

A G R E A T E R S U B L I M E

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MONOPRINTS BY

Shelley Horton-Trippe

POETRY BY

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Richard Greenfield

Will Alexander

Tomaž Šalamun,

translated by Sonja Kravanja

Catherine Meng

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Jennifer Foerster

Ken White

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8 P O E T S / 8 P A I N T I N G S

A G R E A T E R S U B L I M E
AN EXPERIMENT IN SYNESTHESIA

8 P O E T S / 8 P A I N T I N G S

It all began on a cold and stormy night at the long farmer's table inhabited by dear friends. As the makeshift salon wound around us in the candle glow, the Slovenian translator Sonja Karavanja rose slowly and recited a Tomaž Šalamun poem in her native Slovene. Even though I had no knowledge of her language, the light, the color, smell and emotion of this poem came to life for me and I experienced a possible cross-sensing, a synesthesia of sorts between the sound of the poem and light and color, texture and form that would soon become paintings. Tears ran down my cheeks. I recognized a visual, palpable transmission, not a translation or illustration, but a clear reorganization of molecules that formed a sort of alchemical experiment.

It was 1990 and a new collaboration between poetry and painting began. Poems were sent by mail from around the globe and listened to, sensed through the wires of my little tape-deck in the studio, playing over and over again, allowing me to catch the essence of the poem that sooner or later would become a painting. The exhibition *The Poem/Paintings* opened at Sena Galleries in downtown Santa Fe one year later.

Jump forward nearly two decades. Poet Catherine Meng and I are sitting once again at the farm table. There is a re-ignition of the old

flame. Poets send their poems from around the country through a cloud, and wav recordings take the place of tapes. As I am listening, feeling the new crop of poems, I discover a significant difference in the work. I hear a calling out from their voices to take notice.

There has recently been reported an increase of poetry sales in the Bay Area by 30%. At this juncture in history, it seems more important than ever to claim the greatness that is inherent in this land. Recently, I was thinking about the Romantic Sublime painters. The natural world, her grandeur and wonder moved this notion across the Atlantic in the 19th century. Now, more than ever, we are beckoned to hear the voices, to over-ride the folly of mankind's confidence and embrace the sublime in our everyday lives, bit by bit acknowledging the scraps of beauty, the light in the eyes of our fellow beings and say, maybe quietly to ourselves, thank you for being alive.

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— *Shelley Horton-Trippe* painter 2018

1.

GRAIL

This freedom is not academic. It thrusts long
In the ephemeral darkness and tumbles
To the slaughterhouse floor. Then emptiness
Opens its arms once again. Though you wanted

Perhaps a scuttle of words about night and time
Or the nightmare in which you're exposed
As the flawed and flayed creatures you are,
Ridiculed by the gowned and suited grownups,

Those gloved hands applauding lightly
The sudden launch at tenderness as if
This groping darkness, the candle guttering
Finally out, this freedom you sought

And were granted by dusk and that was
By dawnlight snuffed, could, among the ten
Thousand things, the griefs and betrayals,
The gossip and grave diagnoses, bring

A cup of comfort to your cold lips. They know
They know, those dank observers
Who loosen their ties and softly cough
Into their sleeves. Caretakers of caution,

They'll retire to chenille and thread counts,
Lie smug in their laundered thoughts. Though
You wanted perhaps comfort, you got instead
This retrenchment of hope squandered

At the altar of desire, the quarrel between light
And curtain settled by one sweep of the arm.
This freedom is not academic.
It is required as night is required, seasonal

And measured. And seasoned thus, you live awhile
And die, riven evenly by loss and hope
And this thin stream of light settling now
Wholly in the grail of your own cupped hands.

— *Jon Davis*

2.

SENTIMENTAL MUSIC

(Willapa Bay, with Bartok, Miura, and piano)

What have we here? On the pedestal, in a museum of whimsies, is a *thing*. See it?:

{ }

This is as far as we go: no admission paid.

~

And we walk down to the mouth of the river drunk on champagne

and out on the ocean we cannot see the lack—the brackets emptied.

Yet now imagine the whale's baleen, how it nets a microcosm who become the singular strained mass mashed into a composition in your stomach's cockles. All of those musicks are available at fireside. Is it vulgar only because it is obsolete? When every song ever catalogued is in the wake of the tail and is lodged on the beach as ambergris, is trash become treasure? The trash vortex in the gyre. The Japanese glass fishing floats in the lighthouse gift shop. We point at trinkets: *why? How? What was it we saw?*

Too late the soft improvisational plinks begin, neither major nor minor, diatonic and not, the net a new network.

~

Hiroya Miura's gnosis teases with a sense of kitsch, like a missing link from Bartok's *Mikrokosmos* or a score for the mausoleum of dead whims. Though earnest and for less-practiced earnest-hearing ears, it recoils with our cold intelligences, stabbing with its echoing singularities, building in modest fidelity to a piece.

I play one on top of the other {Bartok-Miura} in a broken andante until fine.

~ ~ ~

On the peninsula of sand, starlight under a moon that absorbs its own light like a black hole. In the tall grass a figure blinks. *What is it? No admission.* And a white silhouette is the entropy of loose velvet. *What is it? A bird calls to the campfire. What is it? Two parallel dots move in motion on the night sky and vanish. What is it? No admission.* A blinking light refracting frantically in the high grey cirrus, *something* slingshotting. *What is it?*

We hope it is brilliant naiveté firing between the tines of the piano score — not glissading, but glissandoing onto the glad companionship of *poiesis*.

— *Richard Greenfield*

3.

FROM THE SRI LANKAN LOXODROME

*... transmitting Egyptian cultural values... in the
domain of writing and navigation*

— Cheikh Anta Diop

As to whether I exist
squared
to the 9 originations of the carnal spirit body
of its clarifying poison or its wheat
does not condemn me
or destroy my fate as Loxodrome

perhaps
I am a mix
of Yemenese or Omani configuration
possessing a murderous carpentry
or a salubrious or insalubrious flexity
at the code at which dissident germs must invigorate
bronchial delay
or answer its breathing by dialectical probation

it is as if each of my lives
is condoned with inflationary drift
with deltas
with models of themselves
involving perhaps
4 or 10 dimensions
more stunning than the ambit of an ibis
transcribing its folios in trance
I exist
not as a technical brutality

not as a monotheistic transcription
or as a terse incapable pilot splitting his axis on rocks
but the mind in its aurific degree
completely incapable of limits
incapable of forming zones of bondage
by which my tertiary compass responds to hosannas

I have burned in previous lives
as one single body
as foiled idyllic moneran
given over
to the permanent ache of isolation
to the permanent ecclesiastical gaze of a brackish melancholia
instinctively kept alive by prolonged engagement
with a succubus
her names
Pyrexia*
Karina*
Mamaloi*

& I have not been able to divide
to re-engender my thirst
according to a sovereign maritime picture
I have never been able to see my own breathing
or begin to awe myself within a narcotic iridescence

GLOSSARY

Pyrexia: fever or febrile condition

Karina: “Egyptian demonology, familiar attached to each child at birth.”

Mamaloi: “... priestess-magician associated with voodooism in the West Indies.”

— *Will Alexander*

4.

Two Poems from Tomaž Šalamun's *Druids*

In 1965
in Macedonia
in August
in the mountains
at sunset
we locked ourselves in the church
of St. Nicholas.
We burned
incense
sang
and made love
until night
turned white.

From here the apple of
the world will pop out and roll over
generations.
You as well as I
stuffed bags in our eyes.
We cut down pine trees.
We scraped the rust from mouse traps.
We pulled the black plasma's teeth out.
Twice I attacked
a thick clod with my scythe
to split it open.
I was rolling lambs and calves over
deeply touched messengers.
They surrendered. And their painted mouths,
bitter wine, ran over. Then I flung
a spear to the robust moon so I'd know
the exact time.
That's how I know.
Time is tall and yellow, the child
of the sun, the sun itself.

Translated by Sonja Kravanja

5.

UNTITLED

I imagine my heart
held together by a procedure
named after a bird

government water flows
freely through
both ventricles

cascading to the east
in turbulent backtalk
& pooling to the west

in shale flats
where revisionists
paddleboard

— *Catherine Meng*

6.

FLICKING OFF THE LIGHT SWITCH

Flicking off the light switch.

Lichen buds the curved creases of a mind
pondering the mesquite tree's dull ache

as it gathers its leaves around clouds of spotted doves-
calling them in rows of twelve back from their winter sleep.

Doves' eyes black as nightfall

shiver on the foam coast of an arctic dream

where whale ribs

clasp and fasten you to a language of shifting ice.

Seeing into those eyes

you uncoil their telephone wires,

gather their inaudible lions with plastic forks, tongue their salty ribbons,
and untie their weedy stems from your prickly fingers.

You stop to wonder what *like* sounds like when held under glacier water,

how *Ná ho kos* feels

under the weight of all that loss.

— *Sherwin Bitsui*

7.

APRICOTS

A light.

A room.

Lakes upon lakes.

The hen's head, blazing
drops to the mat.

I want to sleep in the straw
through the slant afternoon,
my own head a bowl of apricots.

Were the blood tracks
on the forested overpass
not the antelope's.

Were the thunder
clouds in my belly
not the dark strokes of men.

There is no man in a tower
with a stopwatch.

Tonight no moon
to break myself against.

A light.

A boat.

Unlit room.

Don't sleep yet.
I'm rowing toward you

— *Jennifer Foerster*

8.

THOUGH OUR MOUTHS BE TAKEN FROM US

Though our mouths be taken from us, the center
comes first, circumference follows. That shall be the whole
of the law. Listen, glassblower. Listen, pendulum.
Though our faces have been smoothed

of feature and our ears stopped fast we have these
our hands, though sense of touch has forsaken us
in foreseeable collapse. If not hands we have
these our remnant stumps. Listen, corn-

flower. Listen, saffron. Though our tongues
swell thick as roots, have dived. Though our skins
unmake their tiny orders of integument
and release. Though the centrifuge. Though spindrift

our blood this suspended sheet we cannot hope
to overcome it wholly. We must meet with lust
for bruising the whole of the bristling law, behemoth
in the jagged breach. Listen, lull-in-lathe. Listen well

bi-valved hinge, let us shatter on the charge. Let us
fragment and combine to let our cracked bicuspid mark
the crater and the sty. Though the whole of the law
shall be unwritten we must speak our remnant

tendons, bunched and flat and dried. Our sinews
must cluster like rushes on the marsh and in slightest stir
of wind must whisper milked the whole of it
and chant it where they touch, choir it

ringing from our lashes smoldering
and singed. Though razed. Though iron
smacks louder than pulse we must — *listen,*
sower. Listen, reaver — though hammer flattens, folded

and damasked we must — *listen, besom. Listen*
transom — speak it though all has been dismembered
and our stolen mouths! Our molecules summarily
dismissed, capillaries driven over cliffs, cells ruptured

with borrowed pin, atoms heedlessly compressed
until the fabric of our voices, our voices
which have no bodies, has been unraveled
and still we must speak it aloud, speak it

together or in part. *Our mouths have been taken*
from us. Listen, bosun. Listen, tiercel. As frightened hares
our tongues have gone to ground; root them out
though banished and remiss. We must *speak.* Listen,

direction. Listen, come-forth. We must
speak. We must speak. We must because everything
can be — everything that *can* be taken from us
will be taken from us — speak for it. This law

is the only law, that the voice must live. That the voice must
live shall be the whole of it. At the center is the voice
and will be invented next circumference and all
will be restored to us though there is no promise

as to the form of it. That is the body
of the, the corpus of the, the only of
the law — that this voice must live and that we speak it
the imperative entire, the floor

of the, the seat of the, the voice the
heart and ember, inner chamber at the center
of the only law that matters but we must
speak it aloud to make it whole.

— *Ken White*

THE ARTIST

Shelley Horton-Trippe moved to Paris to study video with Nam June Paik after graduate school at the University of Oklahoma. In 1979, she settled in New Mexico to continue her art practice and raise her daughter, Bess Murphy. She lives in an old adobe studio on the outskirts of Santa Fe, where she lives and works with her companion, right around the bend from her daughter, son-in law and granddaughter. She exhibits her art both nationally and internationally and continues to delve into the relationship between painting and poetry.

THE POETS

Jon Davis, former Santa Fe Poet Laureate, is the author of five full-length books and five chapbooks of poems. His most recent collection is *Improbable Creatures*. He co-founded and directs the MFA program in Creative Writing at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

Richard Greenfield is the author of three books of poetry, *A Carnage in the Lovetrees* (University of California Press), *Tracer* (Omnidawn), and *Subterranean* (Omnidawn). A recent Fulbright in South Korea, he was most recently International Writer in Residence at Seoul ArtSpace Yeonhui. He is editor in chief of *Puerto del Sol* magazine, and co-editor of Apostrophe Books. Recent work has appeared in *Verse Daily* and the *Boston Review* and in *Privacy Policy: The Anthology of Surveillance Poetics* (Black Ocean). He lives in El Paso, Texas and teaches in the creative writing program of New Mexico State University in Las Cruces.

Will Alexander: Poet, novelist, essayist, playwright, philosopher, visual artist, pianist, instructor who has written over 30 books and chapbooks. Among his honors he is a PEN/Oakland Award winner, an American Book Award winner, and winner of the 2016 Jackson Poetry Prize. He is a California Arts Council Fellow, as well as being a Whiting Fellow.

Tomaž Šalamun was born in 1941 in Slovene. He was one of Europe's most prominent poets of his generation and was a leading figure of post-war neo-avant-garde poetry in Eastern Europe and an internationally acclaimed absurdist. He died December 27th, 2014.

Sonja Kravanja, a native of Slovenia, is an award-winning translator of Slovenian poetry into English. Forthcoming is her translation of Tomaž Šalamun's *Druids* from Black Ocean Press.

Catherine Meng is the author of *Tonight's The Night* (Apostrophe Books) and *The Longest Total Solar Eclipse of the Century* (SplitLevel Texts). She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico with her family.

Sherwin Bitsui is the author of *Dissolve and Flood Song* (Copper Canyon Press). He is originally from White Cone, Arizona on the Navajo Reservation. He lives in Albuquerque.

Jennifer Elise Foerster earned her PhD in English and Literary Arts from the University of Denver and her MFA from the Vermont College of the Fine Arts. She is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship, a Lannan Foundation Writing Residency Fellowship, and was a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University. Jennifer teaches at the Institute of American Indian Arts MFA Low-Residency Program and co-directs For Girls Becoming, an arts mentorship program for Mvskoke youth in Oklahoma. A member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma, Jennifer is the author of *Leaving Tulsa*, (2013) and *Bright Raft in the Afterweather* (2018), both published by the University of Arizona Press. She lives in San Francisco.

Ken White is the author of three books of poetry: *Eidolon*, *The Getty Fiend*, and *Middlemost Constantine*. White teaches screenwriting at the low-residency MFA at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe.

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