

Dia Art Foundation
Readings in Contemporary Poetry
Deborah Garrison and Gary Lenhart

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Dia:Chelsea
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Introduction by Vincent Katz

Deborah Garrison is the author of the poetry collections *A Working Girl Can't Win and Other Poems* (Random House, 1998) and *The Second Child* (Random House, 2007). Her poems and pieces about poetry have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *New York Times Book Review*, *Slate*, *Yale Review*, and other journals. Garrison is the poetry editor of Alfred A. Knopf and a senior editor at Pantheon Books. Prior to joining Knopf, she edited fiction and nonfiction and wrote criticism for the books section of the *New Yorker*.

Deborah Garrison's first book, *A Working Girl Can't Win*, tingles with the life force of its narrator, a young woman navigating the shark-infested professional and romantic waters of New York City. This description, while accurate, is unfair, as it gives no sense of the brilliance of Garrison's mind and linguistic and rhythmic shifts. Language, for her, is a field of play — like work, like romance — and there, with alarming confidence, she finds herself. She has lived in a certain world many may recognize, or recognize parts of, but what really happens in one of her poems seems to happen as much in her imagination as in the reality that prompted it. This section from her poem "A Friendship Enters Phase II" seems the crucial one, in which the banter of the early evening is swapped for the reckoning of dawn:

You were the maestro,

twirling a smoke in the dark

then piping on it, braving the toy

puffs of death, conducting the ragtag band

of losses.

Published almost a decade later, Garrison's second collection, *The Second Child*, revealed the same poet, with the same delight in the experimentation not just of language but simultaneous thought. Always, she locates insight in her lines with wonderful ease. Now, the setting and set have changed. There are fantastic poems of breast-feeding and childbirth and fevers that transform the physicality of her first book into the bodies of another generation. At least one poem, "Goodbye, New York," with its playful mixture of realism, memory, and music, seems to me an undeniable classic, almost like a Cole Porter lyric: "now you're the dream we lived before".

Her lines turn with a vivid nimbleness, trim and athletic. The life observed, the actors accorded their positions in the pantheon of daily life. As she writes in "How Many," "How many, exactly? // For I want more — / yet more / voices that pierce / my heart utterly." Please welcome Deborah Garrison to Dia.

Gary Lenhart is the author of six collections of poetry, including *Drunkard's Dream* (Remember I Did This For You, 1978), *Bulb In Socket* (Crony Books, 1980), *Light Heart* (Hanging Loose Press, 1991), *Father and Son Night* (Hanging Loose Press, 1999), and *The World in a Minute* (Hanging Loose Press, 2010). He is also the author of two collections of prose: *The Stamp of Class: Reflections on Poetry and Social Class* (University of Michigan Press, 2006) and *Another Look: Selected Prose* (Subpress, 2010). He has contributed essays, poems, and reviews to many anthologies and journals, and he edited the literary journals *Mag City* and *Transfer*, as well as volumes on the work of Michael Scholnick and William Carlos Williams. Lenhart is currently a senior lecturer at Dartmouth College, where he has taught since 1996.

Gary Lenhart's poems seem like pieces of a life, and the fact that he often includes prose memoirs in his books of poetry indicates that the recovery of a life is of the utmost importance, to him and by extension to his readers, and that he will go the extra formal step required to find the mode appropriate. But the reader of Lenhart's poems must be a careful reader. Not everything is as it seems. I had to read one poem over to realize it wasn't in Lenhart's voice speaking to a former work buddy, but rather the other way around: the poem in his friend's voice, addressing and critiquing Lenhart himself.

While always intent on saying something, he pays as much attention to how it's said:

I'm for full

Disclosure. But since words are

Broadcast by large sums of cash I try

To keep in touch with the world as it

Manifests, where names serve not merely

To disguise nature for exchange.

(from "Ode to Utopia" for Bernadette Mayer, in Light Heart)

There are many love poems in his opus, most of those directed to Lenhart's wife, painter Louise Hamlin. There are also poems of lust, youthful errancy, and badinage. Lenhart's poems of love sustained over years are among the most affecting I know:

One

Exits more easily than one remains, for two

Encounter sorrows too. I slump, but don't

Hit bottom, buoyed by you, bonnie pal.

(from "Love, Like Art" in Light Heart)

In his most recent poems, by turns elegiac, memorializing, observant, Lenhart keeps testing the limits of poetry, always stopping just before that point where it becomes another form of discourse. Please welcome Gary Lenhart.