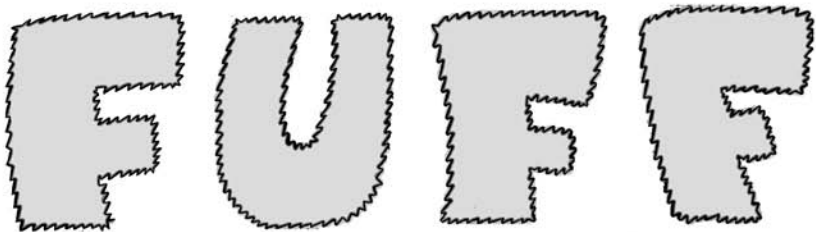


Celebrate Five of the City’s Best Small Presses Inside in Their Own Words and Live



d.a. levy lives

celebrating renegade presses

14th Annual

NYC Small Presses Night

Sun. Dec. 11, 6:00 p.m., \$5 suggested

5:30 p.m. Book Fair

Readings from BOMB Magazine, Fuff Comix, Nightboat Books, Ping Pong literary journal, and Switchback Books authors and music from Jeffrey Lewis (solo acoustic).

Sidewalk Cafe
94 Avenue A
(@ E. 6th St.)

The East Village
For information call
212-842-BOOG (2664)
editor@boogcity.com
@boogcity

BOMB

BOMB Magazine has been publishing conversations between artists of all disciplines since 1981. BOMB's founders—New York City based artists and writers—created BOMB because they saw a disparity between the way artists talked about their work among themselves and the way critics described it. With its print quarterly and online journal BOMB reaches an audience of 1.5M readers annually.

We are proud to share two poems by Marwa Helal, winner of our 2016 Biennial Poetry Contest as selected by guest judge Bhanu Kapil.

photographs not taken

airbags opening during the crash,
a life saved;
DJ armed with two milk canisters,
when the three of us were still friends;
my mother's birthmark next to mine,
both on the same spot above our right knees,
hers brown on white,
mine white on brown,
proof: i am negative of her image;
flames moving upwards from the charcoal,
singeing my eyebrows and eyelashes;
flames that lit nashwa's soft sweater,
we were playing with sparklers in bideen;
flames in a trash bin, a homeless man,
winter in mansurah;
train light reflecting on rails when it is still arriving;
train light reflecting on walls when it is still arriving;
my mother when she was younger than me;
my father when he was younger than me;
my youngest brother's hand reaching out of the
bathroom door,

open and waiting for a towel;
the Green Day CD my father threw out the window,
lying on the side of US131;
my grandmother tucked in for her afternoon nap,
the light in her window,
the light the day i left;
mezo's big toe,
before i left;
all the dawns i slept through,
before i left;
my own face,
looking back at his,
before i left;
your face,
the one
reading this.

to learn more

about what
your pity did for me,
[click here >>](#)

Marwa Helal's poetry has appeared in Apogee, Day One, The Offing, and The Recluse. Her essays and journalism have been published in Poets & Writers, the American Book Review, Entropy, Egypt Today, Sukoon, and elsewhere. She is a Cave Canem fellow, a mentor in the New York Foundation for the Arts Immigrant Artist Program, a VONA alum, and she received her MFA in creative writing from The New School.

NUMBER FIVE

PRICE: THREE DOLLARS & FIFTY CENTS IN AMERICAN COMIC BOOK STORES

FUFF

By Jeffrey Lewis

IN THIS ISSUE:

STORIES MY DAD TELLS

"ORWELL'S SAVINGS PROVED THAT HE HAD LED AN UNUSUALLY SOLITARY AND FRUGAL LIFE IN BURMA..."

"...READING RATHER THAN BOOZING AT 'THE CLUB'..."

"...YET THEY REPRESENTED ONLY A FLIMSY LIFEJACKET WHEN HE PLUNGED INTO THE DEEP COLD WATERS OF THE LITERARY WORLD."

"WHERE, FOR INSTANCE, WAS HE TO LIVE?"

"EVENTUALLY A FAMILY ACQUAINTANCE FOUND HIM A GROTTY BED-ROOM IN A MEAN STREET OFF THE PORTOBELLO ROAD..."

"...AND THERE HE SETTLED DOWN, AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-FOUR, TO TEACH HIMSELF HOW TO WRITE."

Baby Shoes and the Sitar-Playin' Glam

COMIX VERSUS MACBETH (Sort of)

"HIS NEIGHBORS WERE IMPRESSED BY HIS DETERMINATION."

"A WEEK AFTER HE REMAINED IN HIS CRAMPED, UNHEATED BEDROOM..."

"...THAWING HIS HANDS WITH A CANDLE WHEN THEY BECAME TOO NUMB TO WRITE."

"CLEARLY HE WAS PREPARED TO ENDURE ANY AMOUNT OF HARDSHIP FOR THE SAKE OF LEARNING HOW TO USE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS EFFECTIVELY AS HE COULD."

"[...]FOR MANY [WRITERS], EVEN MODEST SUCCESS HAS TO BE WORKED FOR, THROUGHOUT LONG BLEAK YEARS LITTERED WITH REJECTION SLIPS."

"IN OUR DAY THIS FACT IS OFTEN OBSCURED, TO AN EXTENT THAT WOULD HAVE APPALLED ORWELL [...]" - Devlin Murphy

EUROPEAN TRAVELS 1999 PART 5

ISSUE NUMBER ELEVEN

3.50 IN U.S. STORES

FUFF

BY JEFFREY LEWIS



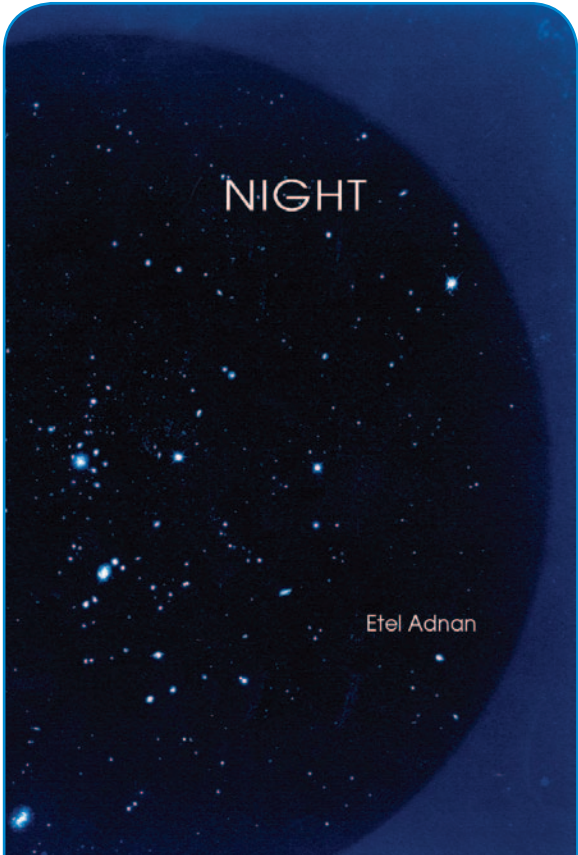
FUFF

Safe Access To Underground Comix

Written/Drawn/Published
by Jeffrey Lewis

Find all 12 issues at your local
comic book shop or at
www.TheJeffreyLewisSite.com

Nightboat

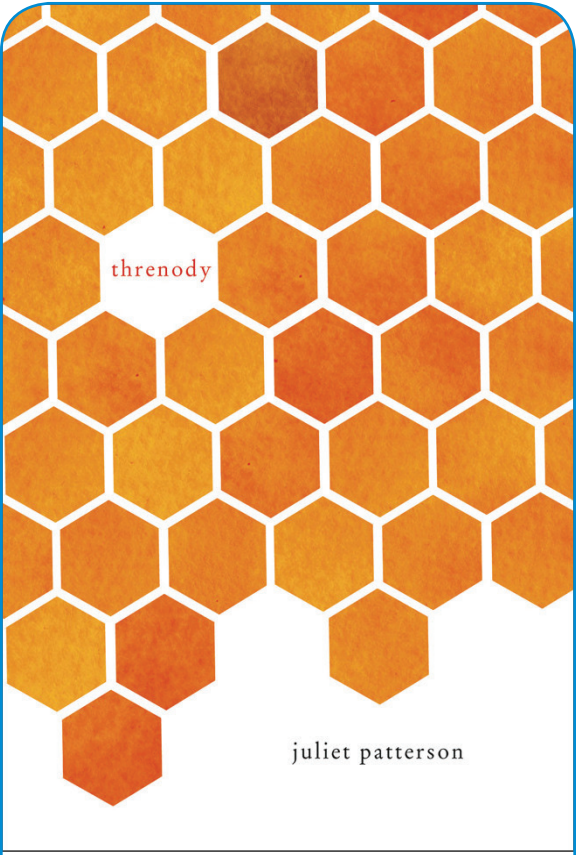


Thus a remembered event is a return to a mystery. When that happened for the first time, in pre-ancestral times, the creature that witnessed it as a return to the past was shattered.

My memories form a forest with unstable boundaries. This forest has entrances in Northern California, Lebanon, Brittany... It's a field of tall trees and strange spirits. The dead do not scare us, that's what's wrong—we have let go of the power of fear. Streams are running, yes, but who's going to tell me how to find a way in the territory I'm speaking of, and if I don't find it, what am I living for?

Reason and memory move together.

FROM NIGHT BY ETEL ADNAN



THAT MUS IC

There were wars going on—

we were lying there
in the constant singing

of radios
lonely
a scant defense

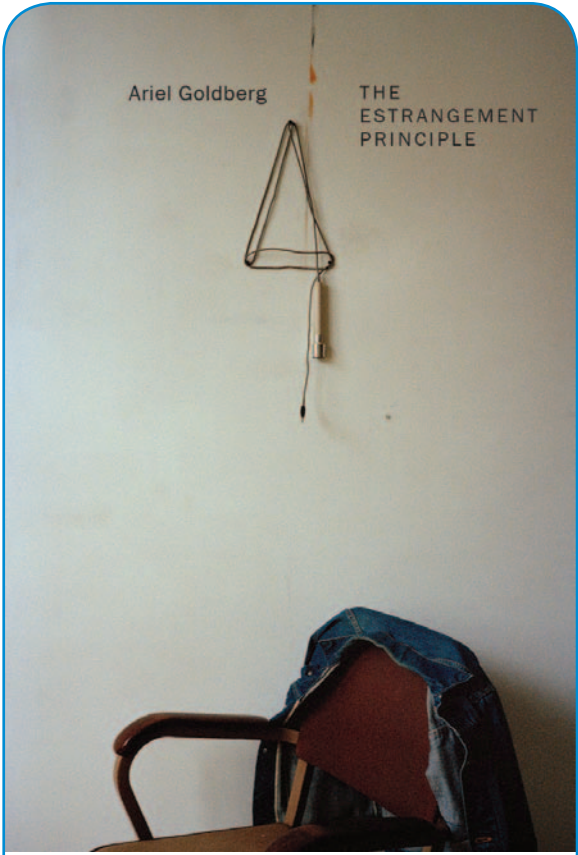
reading our hands

as an eye going
upward

a house strictured
in rain

and August
sweat

FROM THRENODY BY JULIET PATTERSON



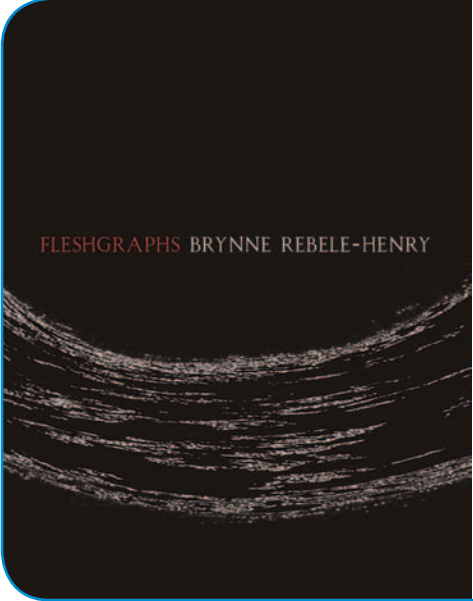
I began collecting the phrase 'queer art' in all its sweaty megaphone pronouncements. I felt pricked by 'queer art,' which I heard being uttered all around me in the titles of group shows, dance parties, anthologies, mission statements, press releases. I was also collecting palpable silences around events that could have used the word 'queer,' but didn't. I had to get close to this description, like I get close to frames in museums, breathe on their glass and notice the dust. I wanted to get so close my vision would blur.

FROM THE ESTRANGEMENT PRINCIPLE
BY ARIEL GOLDBERG



I mean
stain that is a continent
lend me your shape
so I too may become
the thing unforeseen

FROM HOTEL ABC BY SUSAN GEVIRTZ



24.
She wanted to make me
scream, a screw-driver, a
curling iron, three jars of
preserves and a lighter.
This is how we love now.”
Electric grid my thighs.

25.
I put my nose against
yours and counted to four.

FROM FLESHGRAPHS
BY BRYNNE REBELE-HENRY



Ping-Pong Free Press and Poet Republik imprint

Ping-Pong Free Press and the Poet Republik imprint follow in the footsteps of its publisher, the Henry Miller Library, and therefore sees itself as a current and vital part of that same impulse. It represents a living connection to the centers and peripheries of contemporary literary culture, both in the USA and beyond. As such, we are not looking for writing that is easy or pretty.

The Henry Miller Memorial Library champions the literary and artistic legacy of Henry Miller, and Miller himself was not a pretty writer. But he was vital. Ping-Pong Free Press will not be censored, will not bow to whimsy, will speak loudly in the face of injustice, will support those artists whose voices are sometimes silenced. Thus American writers who exist, as Miller did for so much of his career, just under the radar of the mainstream literary world, will be represented by Ping-Pong Free Press.

And just as Miller was and is as much an international literary figure as he was/is an American one, so too does Ping-Pong Free Press seek to reach beyond our shores in order to bring unknown, or lesser known, writers from around the world into more prominence in English.

Ping-Pong Free Press understands itself as furthering Miller's legacy by tapping into the contemporary literary and artistic milieu. The writers and artists represented in the magazine Ping-Pong are heirs to Miller's legacy, and were Miller alive and writing today, these would be his peers and contemporaries. It has been argued that were Miller writing in 2016, he would be no more a part of the mainstream US literary world than he was in the 30's, 40's, 50's or 60's. He was not a writer for the market. He would be denounced as vulgar, as obscene, and as barbaric.

The work published by Ping-Pong Free Press is similarly not written for the market, but for the ages. It is challenging; it asks much of its reader. It's not easy. It is, though, a vital continuation, and contribution, to Henry Miller's literary legacy.

News and Announcements

Ping Pong Free Press and Poet Republik are proud to announce the first winner of the annual book contest: Jameson O'Hara Laurens, with *Medeum*.

About *Medeum*: "Jameson O'Hara Laurens' poetry is gently and carefully constructed, with great attention paid to both the sound and meaning of words, as well as the placement of those words on the page. Her poems reimagine and rework the figure of Medea, making her a woman of power and insight on a difficult journey – burdened, perhaps, by too much knowledge and no one to listen to her."-- Christine Hamm, Editor, Ping Pong Free Press

Poet Republik also announces the first chapbook in its series, *Invitation to a Rescue*, by Kate Lutzner.

About *Invitation to a Rescue*: "Reading Kate Lutzner is like taking a leisurely drive into the dark night of the soul and discovering a light of lyrical beauty and intimate truths. A truly original voice, Kate Lutzner will dazzle you with her poems of emotional depth and lyrical beauty." – Nin Andrews

About Our Annual Contest

Our next poetry book contest opens September 7th, 2016, and ends on April 15th, 2017. All writers in English are eligible, regardless of publication history. The editors of Ping Pong Free Press will not be screening entries – all submissions will be screened by this year's judge, Brian Henry.

The winner of the Ping Pong Free Press Second Annual Contest will win 500 dollars and 10 copies of the finished book. Two finalists may also be considered for publication. We follow CLMPs guidelines. No former or current students of the judge may submit.

For details and to submit, please go to: <https://pingpongmagazine.submittable.com/submit>

Into the Celery Doors

Around the bodega, its blunt black awning,
astroemeria, ronunculi trimmed to the ankle,
you take a quick break from make-believe blue
blossoms to sandwiches on carts. A bus horn
and a busker's song braid inside refreshing bliss.
A white splotch hangs above emptiness. Iron scent
touches the ticket edge before you run downstairs:
the dream of monotony gone, heads ascending
to some nightish above. Those maybes light pink signals,
a cardiology afloat over the wide whiteness,
cabs cabbed. Do you love the square
or sinking into bed more? It's hard to say.
A cool green gate to pass under, a cool green pill
and bliss—your affection for waiting for 2 AM trains,
your goods wrapped in yesterday's *Times*. A bamboo grove
of guesses: Should I be on this side, or the other?
And your hair blows back in gratitude for the violin screech,
a shapeless bit of light swimming to you through black.
The word *city* opens its silver robe like a stick of gum. Let it.

--from *Manifest* by **Cynthia Arrieu-King**

excerpt from *Charcuterie*

*

A firefighter and a ghost with a toothbrush make
fine lovers in the grass their sooty and see-through
limbs slime together like French snails in my dreams

I don't even know how I can't sympathize with the elite

Ghost I am also turned on by the heaviness of his suit
and his sense of duty and desire for thrills and I know
how he sees you transparent and glistening

He cannot turn away from your knowing eyes
His cells become epic inside your epistemologies

I left the dentist's office the other day feeling invincible
I looked both left and right and saw no kings whatsoever
nor heads rolling in any of the gutters

I took this as a sign that optimism is warranted
and that it is okay to crane any face toward any sun

There is always the choice of couture and the
choice of massacre or of doing some calculations

I could call up three men and take all the penises in me
I could eat eleven sandwiches of Atlantic cod I could
write thank you notes to all these benevolent captors

A firefighter is liberty and a ghost is the
shackles of a centralized government and fire is
demonic bureaucrats and totalitarian flashover

I cannot separate them all as they are joined in coitus

Rather I watch the parade and tally the entries that have a
commitment to the freedom of the raw human mind

I too have been on floats and all of my floats have
been subsidized by the state I am afraid to admit

--from *But I Have Realized It* by **Crystal Curry**

What Happened in the Pool

I could open my eyes under water, a formation of
girls like a flower, lips petal pink. Loves me, loves
me not, will never forget me, dives like a
Neapolitan ice cream cup. Ashley the Acrobat,
Tracy the Tongue Depressor, Candice the Carnival
Apple. Tell me there's no / in team. There's no hole
in the ozone, no scream in ice cream. I could see
everything through your bathing suit, everything.
Guilt as solitary, a kickboard, a mishap, a sky. I laid
my body on top of the water, floating. The sky is
made of Lycra. Chocolate-syrup solar eclipse,
maraschino cherry, hole in the ozone. I could touch
the bottom. I could lick the spoon.

--from *The Haunted House* by **Marisa Crawford**

If My Housemate Fucks with Me I Would Get So Real (Audition Tape Take 1)

I didn't come here to make friends.
Buildings spit their stomachs at me
and I spit back, down the sidewalk
into a bitch's hair. I am a forehead
careening in clouds, a dirty tree branch
brushing against the shingles
of the production room. I am
groundbreaking: two as one.
Brooding tattooed over my art.
Otherwise, black.
Can do angry, can't do
accents. I need little coaching or
provocation. Opinionated and
everything a man wants.
Lips and boobs camera-ready.
If I hear you're talking shit about me
in your confessional interview,
please know
seven birds have fallen dead at my feet
right out of the sky.
I learned this right hook here
when I was only six. Bitch, please.
I'm so real my hair is going gray,
legs bruised up like tree bark,
veins of my neck as swollen as
ripe fruit, the cheeks of what is growing.

--from *Other People's Comfort Keeps Me Up at Night*
by **Morgan Parker**



Switchback Books challenges gender inequity in literary publishing by producing and promoting books of poetry by women, including transgender women and all other female-identified individuals. Publishing exclusively women poets comprises a feminist act. We aim to change the unbalanced ratio of genders represented in literary publishers' catalogs, making women's voices and perspectives accessible to the literary community and the general public.

Visit us online at www.switchbackbooks.com for more information and to purchase any of our titles.



Ivy Johnson and Kate Robinson.

PRINTED MATTER

Johnson and Robinson Sound the Alarm And They Aren't Sorry for It

ART

Basil King

FILM

Mono No Aware at 10

MUSIC

Edan Archer, Ariah, Current Ex, Horra, Kishi Bashi, St. Lenox

POETRY

Oliver Baer, Joseph Buckley, Leila Ortiz, Alla Vilnyansky

PRINTED MATTER

Ali Power Has a Poem for When You Can't Care Anymore

SMALL PRESS

Chatting with 421 Atlanta's
Editor Amy McDaniel and Author Chris Cheney

Secret Book Scouts Chatting with 421 Atlanta's Editor Amy McDaniel and Author Chris Cheney



INTERVIEW BY JACKIE CLARK

Small Press editor Jackie Clark talks to 421 Atlanta's editor Amy McDaniel about the press' alternative approach to getting submissions and to author Chris Cheney about his recent 421 Atlanta publication, *Lay Me Low*.

Boog City: So to get started, Amy, I know that 421 Atlanta did something a little unique when selecting its 2016 catalog. You put out a call on your website for Secret Book Scouts, essentially asking for nominations for who 421 should publish next, even offering to reward successful scouts with swag. This is such a generous way to put out a call for new work. Where did this idea come from? And can you talk a bit about the process of wading through nominations? You also explicitly state "On your honor, please do not ask someone else to nominate you." Is this something that you were really worried about, or was it more here's-this-obvious-thing-that-I-am-going-to-remind-you-not-to-do-even-though-I-want-to-believe-that-no-one-would-do-this thing?

Amy McDaniel: The idea came from necessity. Publishing is not my day job (surprise surprise), so the thought of an open call for manuscript submissions intimidated me. So did the thought of rejecting lots of people. At the same time, I don't want to just publish people I already know. I thought about asking people I respect to give me leads, but that's still somewhat limited, so it evolved into Secret Book Scouts. It worked so beautifully. *Lay Me Low* is a testament to that.

I asked for just a short note about why the nominee would be a good fit for 421 Atlanta along with a one-page writing sample. Out of 72 or so nominations, I asked about 16 people if they had manuscripts they'd be interested in submitting for consideration. A few were a little weirded out! One who I ended up publishing, Sarah Green, had also secretly nominated someone, so that felt good. The scouts whose nominees I chose were equally if not more excited as the authors themselves, so it really felt like a project in goodwill all around, and I got to avoid doing the bad rejecty thing for the most part.

It's funny you brought that up, about not asking to be nominated. One person got like seven of her friends to nominate her, which was infuriating slash hilarious. Like she kept tweeting the link and saying "hint hint." Does that answer your question?

Chris, can you tell me a little bit about *Lay Me Low*? Had you been actively sending the manuscript out, either to open calls or contests? How did you feel when you learned that your book had been nominated for publication? Did you have any idea that Rachel B. Glaser had nominated your book? Was 421 Atlanta a press that was on your radar?

Chris Cheney: *Lay Me Low* is a selection of poems spanning from the late '00s to the beginning of last year. In 2013, the collection was titled "My Greatest Weakness," and was a finalist for the Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize. After that, I sat with the collection. I wrote. Rachel was someone I sent new poems to, and she sent me hers. I hate finishing. I was never great at submitting my manuscript but I liked sending Rachel poems. Sometimes Rachel would write back, "Killer poem chain. Knocked it clear out of the park!" These short positives slash sports metaphors, fueled me.

I had no idea Rachel nominated my collection until Amy reached out. I knew about 421 Atlanta and Amy's Secret Book Scouts from announcements on <http://realpants.com/>. When Amy contacted, I ordered, read, and was loving Lucy K Shaw's *The Motion*. At some point, I heard Shannon Burns was also releasing her debut book with 421 Atlanta. Her *Factory Hollow* chapbook is something I have worn down and dog-eared into the ground. I had a good feeling. Here are some lines that stuck me from *Oosh Boosh* her book with 421 Atlanta:

Can those who will outlive me
come forward and help me
with this cold sunny day—this idiotic yellow day—
Help me confront the sunny winter day—
Help me to not close my eyes in it—
Help to keep memories apart from dreams in it—
Help me give the wild dead a nice place to live in it,
things to do, the feeling of being needed in it.

421 atlanta

Amy and Chris, I wonder if you both could talk a little bit about your first interactions with each other after *Lay Me Low* was accepted for publication. Did you guys know each other at all? Or were you really meeting for the first time? Amy, maybe you could talk a little bit about some specifics that drew you into Chris' poems? Was there some "a ha" moment when you arrived at a certain line or poem that made you sure his book was for 421?

AM: We met briefly at AWP, but that doesn't count. Chris seemed happy and kind of laid back about the whole thing. I remember he used the phrase "a little Glaser magic" in his first email. Then, after I said I would love to publish *Lay Me Low*, it took him a day I think to get back to me, so I was worried that he wasn't interested. But then he was, and he was a dream to work with.

I love the looseness and the intense lightness, or maybe the light intensity, of Chris' poetry. It is hard to pick out individual lines, partly because I love so many of them, but even more because I love how Chris's poems move as whole poems. Here's a great line from the poem Rachel sent: "Go even though you've locked eyes with the waiter and you'd like to be moved to a seat by the window so you can look upon the river." But I've read the book so many times now that I don't really remember which poems especially struck me when I read the whole manuscript for the first time, just that I loved all of it and thought it was so special. I love how Chris' poetry is otherworldly while also very much of this world.

CC: We were basically meeting for the first time. We had mutual friends, Mike Young and Amy Lawless. She reached out to me with her vision as an editor, and with her belief in *Lay Me Low*.

Can you talk about the editing process, if any? I guess I am interested in the shape of *Lay Me Low* from when it was accepted until publication. Were there a lot of big changes (ordering, content, grouping)? Or was the manuscript more of less "ready" for publication as it was?

AM: On my end, there were no big changes. I made some tiny notes and edits and sent them back to Chris, but most of the notes were along the lines of, "I love this title and this poem" or "I love this line." A few months after Chris signed on with the press, but before I got into the edits, he sent a new version of the manuscript, but I'm not sure how major those changes were.

How did you decide on the cover art? Was it a collaborative effort? I love the delicate lines and the rupture between the two home figures is sort of sad and lovely in the way that ordinary/simple things can be sad and lovely. How do you see the art relating to the poems and vice versa?

AM: I love all that too! When I asked Chris about the cover, he had some really great ideas. One thing he said was that he loves Emily Hunt's drawings, and so I checked them out. They are so good, and we all three kind of independently thought the one with houses was the perfect one for *Lay Me Low*.

'Rachel [B. Glaser] was someone I sent new poems to, and she sent me hers. I liked sending Rachel poems. Sometimes Rachel would write back, "Killer poem chain. Knocked it clear out of the park!" These short positives slash sports metaphors, fueled me.' —Chris Cheney



I think, like Chris' poems, that Emily's drawing has that weirdness and not-rightness of something familiar, something domestic. And there's so much movement in the drawing, and the poems.

CC: I wanted something minimal. I have one of Emily Hunt's drawings hanging in my kitchen and I stare at it. I reached out to her and we both thought about what might pair with my collection. We looked through her tumblr (<http://ehunt.tumblr.com/>) and her book of drawings *This Always Happens*. We both thought of the same image, it was that simple. I see it relating to my poems in the way it dismantles a known object through stripping it of its frills. Emily's unromanticizing is a truer, sad, lovely surprise as you mentioned.

Amy, do you think you will use Secret Book Scouts again for your next round of books?

AM: I'm still working that out, but I do plan to use it again, yes.

Chris, I know your collaborative book with Amy Lawless entitled *I Cry* was published also this year by Pioneer Works. Any new projects or manuscripts in the works?

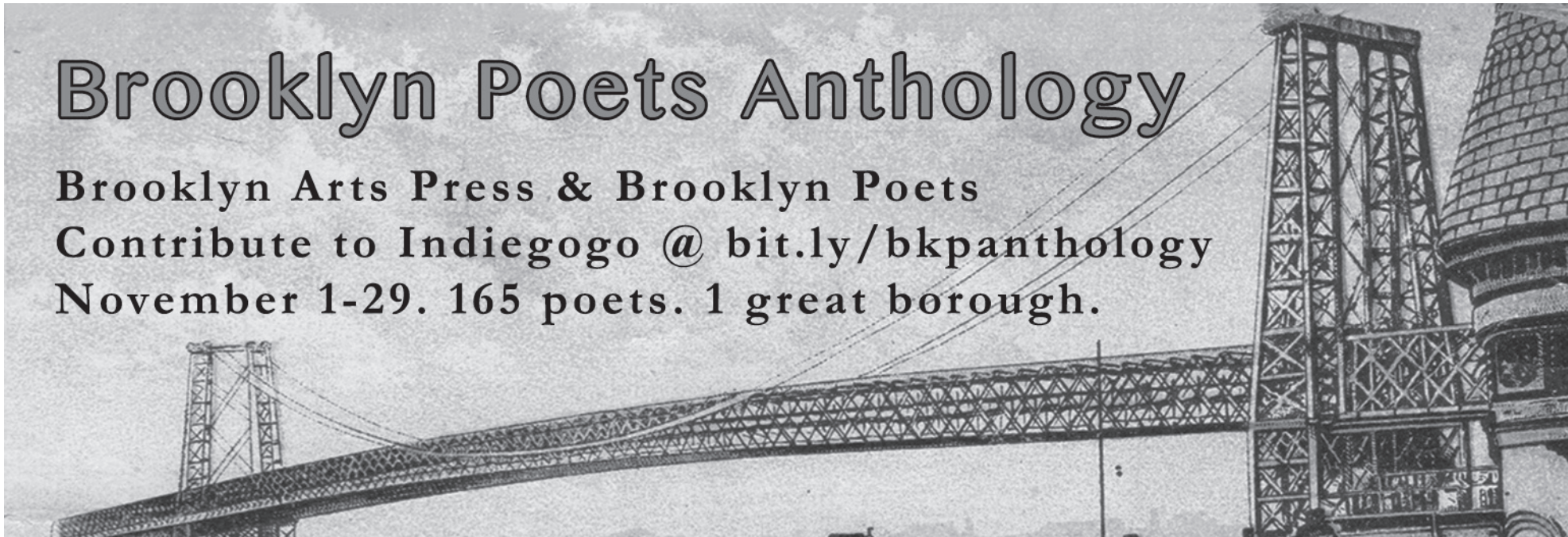
CC: We are currently working on our follow up to *I Cry*, titled *Heartland*. It's a novel loosely based on our recent journey into investigative journalism, better understanding of Erwin Schrödinger, and meditations on competitiveness.

Selections of this will soon appear in *FOTOFOBIA* (a photography book series with poetry, critical writing, and performances).

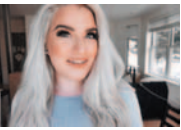
Jackie Clark (<https://nohelpforthat.com/>) is the author of *Aphoria* (Brooklyn Arts Press) and most recently *Sympathetic Nervous System* (Bloof Books). She is series editor of *Song of the Week* for Coldfront Magazine and small press editor for Boog City.

Chris Cheney is the author of *Lay Me Low* (421 Atlanta) and co-author, with Amy Lawless, of *I Cry: The Desire to be Rejected* (Pioneer Works Press). His poems have recently appeared in *Horsethief*, *jubilat*, and *Stonecutter Journal*. He lives in Queens.

Amy McDaniel runs 421 Atlanta, a very small press that publishes poetry and short prose, and co-runs *Real Pants*, a literary website, with her husband. She is the author of two chapbooks, both with the words "Adult Lessons" in the title, and her poetry and prose has been published widely online and in print. Last year, she began teaching high school English.



Johnson and Robinson Sound the Alarm And They Aren't Sorry for It



BY HOLLY RICE

The Third Thing
Ivy Johnson and Kate Robinson
Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs

In the opening pages of *The Third Thing*, Ivy Johnson and Kate Robinson are quick to outline their expectations of their peers and of their audience, as seen in the choice of including an email from Johnson to her art collective: “Please be mindful when you come and go out of the gallery,” she writes, “and be respectful of our nudity.” She is polite when she asks for awareness of their art and this is where her politeness ends. In the pages to follow, they are unapologetic about their feminism, their bodies, and their repossession of gender power.

Johnson and Robinson have done something weird, something badass, and something a bit fantastic. *The Third Thing* is a collection of poetry and photography that puts its finger directly on the pulsing rage of what it’s like to be a woman—an angry, exhausted, and hyperaware one at that. This collection dissects the body, trauma, rape, the male gaze—the list goes on. What Johnson and Robinson do best, however, is boil down specific moments where the imbalance of gender gnashes its ugly teeth and clap back at it with a violent demand for respect.

In “You Look Familiar,” the authors begin with a scene any woman knows all too well: “this day while biking to work in jeans and a crop top, wet hair/ drying under helmet a man yelled at me. “WONDERFUL” from the open window of his dumpy white/ station wagon, a ford or saturn or whatever.” It is a scene that evokes hot frustration, and I love the authors’ choice to have the poem’s driver shout only “WONDERFUL” from his “dumpy white whatever,” as it shows that even the smallest moment spent as an object of the male gaze is enough to rob a woman of her power. It would be harder to argue with the sexism of something more illicit, but Johnson and Robinson prove with their subtlety that women are never free, even alone on our commute, to just exist. Men have something to say about our bodies and will continue to say it. In “The Dream” they write: “and still so many men want to talk to me at the bus stop, feel/ entitled to my attention just because I’m alone and appearing female,” yet another simple, and eloquent, example of man’s sense of ownership over women. Johnson and Robinson make the disparity in power clear with the beauty of their poetics, but it is their response to this disparity that is even more evocative.

Violence is a prevalent theme in *The Third Thing*, both as an act committed on women and as an act women commit themselves. The narrators of both “You Look Familiar” and “The Dream” speak of a violent “dream” or “fantasy”: “I keep having fantasies of a play that’s/ just women slaughtering men on stage for an hour and a half./ buckets and buckets of blood” and “a gang of the powerful women in her life were massacring men./ slitting their throats with daggers. brutally dismembering rapists/ and other perpetrators of gender violence./ while impeccably dressed./ I told her it made sense.” Dispersed throughout the poetry are photos of Johnson and Robinson covered in fake blood, as well as one depicting an author wearing a traditional hockey mask which is usually associated with violence and fear in popular culture. The cover image itself is of two women in a bathtub covered with, and playing in blood. These images suggest the aftermath of violence, of women driven to aggression out of desperation. Johnson and Robinson show through both poetics and image what women become when they continue to be abused, belittled, and objectified. They suggest through this collection that women won’t, or shouldn’t, continue to be silent in their anger.

The Third Thing has been a wonderful lesson in feminism. While some might believe its themes and imagery to be extreme, it is refreshing to experience women who hold nothing back, especially in art. This collection upends the notion that women should create pretty things, that they should be polite, that they should accept what is given to them by society and be thankful. *The Third Thing* is an important read for women everywhere, especially those who are still navigating what feminism really means. As a woman, reading this collection was satisfying and validating, because I have found two artists—two women—who showed me it was okay to be mad. Art, after all, is about finding common ground. For women, *The Third Thing* has done just that.

Ivy Johnson (<https://ivyjohnsonblog.wordpress.com/>) is a poet and performance artist in Oakland, Calif. Her book, *As They Fall*, is a pack of 110 notecards for aelatoric ritual, and was published by Timeless, Infinite Light in 2013. She is co-founder of *The Third Thing*, a feminist performance art duo. She is currently working on a book of poetry about the ecstatic entitled Born Again.

Holly Rice is a creative writing M.F.A. candidate at The New School and the deputy editor of *The Inquisitive Eater*. She is the 2015 recipient of the Nova Scotia Talent Trust’s RBC Emerging Artist Award and currently lives in Williamsburg.

Kate Robinson (<http://archives.sfweekly.com/exhibitionist/2015/12/17/the-write-stuff-kate-robinson-on-what-happens-if-we-dont-make-art-with-our-excess-energy>) is a poet and intermedia book artist living in Oakland, Calif. where she co-founded the Manifest Reading and Workshop Series, a founding series of the East Bay Poetry Summit, and *The Third Thing*. Along with Caleb Beckwith she hosts Bay Area Poet?, a periodic podcast that explores the poetics of the S.F. Bay Area.



Johnson (I.) and Robinson have done something weird, something badass, and something a bit fantastic. The Third Thing is a collection of poetry and photography that puts its finger directly on the pulsing rage of what it’s like to be a woman—an angry, exhausted, and hyperaware one at that.

A Poem for When You Can't Care Anymore



BY ANDREW JAMES WEATHERHEAD

A Poem for Record Keepers
Ali Power
Argos Books

Ali Power’s *A Poem for Record Keepers* was the only book I bought at AWP 2016. It cost \$15. In years past, I had budgeted \$100 to \$200 for the purchase of books at AWP because, I reasoned, I’d be purchasing work from its creators directly, getting a chance to put a face with a name, express gratitude, ask questions, maybe arrange to grab a drink later. I was “supporting the community,” I told myself. I was “participating” and “engaging,” adding meaning to a life that is otherwise tedious, vague, and unavoidable.

2016 was different. In aisle after aisle of the mammoth L.A. Convention Center, I was confronted by literary endeavors that might as well have been named *Mediocrity Quarterly*, *The Eager to Please Review*, *Another Press*, *Please Take My Hobby Seriously*, and *New Directions in the Status Quo*. The older we get, the better we should be at separating signal from noise, but AWP 2016 was a thoroughly disturbing look into the pyramid scheme that contemporary literature has become in order to validate its own existence. More presses, more journals, more M.F.A. programs and “writer’s guilds” built on the fool’s gold of “a career” with dwindling proof that anyone is paying attention to anyone but themselves. The deafening level of narcissism and bullshit and insincerity is enough to drown even the strongest signal.

But Ali Power’s small, square book cut like a siren song through this fog of self-interested small talk. Having read excerpts prior to its publication, I knew enough to know that it was doing something different, but as I opened *A Poem for Record Keepers* on the flight back to New York, I was surprised to find myself reading it for a third time an hour later. Her long poem doesn’t grab you by the throat so much as it deftly charms its way into your consciousness. With a smoldering intensity, the book circles a truth only it knows about, and its beauty is that it doesn’t care what you think. It’s so self-assured, so pitch-perfect that it exists in a world to itself, voiding all the middling book fair verse to remind you that original poetry is still complicated, possible, and worthwhile.

In seven sections of seven pages, each with seven end-stopped lines, *A Poem for Record Keepers* explores language and form, the self and others, classic rock and professional sports, and the power of insight amid its seeming impossibility. The language is conversational yet probing, preferring to ask as many questions as it deigns to answer. Here is “33”:

You want a location.
But you really mean a telescope.
I hand you the champagne from no occasion.
Should I keep going?
In certain rooms we can only look ahead.
Looking ahead is fun.
When you’re delusional.

Yet the poem’s tempered lyricism builds into crescendos of quiet righteousness throughout the book. Here’s a moment from “35”:

Sometimes we say things we don’t mean.
Sometimes we say things we do mean but then say, “I didn’t mean it.”
Because what was said was mean.
And the truth hurts.

The truth does hurt, and Power reminds us in “10”:

The truth is not.
Decorative pillows.
Painted explanations.

The necessity of the end-stopped lines complicates an otherwise straightforward passage here. Is the truth not? Or is the truth not decorative pillows, painted explanations? By suggesting both interpretations, the poem constructs shifty and enigmatic meanings in real time. The end-stopped lines resist the book’s formal scaffolding to create an off-beat rhythm and uneven emphasis, something with the transcendent abruptness of a Thelonious Monk piano solo, Jean-Luc Godard’s jump cuts, or a Manu Ginobili hesitation dribble.

Here’s “42”:

I’m beginning to wonder if this is just a coping mechanism.
A way to move the space between ideas and things.
A strange community of nets.
Never ending free-throws.
But sometimes I can feel calm.
Like right now.
Because tonight we’ll watch the Spurs & the Heat & touch each other.

Power is doing her damndest to breathe new life and rhythm into a contemporary poetry that’s in desperate need of it. It’s your loss if you’re not paying attention.

Ali Power (<http://ali-e-power.com/>) is the author of the book-length poem *A Poem for Record Keepers* (Argos Books) and the co-editor of the volume *New York School Painters & Poets: Neon in Daylight* (Rizzoli). Her poems have appeared in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *LIT*, the *PEN Poetry Series*, *Stonecutter*, and elsewhere. From 2008 to 2015, she was an editor at Rizzoli Publications in New York. She is pursuing a master’s degree in social work at New York University and co-curates the KGB Monday Night Poetry Reading Series. She lives in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

Andrew James Weatherhead (<http://www.andrewweatherhead.org/>) is the author of the poetry collections *Cats and Dogs* (Scrambler Books) and *Aardvark* (forthcoming). Born in Chicago, he now resides in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Brooklyn.



As I opened A Poem for Record Keepers on the flight back to New York, I was surprised to find myself reading it for a third time an hour later.

Mono No Aware at 10



INTERVIEW BY JOEL SCHLEMOWITZ

The annual festival of expanded cinema and projection performance known as Mono No Aware will have its 10th anniversary this December. The name of the event, “Mono No Aware,” is a Japanese phrase—one of those seemingly untranslatable idioms—conveying the sense of the bittersweet emotion when experiencing some exquisite moment of the present that will never be repeated the same way again. A fitting name for an event of cinematic works with a live, performative element. To celebrate the first decade, a month-long 22-event pre-festival series has been planned, taking place at different venues across the city. I sat down with the director of Mono No Aware, Steve Cossman, to find out more about the upcoming events leading up to the festival in December.

Boog City: So 10 years of Mono No Aware. When you started it did you envision it being a long-lasting thing?

Steve Cossman: When I organized it the first year I had just been out of film school where I’d studied animation. I’d been newly exposed to experimental and expanded cinema while at school. But then I came to New York and wanted to engage, to be part of a community. I thought the best way to do that at the time was to have an open call and organize a screening to get to know the people who are working in these alternative forms. At the beginning it was very grassroots. I started with a list of schools with film programs and screening venues; that was the base list for putting out the call for works. There were about 30 or 40 entries back then.

The first festival happened at the Galapagos Art Space at its former location on North 6th in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. It was a small screening venue, perfect for the first year, but with access to a larger space, we can present more ambitious work—including installation works—so the call for work is now announced through dance organization websites and sculpture forums. We’re trying to involve more people outside of the film community who incorporate the moving image into their work.

Can we talk about all the screenings happening in November?

As part of the anniversary I wanted to involve more of the community members in New York. Mono No Aware had started out as a one-night event and over the last nine years has become a two-night event. The initial idea this year was that we’d do 10 days to celebrate the 10 years—but as I spoke to different spaces, curators and institutions it expanded very quickly into 21 nights. The positive response was overwhelming. To call some of my favorite venues and artists and have them say, “we’ve always wanted to work with you” is very touching.

Lucy Kerr is a choreographer and a dancer who I had met through her participation in the Mono filmmaking workshops. Last year, I had seen a multimedia piece by Kerr incorporating dance and a single channel projection. I was very impressed and approached her asking if she would be interested in producing a new piece with the support of Mono No Aware. We provided filmstock and camera equipment, even hand-processed some of the film with her. It will be a dual channel dance performance that will premiere on Sat., Nov. 5 at the Center for Performance Research in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Some of the venues have rarely or never have had screenings before this?

Well, BRIC Media Arts Center has never shown work on actual film, so that’s kind of exciting. Dungeon Beach is a post-production studio, so the screening space is really a private space for clients. Working with their sound engineer Tim Korn we put together a nice, intimate screening program for that space. We’re also doing workshops as part of the festival, including a Muybridge-style motion study workshop at the Penumbra Foundation, located on East 30th Street in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan. The place is kind of like Mono No Aware’s “older brother” in the still image analog world. So people will get to star in their own motion study and make a print of it. Penumbra is interested in the early technologies of still photography and so the workshop highlights the cross over to protocinematic devices.

We also approached Molly Surno who curates the live music and film series Cinema 16, who is someone we’ve wanted to collaborate with for some time. One of the other programs is happening at THE CAVE home of LEIMAY in Williamsburg. It’s being programmed by Tiffany Fung. It will be more of a time-based experience incorporating a multi-channel video projection environment with a live sound element.



The 9th Annual Mono No Aware Exhibition in 2015.

Courtesy Mono No Aware.

I came to New York and wanted to engage, to be part of a community. I thought the best way to do that at the time was to have an open call and organize a screening to get to know the people who are working in these alternative forms.

I’m also really excited that we’re presenting something at the Alice Austen House in Staten Island. On Nov. 12 they have a “camera day” where artists of still photography demo and talk about their cameras. We thought this sounded like a great opportunity to collaborate. Mono will be there with a 16mm Bolex movie camera inviting the public to get their hands on the camera and shoot a little. We’ll have a darkroom tent to process, and we’ll be able to show the processed film at the very end.

Any of the November events happening at places more directly within the fine arts world of galleries and such?

There aren’t really any installation works in the November pre-festival series, really only due to the time consideration; to set up something like that you’d want it to be in the space for a long period. But we will have three pieces with sculptural elements within the festival itself in December. One is a six-channel projection by Antonio Castles and Lucas Maia, using a polarized viewing system with each of the images running on a loop, which will change and evolve over the night. The projections are really only visible with the linear polarized glasses on, otherwise you just see a wash of color fields.

There will be another piece by Olya Zarapina who repurposes a 35mm still photography viewing system and reverses the light to blow the image back as a projection. She uses a 35mm still camera to make overlaid exposures of landscapes within the city. There’s a sensor that can tell when someone gets close to it that will activate the moving of the film through the viewer. So as the viewer moves around the piece the landscape changes.

<http://mononoawarefilm.com/calendar/?view=calendar&month=November-2016>

Joel Schlemowitz (<http://www.joelschlemowitz.com>) is a Park Slope, Brooklyn-based filmmaker who makes short cine-poems and experimental documentaries. His most recent project, 78rpm, is in the final stages of post-production. He has taught filmmaking at The New School for the past 19 years. Robyn Hasty photo.

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Oliver Baer

Manhattan

56. Daylight’s tentacles writhe inside.
I think of you from a frozen wasteland.
Snowflash blind walking icy crags at noon.
Legs of a monstrous millipede sliding through
alabaster earth towards the
undershadow of a mica strewn monolith
Swaddled in a sleeping bag of comforts
self-induced deafness to block out overwhelming zeitgeist
ego neuropathy so the day passes quickly
static snow on a Latin American tv.
The return seems a journey to the moon
Words around me expressing global views,
sounding like a ghost story of
prisoners, warriors and heroes enduring
tortures, horrors... wonders.
Truth told through grave’s end senses
in a potter’s field.
Flowers blossom on a tree
quickens my blood.
Their perfume bridges time until
I taste your next kiss.

Joseph Buckley

New Orleans

The Globe Is So Round

Under my pillow I keep a dream
journal to write down my dreams.
All the pages are blank.

On the couch
next to me a girl
ate beef with her hands.

An airplane went down
on the television like a new
year’s ball.

Blood dropped on the girl’s blue
striped blouse so I wet a rag and dabbed at the red
bloom. This was her favorite shirt.

The ground shook from termites
who dined, wondrously as acid bores,
on my house’s foundation.

On the coffee table lay a newspaper. One of its many
pictures displayed a man beheaded
by another man who wore a mask that hid his face.

A phone rang. No one
heard it. If someone answered,
what would be different?

The exterminator came laughing
when he dangled one of the bugs in front of my face
it looked like an old friend.

The televised airplane’s wings were clutched in yellow
orange flames that ate the remaining
plane body slow and motionless.

The girl’s blouse dried, years later
the stain still remained.
I’m not sure how the meat made out.

He smashed it in his palm then swallowed
the bug without a sound
it was gone.



Alla Vilnyansky

Philadelphia

Letter

While you were away,
they named me after
one of the most vile women in history
and told me to tell you
that I will take my own life.

But I do not dream of such a thing.
I only want to know if you are alright.

Meanwhile, I really do feel a sharp pain
in the center of my loins.

I have only ever had this feeling once when I was twenty-eight,
but as of late I have it almost all of the time.

Nobody here writes digital poems.
They only speak of the Greeks and of love
in all of its possible versions.

And you will be happy to know
I have read almost all the poetical works of Paul Celan.



Leila Ortiz

Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

To Banish Demons I Sing Lisa Lisa

Know this / I am whole / many pieces / pieced together / I am

bird shit / on a swing / a 45 record / scratched / still playing.

Refrigerate / rotting veggies / I didn’t cook because / need a recipe / to banish demons/ I

sing Lisa Lisa.

This world’s / a cheap lawyer / negotiating / pain / trees are bare armed

bitches / I don’t care / about trips to paradise / McDonalds orange soda / is my shit.

Tilted day / spilt color / on horizon / stench of garbage / in my nostrils / the horror

of small talk / the lies / we speak / so easily / it is / summer / weather.

Anxiety concert / I am / moronic animal / of hope / skipping through / globes of ash deteriorating / in wind /

adlibbing estúpida / in cut-offs.

Memory / I am / eighties child / Velcro sneakers / fake designer jeans / Ooo / La / La Sasson / Reagan / Reagan /

You can’t hide / We charge you / with Genocide!

Oppressive / semantics / I perform / pleasantries / underneath / flea bites / my clothes my liquid eyes / my overbite /

my dedicated shame / gave me / a double heart ring.

Soggy cereal / too long / in plastic camping bowl / I want / to love you / meaning me / I guess / but corporations /

throw a wrench / all the expressions / mean the same thing.

Microscopic / holes / in a sheathe / of sky / oh my / what big hands / you have

grandma / this blueberry / was picked / by an exhausted person / it’s organic / let’s put it

in a pie.

Poetry Bios

Among many other things, **Oliver Baer** writes and reads poetry in Manhattan. Much of his work can be found at <http://tentacularity.wordpress.com/>. **Joseph Buckley** is an unpublished poet working toward his M.F.A. in New Orleans. **Leila Ortiz**’s (<http://killingfieldsjournal.com>) chapbook, *Girl Life*, is forthcoming from Recreation League. **Alla Vilnyansky** (<https://av2533.wordpress.com/about/>) is a Russian born poet working on her first collection of poems.

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editor/publisher
David A. Kirschenbaum
editor@boogcity.com
art editor
Jeffrey Cyphers Wright
art@boogcity.com
film editor Joel Schlemowitz
film@boogcity.com
libraries editor
Lynne DeSilva-Johnson
libraries@boogcity.com
music R. Brookes McKenzie
music@boogcity.com
poetry editor Buck Downs
poetry@boogcity.com
printed matter editor
Jaclyn Lovell
printedmatter@boogcity.com

small press editor
Jackie Clark
smallpress@boogcity.com
counsel Ian S. Wilder
counsel@boogcity.com

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Basil King

Park Slope, Brooklyn

Basil King (<http://www.basilking.net/>), born in London before World War II, has been painting for over six decades and writing since 1985. He does both in Brooklyn where he has lived since 1969. His latest book, *History Now*, is due from Marsh Hawk Press in 2017.

Basil is honored to be the subject of the 2012 film, *Basil King: MIRAGE*, by Nicole Peyrafitte and Miles Joris-Peyrafitte. The text is from his book, *mirage*: a poem in 22 sections, and most images are his art.

In 2016 his art is being exhibited at the Black Mountain College Museum in Asheville, N.C., and at St. Andrews University in Laurinburg, N.C.

Artist Statement

I often explain my art by saying "from the abstract to the figure, from the figure to the abstract makes an edge of exquisite distance and distance gives us our sensations."

Today I go back and forth between painting and writing. One feeds the other and in both I work to bring disparate things together. My painting, like my writing, always comes in series as I need time to roam around ideas, spaces, facts, influences. I am always "learning to draw."



King of Diamonds (Rose) 60" x 44", mixed media on canvas, 2010.



Double King diptych, combined dimensions 26" x 23", mixed media on canvas, 2010.



Kings of Diamonds (Red) 44" x 60", mixed media on canvas, 2011.



BY R. BROOKES MCKENZIE

IN DEPTH

Kishi Bashi
Sonderlust (LP)

Joyful Noise Records

https://www.joyfulnoiserecordings.com/products/sonderlust

Kaoru Ishibashi was formerly in a little band from Brooklyn called Jupiter One, which released several excellent albums from 2005-2009. Ishibashi, a classically trained violinist based in Athens, Ga., went on to record and perform with Of Montreal for several years before going out on his own under the name Kishi Bashi. I had been a huge fan of Jupiter One back in the day and loved Kishi Bashi’s first EP (*Room for Dream*) and first album (*151a*) but lost touch with what he had done since then. I was delighted to find he had released two records in the interim, *Lightht* (2014) and now *Sonderlust* (2016), both on Joyful Noise Records.

Upon first listen I was slightly disappointed by the new album, however, as it sounded like he had succumbed to industry pressure to be more radio-friendly, when what I liked about his former output was that it was catchy but not clichéd—it was too weird to be popular. Known for his looping skills—I saw him play at Zirzamin in 2012 and was blown away by how skillfully he built elaborate soundscapes out of just violin and vocals—his sound seemed to have expanded considerably with lots of synth, heavy bass lines, and chipper techno drums. (Though “Bright Whites” from *151a* was best known for being in a Microsoft commercial—everybody has to make bank somehow, right?). The first singles from *Sonderlust* (“m’lover,” “Say Yeah,” and “Can’t Let Go, Juno”) sounded like he was seriously trying to make the Top 40. But the more I listened, the more the record grew on me, as I heard Kishi’s signature strangeness peeking through. The



whole record is quite well produced, with much more layering and interesting use of audio space than arguably 95 percent of Top 40 fare.

The (unfortunately annoyingly titled) “m’lover” starts with plucked, twittering violins and uses backing vocals like another instrument, flitting in and out of the arrangement coyly before bouncing into a catchy dance-pop track that you can’t help but want to move to. “Big Star” offers more of the same but with a buzzy, deep bass line to anchor the whole thing to the ground. “Say Yeah” starts with 25 seconds of glitch video-game sounds sprinkled with synthy strings before settling into a slightly retro groove that somehow manages to sound like a cross between The Bee Gees and a Japanese cartoon theme song. His voice is most often high and sweet and floats along with the violin over funky bass lines, and he sometimes sings in Japanese. A flute solo that wouldn’t be out of place on a Jethro Tull song dances with the violin like a butterfly. In general the lyrics are arguably not his strongest suit, being slightly clichéd, but sonically this album is a compellingly original mix of influences and ideas.

Standout track “Who’d You Kill” is a stylistic departure, starting with the sweeping violins again but now they sound menacing, like the famous Psycho death scene, before the bass and low notes kick into a dirty, funky grind as the synths continue to swirl around a positively sexy guitar and piano solo. Overall it reminds me quite favorably of Pink Floyd’s “Have A Cigar.” “Statues In a Gallery” sounds like Of Montreal mixed with Duran Duran, “Flame On Flame (A Slow Dirge)” sounds like 10cc run through a blender over a modern beat, and the closing track,

“Honeybody,” is a gloriously joyful song that slowly builds from light violins and synths in the intro to a dancey, almost symphonic, full-bodied yet sweet tune sprinkled with handclaps and fluttering, swelling, intertwined vocals reminiscent of the Beach Boys, with similarly light and breezy lyrics “Oh honeybody what you doin’ Sunday/ maybe sippin’ a Coca-cola with me babe” but with nods to his geeky roots “if you want to bring your dice that’d be real nice/ Six-sided, dodecahedron, it doesn’t matter.” Charming, cheeky, and insanely catchy, it makes me want to play the whole album all over again, which is how I know it’s a good record.

Ishibashi plays at bigger venues now. I saw him at Webster Hall earlier this month, where he had the entire crowd dancing and singing along, and he even crowd-surfed!—who still does that nowadays?!?!—but he still does his magical looping thing. His live show has been enhanced by having a few more toys, props and people to play with, like a giant dancing Steak, as well as special guest Tall Tall Trees.

Recommended if you like: Of Montreal, Vampire Weekend, 10cc, Bee Gees, fun, and weirdness.

St. Lenox
Ten Hymns from My American Gothic (LP)

Anyway Records

https://midheaven.com/item/ten-hymns-from-my-american-gothic-by-stlenox

St. Lenox is Andrew Choi—a lawyer, Juilliard-trained violinist, karaoke-trained vocalist, and Columbus, Ohio native, who has lived in New York City for around 10 years now. (At first blush it may sound like there are demographic similarities with Kishi Bashi. But in sound and overall aesthetic they are very very different.) But there are no violins anywhere on St. Lenox’s music—instead he uses his voice like an instrument, brassy and full of melismas like a trumpet or a French horn, but with an appealing rasp that conveys his passion and soul, both of which he has in spades.

Choi’s first record, 2014’s *Ten Songs About Memory And Hope* (Anyway Records), set an extremely high bar. I was obsessed with it when it came out, stayed awake listening to it for three days straight and then wrote a 3,000 word review purely for my own satisfaction (for the curious, that review can be found here: <http://roesmoker.tumblr.com/post/108635038035/10-songs-about-memory-hope-for-the-future-an>). It was an amazing journey through his love life and adolescence that absolutely blew me away and inspired me to try to write my own songs, though it took two years for me to actually do it. So when I saw he had a new record coming out about his parents and law school, I was afraid it would not live up to my sky-high standards for him. But just like the last record, some songs grabbed me right away and wouldn’t let go (“Korea” and “Nixon”) and the rest wormed their way into my heart with amazing persistence to become just as loved.

My only real beef is that he starts the record with a 20-second sample of “We Shall Overcome.” It’s just too much of a downer and while I see the relevance, it seems a bit heavy-handed. It would be better as a separate track because then I could skip it. Like we get it, he’s not some empty-headed pop starlet writing about nothing, he’s trying to make us think and feel and he does it, beautifully, with his own songs. We don’t need to be beaten over the head with a dated social justice cue to know what he’s talking about, just listen to the fucking brilliant lyrics. “Fuel America” is also not the song I would have opened the record with. Although it’s not bad, it doesn’t blast us into the stratosphere the way “I Still Dream of The 90’s” did on Memory & Hope. I mean, there is a thread running through the record of Choi’s parents having come to the United States after undergoing unimaginable experiences growing up in Korea—which he hasn’t visited in so long (“I’d forgotten the feeling”)—and how he tries to relate to them while knowing there is this cultural and generational gap, and how he says “I’m coming to New York City/ to chase the American superdream!” in “Fuel America.” I admire the way he writes about subjects that are not your typical singer-songwriter material, how he makes us care about things we might not otherwise even know about, because no one else has his life—and his rich musical and literary history comes out in these stunningly crafted songs.



“Thurgood Marshall” is an aspirational paean to “a handsome black man from a different time” over jagged synth riffs and a driving drum beat—“I was a sad law student lost in all the books piled in the corner of the library/ a weary caffeinated soldier of the big man/ and Justice Marshall reached out of the history books and spoke to me/ cause those dead do rise again, yes sir they still do rise again.” Despite all the fucked-up shit that goes down—of which Choi is highly conscious—he still believes in the law and the justice system because of great figures from the past. “The Public School System” is a gently plucked ballad about class consciousness (“you’re not better than me, rich kid” is the chorus) with memories polished like jewels (“did you hear the one about the torrid affair that the English teacher had with the librarian?/ she never smiled with that sparkle again/ yeah, young love from a long time ago ... crushed by the years”). “Nixon” is a hip-hop hymnal sympathizing with, of all people, Richard Nixon. Over a powerful piano chord progression highlighted by soft, blurred jazz horns and an old-skool nineties beat, you hear the essential humanity behind one of history’s monsters: “I think that it sucks to fail/ and you can’t take a bigger punch/ than by giving up with the cameras on, on national TV/ Maybe I’ll give him a break, after all I’d have fucked it up too/ if they put me in a similar spot, with all them watching me.” “Conspiracy Theories” features mariachi-like horns and a galloping beat and is about how people all over have strange conspiracy theories but maybe they should just relax and enjoy life now while they have it: “You’ve got a lot to live for/ go out and have a beer now/ hang out with your wife and kids.”

“You Don’t Call Me Anymore” is my favorite song on the record, and is kind of a lonely hearts song about his parents, which sounds a lot weirder than it is. What I mean is, if you didn’t know who it was about, you might assume it was about a lover. Something that sounds like a harpsichord dances up and down an extremely catchy riff, with Choi’s vocal cross-stitching a counterpoint melody over a thumping drum beat. But if you listen closely the lyrics so perfectly describe when you do things just to have something to discuss with someone you care about, something you know they’ll like, but maybe you wouldn’t do them just for yourself (“I read an article about the heat death of the universe, just for you, yesterday/ I saw a movie about the treasures of the ocean, just for you, just today”) but they don’t call you

and then you’re left with all this useless knowledge.

“Korea” is the catchiest song on here—the drum beat sounds like karaoke, which I feel must be intentional—and the synth keeps it going again with those strong block chords, while horns and harmonica skitter after like cigarette smoke coming out of the dark, swirling into the spotlight while the singer belts out an instant classic with such power and conviction: “an origin story is a very nice thing/ when you never know where you come from” and “the tell-tale sign of a Tiger Mom/ is a permanent scar remembered.” This is the song I would have led the record off with, because it makes you want to hear more, it’s such strong storytelling, powerfully told in a melodically fascinating journey.

“People from Other Cultures” is the heart of this record, though, emotionally. It starts out so simply: “My mother’s on the phone/ she does not understand/ why I’m always fearful of the dangers/ in the world.” But it rapidly gets darker: “You know when she was just a child/ they had to hide in caves and hush the babies/ so the enemies would not find them.” I’ve had dreams like that. “You know when she was just a child/ they told the lepers that the blood of kids would cure them/ of their situation.” This is some dark, powerful, fucked-up shit right here. This is stuff you’re not going to hear anywhere else. This is why I love St. Lenox. “It makes you feel a little stupid talking back to her/ she still recalls it all.” A buzzed-out guitar leaves us hanging as we go into the next track, still a little shell-shocked.

“What I Think About When You Say South Korea” is a sad ballad with a TV in the background, like when you call your parents and you hear the TV on. “Now and then my dad would sometimes talk about Korea/ in short burst and anecdotes in a serious hour/ stories from a distance that I heard then as a young boy/ amongst the tall trees, at our house in the hills.” “Several years in the army, part of conscripted forces/ several years at the National University in Seoul” what must that have been like for his dad, and what must it be like for Choi to have these parents who are so very informed by their very different culture. It’s unimaginable, but he puts us in his shoes as much as anyone can do with their art. “Heard the tale that my mom told me about the first thing that he said to her/—but we don’t hear the actual tale, just his memory of it, fleeting and beautiful and sad, like a butterfly under glass. Even when you see the colors and the wings you can’t really imagine what it’s like to see it flying in the sunlight. “Some time in the ’70s he flew across the ocean to America/ and left it all behind him then/ I always wondered why he wanted to come here/ I never even asked him about it.”

“When I Return Again” is an uplifting song, a triumphant return to light after so much sadness—the background is more upbeat with celestial dings over moving chord progressions, and there is humor in the lyrics: “I’ll have sprouted wings and drift right to you through the ether/ arms outstretched to take you to a distant land or other place/ you’ll be so amazed you’ll drop your iPad on the floor/ like it was so much trash.” Even the solo sounds slightly funny, it’s so reverbed and delayed you can’t even tell what instrument makes it. But the lyrics turn again to two of his favorite subjects, memory and hope: “When I return again/ things won’t be quite the same/ we’ll watch the rise and fall of nations all the while/ we’ll watch the rise and fall of history reviled/ we’ll remember everything the way it was/ before I ever left again/ When I return.”

Such a beautiful sentiment to close out this powerful emotional journey St. Lenox took us on. Once again he has taught me things I didn’t know I needed to know, made me smile and made me cry more than once. A stunning, deeply relevant addition to the modern American canon. St. Lenox is a national fucking treasure.

Recommended if you like Amy Winehouse, Mountain Goats, Rufus Wainwright, serious subjects.

IN BRIEF

Edan Archer
Cruel Mother (EP)

Rowan Records

https://www.amazon.com/Cruel-Mother-Edan-Archer/dp/B011BL8CGK/



Archer, though based in Gainesville, Fla., plays at Sidewalk when she comes to New York. Her first EP is a polished, confident slice of alt-country honey

mixed with just enough grit to be satisfying. The title track is the best: a dark tale of a mother who kills her children—a modern-day Medea retelling—delivered in an alternately sultry and commanding voice over a hook-laden tune. “Boomerang” is a softer number with reverberating guitars washing softly over waltz time cymbals with gently peeping keyboards like crickets chirping in the background, the deceptively sweet sound hiding a lyrical sting about instant karma coming back to get the one who hurt her—“you’ll go down to the bottom/ you’ll be haunting the blue/ your outsiders will be rotten/ like the inside of you.” “Ain’t That Kind of Woman” is another dirty blues rocker in the vein of “Cruel Mother,” while “I Don’t Need You for the Money” and “Cutthroat” are similar to Boomerang, with a wash of layered harmonies over gently rocking accompaniment.

Recommended if you like Sheryl Crow, Lucinda Williams, Alison Krauss, KT Tunstall.

Current Ex
The Ex-Files (EP)

https://currentex.bandcamp.com



Current Ex is a duo comprised of Joanna Kelly from Kung Fu Crimewave and Anelya Mayzlin

from Frank Olson & The Olson Twins. Their first release is a short, sweet, summery, poppy, half-riot grrl, half-retro record that brings to mind Sleater-Kinney meets the Go-Go’s. When I listen to this EP I feel like it’s June again, and I want to be on the beach drinking frozen margaritas, getting sunburned, juking to the fast songs and slow dancing to the sad ones. Starting off with “Foxhole,” slightly ragged guitar licks compete with appealingly natural-sounding drums before Kelly comes in, her voice pitched in that high-near-screech register that Corin Tucker uses to drill her lyrics into your consciousness, and Current Ex seems almost as pissed off—which is a good thing. The second track, “Hey Pedro,” is fun and jangly and passes quickly like a night spent getting blackout drunk, but it’s the third track, “Beachy Dream,” that is the standout of the EP. This song is like if The Ronettes “Be My Baby” had a baby with Lilys’ “Jenny, Andrew and Me”—dreamy and swirly with beautiful, aching lyrics (“You’ll forget about me/ and I’ll forget about you/ ooh ooh ooh”) sensitively, longingly sung.

Recommended if you like Sleater-Kinney, The Go-Go’s, Lilys, Babes in Toyland.

Horra
“Big Black Curtain”/“Pencil Me In” (double single)

https://horra1.bandcamp.com/releases



Horra is an antifolk supergroup with Margo Goldstein (who also performs ironic white-girl rap as Miss Represent) and

Matthew Seneca (who performs depressive synth numbers as Loose Lid) in which the whole is greater than the sum of their parts. This double single off of their forthcoming EP is a tasty treat that tantalizes. They’ve been playing these songs live for quite a while, but the production here is quite interesting. On “Big Black Curtain” I really like the layered vocals and waves of reverb over a gentle, skittering drum beat that builds to a wave like someone drowning in the ocean before it stops abruptly and goes back to the bare-bones, catchy sound that we’ve come to know and love from Horra. “Pencil Me In” has the reverse trajectory, starting off plain and gradually building up to a big sound. Touches of humor lighten up the generally dark sound and mood of both songs, like the squeaky bedframe sound on “Pencil Me In” when Goldstein sings “You call me when you’re stoned” implying a booty call without actually saying it. I also love the xylophone sound and Seneca’s hilarious extra-bass interjections. Great stuff and I can’t wait to hear the full record.

Recommended if you like Sneaker Pimps, Red House Painters, The Sugarcubes

Ariah
Ariah & (EP)

http://ariahand.com



Young Ariah Noetzel bursts out of the gate with this strong first EP. Her voice is so utterly original, ranging from dark, almost guttural growls to high, piercingly sweet trills of exquisite beauty, in that she reminds me of none other than Phoebe Novak

with a similar range and depth of expression. The songs themselves are well-developed settings in which her singing shines like a rare jewel—acoustic guitar cunningly overlaid with horns, electric bass, drums all are perfectly tailored to showcase her gorgeous, lush voice. I especially love the bells on “Disenchanted”—there’s something so satisfying about the way they come in the arrangement, not every time but when they sound it’s so beautiful. All in all an excellent record from this artist to watch.

Recommended if you like Renaissance (“Carpet of the Sun”), Jefferson Airplane, Phoebe Novak.