

Saturday Nights at the Getty and Write Now Poetry Society present

Dark Blushing

Featuring

Brendan Constantine

Suzanne Lummis

Jeffrey McDaniel

Rachel McKibbens

Patricia Smith

Ilya Kaminsky

with

Roberto Miranda, *bass*

Timmy Straw, *keyboards*

Special guest appearances by **Marilyn Manson** and **America Ferrera**

Hosted by **Mindy Nettifee** and **Amber Tamblyn**

Getty Center, Harold M. Williams Auditorium
Saturday, September 10, 2011; 7:30 p.m.

The works of art featured in tonight's program can be viewed in the exhibition *Luminous Paper: British Watercolors and Drawings*, currently on view in the Museum, West Pavilion, Plaza Level, through October 23, 2011.



performance

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

LIVE at the Getty Center

The Program

"Invocation"

By Roberto Miranda

"Stonehenge at Twilight"

Written and performed by Brendan Constantine

After *Stonehenge, Twilight*, about 1840, William Turner of Oxford (British, 1789–1862). Watercolor

"In Which Lummis Makes Several Attempts to Scale the Castle and Apprehend the Cathedral"

Written and performed by Suzanne Lummis

After *Durham Cathedral and Castle*, about 1800, Thomas Girtin (British, 1775–1802).

Watercolor with gum arabic over pencil

"Proverbs of Hell," 1790

By William Blake (British, 1757–1827)

Read by Marilyn Manson

"Satan Exulting over Eve"

Written and performed by Jeffrey McDaniel

After *Satan Exulting over Eve*, 1795, William Blake (British, 1757–1827).

Pencil, pen and black ink, and watercolor over color print

Solo performance

By Timmy Straw

Untitled

Written and performed by Rachel McKibbens

After *Sir Guyon with the Palmer Attending, Tempted by Phaedria to Land upon the Enchanted Islands*, 1849, Samuel Palmer (British, 1805–1881).

Watercolor and gouache with gum arabic over black chalk

"Insomnia," 1881

By Dante Gabriel Rossetti (British, 1828–1882)

Read by America Ferrera

"Crave of You"

Written and performed by Patricia Smith

After *Portrait of Elizabeth Siddal Resting, Holding a Parasol*, 1852–1855, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (British, 1828–1882). Pen and brown ink with light brown and gray wash on ivory-finished paper

"What She Saw, Lifting the Curtain"

Written and performed by Ilya Kaminsky

After *The Dream*, 1896, Aubrey Vincent Beardsley (British, 1872–1898).

Pen and black ink over pencil

Hosted by Mindy Nettifee and Amber Tamblyn

All projected drawings are part of the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum.

About the Program

All of the volunteers who form the Write Now Poetry Society have been personally transformed by poetry. Ask us to explain *transformed how*, and you might get a thousand poems, two dozen half-novels, several pedantic essays, and more than several tipsy brunch rants, but you probably won't get anything close to a straight answer. The straightest answer we can give must be shown and not told. And so we have spent the last five years producing poetry events in theaters and tree groves, ballrooms and bars, showcasing some of the greatest living poets in America, pairing them with musicians and magicians, and experimenting with the ecstatic line where great page writing and great performance meet. We mean to prove handily that poetry is alive, relevant, entertaining, thought charging, soul provoking, and ultimately, exactly what we all need. When we get it right, we no longer need to explain; we create new believers out of the wariest critics.

We are always looking for new partners to help us elevate this work, and so we are thrilled at the opportunity to collaborate with the Getty on an event to celebrate the exhibition *Luminous Paper: British Watercolors and Drawings*. In addition to having a name that shimmers poetically itself, *Luminous Paper* features the work of two beloved poets—William Blake and Dante Gabriel Rossetti—who were also great visual artists. This evening's program pays homage to them both, as well as other artists from the exhibit. We invited musician and iconoclast Marilyn Manson and actress America Ferrera to bring Blake and Rossetti's words to life, and commissioned six contemporary American poets to write new ekphrastic poems and perform them.

Ekphrastic poetry—writing that comments on another art form—is as old and traditional as a Grecian urn. (Sorry, Keats, we had to.) It has inspired writers as a medium throughout the centuries, especially as a way to breakthrough what Socrates' called the "most majestic silence" of the painting. Poets Patricia Smith, Ilya Kaminsky, Jeffrey McDaniel, Rachel McKibbens, Brendan Constantine, and Suzanne Lummis have all taken up the challenge, and we are excited to present them to you tonight with the lush live music of Timmy Straw and Roberto Miranda. Together their work is a testament to the power of artists in conversation with other artists, of the great feedback loop of arousal and epiphany that is possible. There will be moments of darkness and light, passion and awe, and, we hope, transformation.

Welcome to Dark Blushing!

—Mindy Nettifee and Amber Tamblyn

The Poems

"Stonehenge at Twilight"

By Brendan Constantine

After *Stonehenge at Twilight*, about 1840, Joseph Mallord William Turner (British, 1798–1862)

From so far back, from this copper hour
when the flock comes muttering to drink,
how meager the stones appear, how like
a shepherd's teeth;

blue as the worm-
wood water, remote as the look in a cup.

Sheep don't see their reflections, don't
wonder at themselves, why their faces
are not born away in a stream.

They say
their one vowel and remember the dog.

This far into evensong, how like a hand
the land looks, an open palm; the flock
but a strand of wool. As if the Lord
of shepherds were declaring,

Look,
*what is in my purse instead of money:
a bit of yarn to make more purses.*

How like a smoking priest the distant
Heelstone seems, how like smoke
the curlews above it. They don't need
rods or tending.

They say their one say
and forget they said it.

So close to dark,
to campfires, to propped sleep and still
within call of the sun, how like a field
is the sky, how much more like a herd
are the clouds than the birds.

The stars
are a few songs away. Only a shepherd
would add them. Only a shepherd
wants to ask,

*What man made those?
How on earth did he get them there?*

"In Which Lummis Makes Several Attempts to Scale the Castle and Apprehend the Cathedral"

Written and performed by Suzanne Lummis

After *Durham Cathedral and Castle*, about 1800, Thomas Girtin (British, 1775–1802)

I. Air. The Other Castle

I didn't see it, the hint, suggestion maybe, of pink, or rose,
a shimmering, pale, like another sky unfurling itself behind
the usual sky—not at first.

First, I saw the watercolored castle, Girtin's, then a different
artist's castle. I don't like "memory" as a word—it's weak,
so I won't use it. I saw it in my head—the path through ocean

breeze-pushed grasses that dropped to the arching bridge,
then up to round castle towers that looked somehow
as if they'd always been there and the cliffs just poured

from them. Children in frocks and pantaloons, straw hats
and sailor suits danced down the incline, over the gully
and up, growing tiny, tinier, and I followed, tracing the path

with my finger to the castle door that would not
budge for me. I wanted in. I wanted the stairs that wound
through the tower to the high chamber, a room of moon

and morning light, as I imagined it, apricot, silver...
Understand, I had no reason to complain. I wasn't starved,
neglected. My parents loved me and each other.

But outside the brown shingled lodge, a cutting wind hurried
the new snow, dry, shifting, over last week's hard-packed snow.
It wasn't my life I minded but the world. I wanted some other,

one not so white, white with the frozen creek water showing
through black and, way off, gray, lonely highway 80
rimmed with ice. The weird children had found it—

this other place—all of them skipping up the embankment
in their lucky fairy dust slippers. Everyone was going but me.

You can get it now on E-Bay, that children's book, circa
nineteen twenty one—an age both Girtin and I missed, too
early and too late. Of course, I know now, in The Age

of Knowing: nobody goes. Castles like that are made of air
—no, not the usual air. I mean the kind that drifted
in the world before some scientist discovered

the existence of oxygen, and gave it its name. The first
air, the kind that surrounded us, and we breathed it,
lived in it, before we even knew what it was.

II. *From Manchester, England: Facebook Communique*
Unsuitable for this Poem

Suzanne, knowing that it was the most splendid cathedral I did visit Durham
once. Unfortunately, I was in the company of someone who cannot abide
cathedrals, which made it difficult to stay long. The building is indeed
fabulous—the pillars, the architecture, the geometry and the size. Sadly, the
choir began their rehearsal, and this made my friend's discomfort almost
unbearable. Outside is a lovely cathedral square and a view way down to the
river—but we had to go. Regrettably, there was some confusion about
parking and we had some difficulty finding our car. Because he'd been
troubled by the cathedral and now we couldn't find our car my friend was in
great distress. I think I caught a glimpse of the castle as we made our way
back to the center of town. It looked lovely. It was far away. I'm sorry none
of this will be suitable for your poem.

III. Stone. Wrong Castles

When I looked again I saw the cathedral's slim, peaked
windows, and before it, the battlements,
the rising castle, and down below, the risen waters

of the River Wear, smooth, spilling from the river wall

toward the viewer, into her palms, into his arms, though
of course, one can't catch water. The painting's beautiful.
Sometimes I have to say it plain, flat-out like that. Sometimes

there's no help for it. Long ago, I once entered real castles
—two. They were made of stone, not air, and the moats
were made to collapse and drown armies who tried to dig

beneath, to burrow in, the maze of greenery
outside designed to throw them off—and beyond the gate,
the round "murder holes," they're called, for pouring tar
and fire. In the center, in the Great Hall, lords and ladies
once drank and chewed. After dark sleeping servants sprawled
across the floors. The tower steps go crazily, high then low,

to make invaders stumble and give those defending swordsmen
who knew these stair stairs by heart, a chance to strike. And
at the top, the dank castle keep, a dungeon near the sky.

That's the truth I guess, or much of it, which is also made
of stone. In English, it makes a wispy, lisping, indecisive
sound against our teeth, *truth*, but it's hard.

We knock our head's against it—*who set that there!?*
We complain truth hurts us, but no: we build it, one
stone on the next, then—we hurt ourselves against it.

IV. *Prosaic Travel Notes with Certain Reflections on Thomas Girtin,*
Medieval Histories and Other Musings that Will Not Coalesce into Poetry

Thirty years in these whereabouts and I have never until now visited this
municipality off the 210, west of Azusa, south of Sierra Madre. But even now
in my first wondrous experience of Monrovia I cannot stop thinking about
Thomas Girtin, and his short life. 'Short' I am thinking, 'but long enough to
become loved by the public, admired by Turner, and to raise the status of
watercolor to a new rank'.

So far, I have not met or spoken to anyone here, but everyone in
Monrovia seems nice. I arrived at this dispensary for quick food by following
a car whose bumper proclaimed "I'd rather be watching 'I Love Lucy'".
However, I'm not fond of this chain, because its terrible mascot terrorizes my
TV with its immense, round, white head and crudely abbreviated features.
What would Tomas Girtin

think of that? He would not like it either; the beholder of beauty
both earthly and otherworldly would not like that mutant who cajoles its
target market of jaded boys to eat more ground flank of cow. But he might
enjoy this rich chocolate cake inside a round plastic container that unsnaps,
and this coffee. I am thinking first of the cathedral then the protecting castle,
here, now, because I must

have a place to sit down until the two o'clock panel on noir, which
is a diversion for college-polished people captivated by stories of crimes they
would not wish to happen to them. *Indigo brush strokes, golden brown,*
amber. . . I am attempting to reconcile beauty and mayhem. I am not the first
to have tried but might be first to have tried in this franchise. Certain
weather angles down across the ancient monuments,

an odd brightness in the clouds I can't discover the source of, then
the small, sudden white of a covered wagon on the bridge. Is it true that
workers installing a heating system a few decades back turned up a cluster of
Scottish warriors imprisoned in the cathedral walls after a failed siege? Of
course, by then they were dead. Now, somehow, quite unaccountably, this
starts me thinking of Lady Jane, yes, like the Stones song,

the same Jane, brilliant, a reader, a thinker, and forced to be queen. For nine days a queen, then cast down by rivals, condemned as a traitor, sentenced to die. She was only a girl, seventeen. And why do I have to think of this here, in Monrovia? On this pleasant day? When I'm supposed to be focused on noir, or the brushstrokes of Merten? No one here tugging their orders from their paper wrappers is lost in the late Middle Age.

They're happy—look how they chew! Still I read it in *Time Magazine*, yes, and clipped the article—how she resolved to be brave, and asked only that her executioner dispatch her quickly. He begged her forgiveness and she gave it. Now I feel the first salt sharpen my eyes but I don't think I'll cry—the cake tastes good, anyway, and so does the coffee. Only when blindfolded did Jane start to panic, for she could not find chopping block

for her head, so she groped on the floor, calling in terror, "Where is it? What shall I do?" And now I am crying in this maniacal food outlet, the fattest tears I've let fall in years, but no one sees. The chattering and noisy sucking of the last, low-lying carbonated sodas carry on in this place where it is always lunch. Even at midnight it is lunch, or at the hour of the world's end: lunch. I'm furious about what happened to Lady Jane! Still, I'm liking

this coffee. Suddenly it seems many cars are traveling the wide, urban-planned boulevards declaring their drivers would rather be watching *I Love Lucy*. What would he think of this—Girtin who, like Joplin, Hendrix, Winehouse, died at age twenty-seven—but look what he did, look what he raised up against chaos. In just twenty-seven years Thomas Girtin made sense of his life. See? The arched bridge and, below, the River Wear,

uncreased, silky, moving toward the North Sea. And rising above: those colossal shapes that are not human, a mystery—if that's the word—at their core, a silence, some deep enduring calm. It must've been there once, must have existed. He must've seen it that day—he painted it.

V. Paint. Error.

Try again: the twin Colossals, and there, slanting just below, ragged, uncrushable dwellings with thick, stacked brick chimneys and windows the poor lean from—made of pigment.

And the slippery water that bends over the sheer drop and foams toward those of us cast out here—pigment. And water. And sealant to keep it in place—and still like that. And moving.

In the dream I almost had, keep having, I step inside, because one can pass through paint in dreams, parchment.

I'm standing just ahead of what the viewer knows, and all around birds signal their letterless, tipped syllables.

They overlap with the overlapping waters.

Of course, I'm gazing at the tower. So I take, one by one,

each step—three hundred and twenty steps, but (in the dream I'm almost having) steps aren't made of stone but desire, turning, turning the way desire does in life. Now. This top door will open at a touch, the *right* touch, a press of fingertips, three.

When it's revealed I see it was never the room after all, which is just a space for possessions, a roof to sleep beneath, a mirror—it's the window. Always, it has been the window. I gaze out, first at the sky with its waves of muted light and the wash of some secret other sky, then down. Look. It's there—The Beautiful World.

And at its heart that place I'd been standing before, by the river, starry now, almost translucent, calling out of itself, and far,
far.

"Satan Exulting over Eve"

Written and performed by Jeffrey McDaniel

After Satan Exulting over Eve, 1795, William Blake (British, 1757–1827)

Here she is, master, your little child.
See how her head slopes back, neck arched,
as if frozen in prayer, her hair spilling
out of her skull in thick, amber waves,
as knowledge's venom courses through her. See
how my scaly logic coils around her,
like bacon curling a lush piece of shrimp.
Come and get her, lord,
before I throw her on the grill.

Oh, don't act so surprised—you knew
this would happen, dressing up
your little mousetrap like paradise,
with sycamores and starlings,
dipping sweet Eve's tresses in jasmine,
rubbing crushed lilac between her toes
and setting her here like bait,
her fragrance loose in the wind.

You knew I was coming, my partner, my lord,
forever linked. You put the ticking
in the apple, you put the fatal in the fruit.
I, your slithering assassin, your eternal patsy,
merely carried out your dirtiest deed

with absolute loyalty, so you could swoop in
and play the good guy under a balcony of stars
that always depict you in a positive light.

What?! You deny it? Is the court to believe
you're almighty in every way but this,
that even with crystal balls for pupils,
and binoculars in your fingertips
you could not foresee this?
Now you hide up there behind a sunbeam,
muttering *free will*. Heavily discounted
perhaps, but never free.

Oh, but you should've seen it, father—
how I took my time, found a little knob
in her mind and turned the temptation
up slow, till desire began to fill her
like water into the belly of a boat,
starting with just one plump, purple drop,
then another, then her hull sagging,
and her mouth opening. Oh father,
just as perception trickled out of her
like the last slur of wine from a kicked over bottle.
I whispered in her ear, *Dear Eve,*
I had to do it. Without you, I'm not Satan.
I'm just a squandered angel.
Now I'm the inventor of heaven.

But oh my liege, I wish you could've seen her
tighten her grip around that Malus Pumila
and ruthlessly test the apple's ripeness
with a brush of her incisors—all my forbidden
juice about to carnival into her psyche.

She knew what she was she doing, master,
her eyes like caramel simmering,
as her lips parted, her cheeks hollowing
inward to a glove, her molars
sinking into me, the apple.

I am all maple now:
skull tilted back, sinister high notes

shuddering into the dark, nethery spires
of my temples, irises quivering
like the quartz tips of metronomes,
as melted coins of moonlight
jukeboxed out of me.

How could something so pure and sweet
have sprung from the gypsy cauldron of my loins?

What's that you say? Now you make threats
to line her pelvis with tiny grenades
so when the offspring grinds out
pain will ricochet through her hips like shrapnel,
so she'll scream your name in labor, her savior?
Talk about vanity. Some savior you are—
saving her for yourself perhaps, you two-faced swine
planting and pruning the tree of death
besides the tree of life. Yes, I am evil. Yes,
I am the minister of woe, but at least I'm consistent.

And what about Adam—you're boy wonder,
with all those ribs? Well, he climbed
the tree of curiosity, father, and he watched
thimbles of her breath lap
the shoreline of my forearm. Now he wants
to grow up to be just like me, Lucifer,
the one who cracks darkness in two
and extracts light. Her gasps,
like little balloons leaving the hands
of children and floating up
into the never-ending space
between my ears:
tremolo, tremolo, tremolo.

Yes, my lord, you are infinite, yes,
you control the galaxies, but this space here
between the shoulder blades
is mine. I patrol this orb, this piece of fruit
plucked from the tree of planets
and spun recklessly. This
bruised orchard is mine.

Untitled

Written and performed by Rachel McKibbens

After Sir Guyon with the Palmer Attending, Tempted by Phaedria to Land upon the Enchanted Islands, 1849, Samuel Palmer (British, 1805–1881)

It is a tired afternoon,
just before the sun crawls down,
slow (a hot white pill)
when the men appear,
a mirage of corrupted flesh,
standing above the water.

My voice hangs in the air like a
postcard bird, gold and warm,
it pecks and pecks
as my hair branches beneath the water
and carries their boat.

Here, each hour is milked by
hunger. Every map
folded, then put away.
It is no fault of mine
men would rather know
the salt of my flesh
than a day of labour's sweat.
I look across the water,
over a turned shoulder
and the suffering hands of their days
fall to their sides.

I am Queen of The
Broken Voyage.
It is an honest confusion;
I am no simple pair of hips.
I roll six nymphs
deep—wives of a wet dream—
we tempt men from their boats,
sing their oars into the ruining mud.
An island of womanly forgery.
Full-figured thrills. Perfumed nipples
and sunblushed skin, we twirl. Our lips full of sleepy
poisons, we cannot be fucked with.
Thunderous spellcasters,
we are the answer to your troubled compass.
In our mouths, every man is small,
and the spineless gods haven't enough
hands to save them all.

"Crave of You"

Written and performed by Patricia Smith

After Portrait of Elizabeth Siddal Resting, Holding a Parasol, 1852–1855, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (British, 1828–1882)

Woman, know that the crave of you was the first chaos,
the bone lodged bluesways in my belly, the slow slap
that tore your fingernails loose and left them in my hair.
No man's hue could speak the damnable light that rollicked
from your skin, or the ocean that snarled and sat upright
whenever the unrhymed stanza of your dark eye latched
to mine. Know the backside of dawn, the burn of my arced
and awkward back as I struggled to capture you in etching
and oil, fingers prickling with failure as I swept a brush
dripping with coral across your breastbone and wept you
in the direction of a breath you never drew. When color
betrayed me, when my attempts to birth another touchable
you fashioned a tongue broad enough for mocking laughter,
I abandoned canvas and crawled to the door you slept behind.

Lizzy, you never tried to glimpse the angry language those
midnights left on my knees, the ripe landscape of scarring
and drag, the wounds of a man gone hollow. I crawled to
what you'd closed to me and pressed my face to the inch
of break beneath our door. I snorted and sniffed, desperate
for the sugary stench of your angles, sour from your drooped
mouth, the voice of a rotted tooth in the cavern my spit could
never reach. I could hear your nude and proper turning,
accordion bone, I listened as you spoke aloud, always on
the cusp of swooning, trying once again to remember
the motions of waking. Woman, know that the crave of you
was the first familiar, the drums in the country of my chest,
my blinded grasp at the purpose of religion, and my shame.

When you allowed, I unfolded your startled sex and laid
beside a body of shuttered doors, squinting in the moonwash
for the nerve to invade your painfully drawn lines, to circle
your wrists of dust with my forefinger and thumb, to crack you,
to fill your collapsing outline with altered light. My life, as it
was, was lived for the reckless clock, for your muffled bellow
of my name riding an air that stank with bruise and rearrange,
pummel and repetition and mouth. Woman, I loved you from
my marrow, far beyond the borders of swallowing canvas
and the false precision of brush. In poems I finally found name

for the luminous stains I desired for you, lines to unleash
and contain the carousing purples and screeches of scarlet, golds
without bottom, lily greens and improbable oranges written
to explode and burn my crave on the listless milk of your skin.

When you were full with child, your whole self unbidden
tears and rumbling fluid, I once again cursed the limits of sight,
shoved aside the paints after trying canvasses of your weeping,
your thin teeter, the odd thing like a cocked rifle inside you.
It was poetry that forgave you the implosion of your bones,
the fracturing at your core, poems forgave you the soft murder
of our daughter. I penned a hundred of them, all beginning with
the flowery name we never had time to give her, all describing
the blood-slicked comma of her arrival, the dramatic squeal
as you pushed and pushed and pushed out the absolute nothing
of her, and I even crafted a four-syllable color for the silence
that revised the purpose of the birthing room. We built the rest
of our lives around the messy, upended ceremony of her goodbye,
the clipped mopping up of what had spilled from you. I wrote
long into the muscle of hours, lines with a foretold measure
of loss and lyric, I forced a chanted love from my fingers while
you lay on your side three rooms away from me, sweating
and sleepless from your root, snippets of lullaby swelling your
throat. Laudanum, cheaper and more romantic than gin, carved
a slow river in you. You mangled my name, laugh/wept from
your center. I dropped to my knees, began the slow crawl.

II.

Watching a woman die is to see her siphoned of blush, to witness
a clock unbeginning. Your soaked, reddened hair painted my
forearm as I held your head and whispered shattered sonnets,
feeling you grow smaller, my Lizzie, my ghost. Woman, you
as ache. I crammed whole pages with our unraveling, mirrored
the wither in stark syllable. Then, in a frenzy, I picked up my
brushes, desiring to fill your dimming with riotous chroma,
painting all and everything that dared a pulse beyond your fall.
But it was words, scrawled and driven, that stood our history
on its end, opened the clenched throat of our dead daughter,
prepared me for the night when I found you, scrubbed of glow,
you, crinkled on the woven indigo rug beside our untumbled
bed, clutching the vial drained of necessary sweet. The delicate
balance of overdose was like a blood around your mouth.
Woman, the crave of you was the first chaos, Woman, I loved
you from my marrow. You were all that color could have been.

For days I lay beside you, breathing in your gone, praying
for your nude and proper turning, accordion bone, listening
for the voice of rot to rise from the very back of your smile.
When finally you were to be folded into our earth, I watched
as they laid your body into the huge center of a painted box.
You were my lady of sticks and slipsilver, wallowing inside
a slim sheath that whispered *once beautiful* under its breath.
I held in my hands the notebook, the rhymed and runaway
metered tale of our us, the days as they flowed from my
fingers. It was all the life I had beyond yours, and I shuddered,
picturing the taut verbs and unbridled music glistening aloud
inside and against you. I wanted to send you to some god with
your story already told, spun wearily on line and line and line.
This would be my suicide, my death beside you, my last drawn
light, the surrender of my voice and eye. I placed all my poems
there within touch, where they could croon you deeper into
the reverse of arrive, where you were forever and unerring a yes.

III.

On each of two thousand shattered mornings,
I printed one perfect
letter
L L L L and for this long *L L L L L* I have waited *L L L*
for the remainder of your name
Oh, there has been inspiration There is always inspiration
I am a continually inspired man
I have ridden your dead hips in more than one dream
I have sipped at the damning drug of your face
I have latched my dark eye to yours
I have *L L L L L*
scrawled you across every hour with the tip
of a filthy finger
I have discovered, Lizzie, *L L L* that stories
do not go on
if you cannot touch them

there is no way to hear music you cannot see

No line should ever be a last line I have written a last line
and for the sake of my soul
I must erase it

*I am mad with shovel clang, with splintering wood, with earth stink and longing
I am mad with dig and pilfer and the betrayal and the streak stream of tears*

but I am just so so hungry and I lift the lid and I love the creak of you, the dusted wrists of you, the absence of eyes of you, the dress still in the shape of the no body of yours, I love the skittering motion in the matted hair of you, woman I love the eaten roads in you, the absolute blank of you, the notebook and its thinned pages still resting beside the no pulsing of you and I grab and it crumbles, and I grab and it powders, it yellowgrays with two thousand days of no you, but there is my next poem, not in the written, but in the you, the you, the you, in the resounding no of you, in my mad mouth gaping, ravenous, moving closer to your altered light of you L L L L Lizzie, Lizzie, the crave of you was always the word and the rhyme the word and the rhyme the word and the rhyme you were always the first always the first always the first

chaos

"What She Saw, Lifting the Curtain"

Written and performed by Ilya Kaminsky

After *The Dream*, 1896, Aubrey Vincent Beardsley (British, 1872–1898)

...Inhabitant of earth for thirty-something years
I once found myself in a silent country

where human beings move, but how differently they move!
I do not know what silence is, mine or

not mine, this country speaks to me
I am sitting before an enormous typewriter. Outside—

a street café, the customers drink lemon vodka,
throw their cups in the air,

they speak of gratitude, the music
we touch in ourselves. If they have nothing else, silence

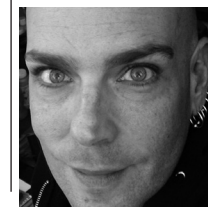
is their music. And here I stand, a fool in an old-fashioned hat,
I have earned the laborious right

to love my country: yes, I stop and stare
as the wonder of the sun occurs—

pigeons rise over churches, the opera theater.
How bright the sky is, as the avenue spins on its axis,

how bright the sky is (forgive me Lord) how bright.

About the Artists



Brendan Constantine is a poet based in Los Angeles. His work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Ninth Letter*, *The Cortland Review*, and other journals. New work is forthcoming in *Field*, *Rattle*, and *PANK*. His first book, *Letters To Guns* (Red Hen Press), was released in 2009 to critical acclaim. He is currently poet in residence at the Windward School and Loyola Marymount University Extension. His second collection, *Birthday Girl with*

Possum, was published by Write Bloody Press in August 2011. He lives in Hollywood at Bela Lugosi's last address.



Ilya Kaminsky was born in Odessa, former Soviet Union, in 1977, and emigrated with his family in 1993 when dire circumstances forced them to seek political asylum in the United States. Six years later, Kaminsky was a Georgetown University graduate and the youngest writer in residence ever appointed at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. Kaminsky is the author of *Dancing in Odessa* (Tupelo Press, 2004), which won the American Academy of

Arts and Letters' Metcalf Award, the Dorset Prize, and was a finalist for the National Poetry Series, the Walt Whitman Award, and the Yale Younger Poets Series. *Dancing in Odessa* was named Best Poetry Book of the Year 2005 by *ForeWord Magazine*. Kaminsky is a recipient of the 2005 Whiting Writer's Award and in 2001 Kaminsky was awarded the Ruth Lilly Fellowship by *Poetry* magazine. He has also received the Florence Kahn Memorial Award, the Milton Center's Award for Excellence in Poetry, and the Southeast Review's first annual chapbook award for *Musica Humana*. He now teaches writing at San Diego State University and acts as director of the Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute at the Poetry Foundation.



Suzanne Lummis was born in San Francisco, raised in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, went to high school in Berkeley, college in the San Joaquin Valley—in the now legendary California State University, Fresno, program—and has lived in Los Angeles for thirty years. She's published two poetry collections, *Idiosyncrasies* and *In Danger*. Recent poems have appeared in *The New Ohio Review*, *World Literature Today*, *ConnotationPress.com*, and the publication commemorating

NoirCon, the biannual festival and conference in Philadelphia. Her work is forthcoming in the Knoph Everyman's Library anthology, *Killer Verse: Poems of Murder and Mayhem*. She teaches creative writing through UCLA Extension Writers' Program. She is the director of the Los Angeles Poetry Festival, and is co-producing with Beyond Baroque a series of citywide noir explorations this fall—*Night and the City: L.A. Noir in Poetry, Fiction, and Film*. She is the Southern California correspondent for a literary magazine out of New Mexico, *Malpais Review*.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Jeffrey McDaniel is the author of four books: *Alibi School* (Manic D, 1995), *The Forgiveness Parade* (Manic D, 1998), and *The Splinter Factory* (Manic D, 2002), and *The Endarkenment* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008). His work has appeared in a number of anthologies, including *Best American Poetry 1994*, *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*, and *New (American) Poets*. He has won several awards, including an NEA Fellowship. McDaniel teaches

creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College. He recently moved from Brooklyn to the Hudson Valley, where he lives with his wife, graphic artist Christine Caballero, and their daughter, Camilla Wren.



Rachel McKibbens is the 2009 Women of the World poetry slam champion, a nine-time National Poetry Slam team member, a three-time NPS finalist and a New York Foundation for the Arts poetry fellow. She teaches poetry and creative writing throughout the country. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *The Acentos Review*, *London Magazine*, *The American Poetry Journal*, *580 Split*, *The Nervous Breakdown*,

and *World Literature Today*. McKibbens appeared on two seasons of HBO's *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*. Her debut book of poetry, *Pink Elephant* (Cypher Books, 2009), has held a place on the small press bestseller list two years.



Patricia Smith, lauded by critics as "a testament to the power of words to change lives," is the author of five acclaimed poetry volumes. *Blood Dazzler*, which chronicles the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Katrina, was a finalist for the 2008 National Book Award. Smith's previous book, *Teahouse of the Almighty*, was a National Poetry Series selection and winner of the first-ever Hurston/Wright Award in Poetry. Her other poetry books are *Close*

to Death, *Life According to Motown*, and *Big Towns, Big Talk*. Smith has performed at venues around the world, including Carnegie Hall, the Poets Stage in Stockholm, Rotterdam's Poetry International Festival, the Aran Islands International Poetry and Prose Festival, the Bahia Festival, the Schomburg Center, and the Sorbonne in Paris. A four-time individual champion on the National Poetry Slam—the most successful slammer in the competition's history—Smith has also been a featured poet on HBO's *Def Poetry Jam*. Smith teaches in the Stonecoast MFA program at the University of Southern Maine and is a professor of creative writing at the City University of New York.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Roberto Miranda is a dynamic bassist who is noted for his inventive, high-energy improvisations. He is adept in both soulful passages and fleet percussive lines, and is fluent in all jazz idioms. He has toured, played and recorded with an impressive array of jazz artists, including Shelly Manne, Kenny Burrell, Horace Tapscott, Bobby Bradford, John Carter, David Murray, Cecil Taylor, Charles Lloyd, and Bobby Hutcherson. He has recorded extensively including albums

with his own group, showcasing his successful blend of African American, Latin, and experimental jazz. As a young player Roberto studied with jazz legends Ray Brown; Red Mitchell; Red Callender; and master classical musicians Bob Stone, Dennis Tremby, and Fred Tinsely of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. While studying for his master of music at the University of Southern California, he received two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. These grants enabled him to score two compositions for symphony strings, jazz bass, bassoon, and trombone, one of which was performed by the Carson Symphony Orchestra.



Timmy Straw is an Oregon-based singer songwriter whose soulful compositions combine his classical training on piano and strings with electronic beats and loops. His music has been described as "the meeting of Béla Bartók, Doc Watson, Frederic Chopin, Nirvana, Goodie Mob, Tupac, church hymns, Sam Cooke, Nine Inch Nails, and Lil Wayne." Straw has toured with Bitch and Animal; Emily Wells; Carla Bozulich; A Silver Mt. Zion; and most recently the Nite Kite

Revival, an award-winning poetry theater experience with Buddy Wakefield, Derrick Brown, and Anis Mojgani. Straw's self-produced first album, *State Parks*, came out in 2010.

Write Now Poetry Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, cofounded in 2007 by actress/author Amber Tamblyn and poet Mindy Nettifee. Write Now is dedicated to finding ways to connect audiences and readers with great poets, and championing the kind of heartbreaking, soul-easing, mind-blowingly good poetry that knows a jugular when it sees one. *Drums Inside Your Chest*, part of Write Now's Best Contemporary American Poetry Series, is an annual showcase of the best poets writing and performing in the United States alongside magicians and musicians. It is taking place this year at the Largo in Los Angeles on November 6, 2011. Visit www.writenowpoets.org for more information.

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