

Dia Art Foundation
Readings in Contemporary Poetry
Sylvia Gorelick and Cole Swensen

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Dia:Chelsea
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Introduction by Vincent Katz

Sylvia Mae Gorelick is a poet, writer, and translator based in New York City. Her chapbooks include *Seven Poems for Bill Berkson* (Kostro Editions, 2009) and *Olympians, we are breathless* (Poetry will be made by all!, 2014). Her work recently appeared in the anthologies *In/Filtration: An Anthology of Innovative Writing from the Hudson River Valley* (Station Hill, 2016) and *For Bill, Anything: Images and Text for Bill Berkson* (Pressed Wafer, 2015). In 2016, The University of Chicago Press published her translation of Paolo D'lorio's Nietzsche's *Journey to Sorrento*, and her translation of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Le Livre* is forthcoming from Exact Change Press.

Sylvia Gorelick's phrases shape-shift, meaning moving from one to the next and back again. There seems to be something French about this, something Cocteau might have thought about, and as well, American poets who steeped themselves in French poetry. But there is, too, something refreshingly contemporary in Gorelick's verse, and that is an attitude that cannot be pinned down, precisely, to details in the poems, but it hovers over and around them.

A recent poem of hers begins, "Emerging somehow into power // you see the fog fall in and out of night / and women on the street". You might expect "women on the street" to be the beginning of a new phrase, but it's not; the sentence ends there. The "you" of the poem is emerging, making one think of the phrase "an emerging artist" as well as someone literally emerging from a building onto the street, or from the fog, into clarity. The "you" comes into view and simultaneously sees. What it sees is something strange — fog falling in and out of night. Fog does not usually fall, but people do fall in and out of love. And finally, "women on the street" sounds like "women of the street," "street women," not necessarily what that phrase once might have connoted, but simply women whose natural place is the street. All these ideas are triggered by language that feels natural, unpressured.

And so it goes in Gorelick's poetry. The words are chosen precisely, and the rhythms are eloquent. She does not shy away from the big topics, but her poems are not bogged down by them. She is able to maneuver away as quickly as she was able to approach. There is also a street-smart sense here, as in the poem that includes these lines:

you begin to feel the
limits
closing in
and at
once an odd expansiveness
it's too soon to love
too late to be had

This is the real thing, folks. A poet for, of, and by these times. Please welcome Sylvia Gorelick to Dia.

Cole Swensen is a prolific creator of poetry, with two books published already this year: *Gave* (Omindawn) and the forthcoming *On Walking On* (Nightboat). Her other books include *It's Alive She Says* (Floating Island, 1984), *Numen* (Burning Deck, 1995), *Noon* (Sun and Moon, 1997), *Oh* (Apogee, 2000), *Goest* (Alice James, 2004), *The Glass Age* (Alice James, 2007), *Ours* (University of California, 2008), *Greensward* (Ugly Duckling, 2010), *Stele* (Post-Apollo, 2012), *Gravesend* (University of California, 2012), and *Landscapes on a Train* (Nightboat, 2015). She has translated into English over fifteen volumes of contemporary French poetry. Swensen is the coeditor of *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2009). She divides her time between Paris and Providence, where she teaches at Brown University.

Cole Swensen brings a breadth of knowledge to her poetic adventures. She likes to write about both places and people who have thought and written about those places, thus fashioning a layered document of her engagement with location and subject. But there is more to it than that, and the more is movement. In two of her most recent books, she highlights the instability of a moving subject. In *Landscapes on a Train*, she documents the rapidly passing sights glimpsed from a moving vehicle. Always, she is aware of the *visuality*, in painter's terms, for example, of what she sees:

Trees with leaves green backed by silver. Turning wherever the light, what small
Light, is taken in. Tree with light painted on. Then tree with points of dark which
Are birds or fruit that build slowly up into a night.

This composition intriguingly has the look of prose, prose as poetry, but when one looks closely, one notices that the beginning of each printed line begins with a capital letter, marking it as the beginning of a line of poetry. The structure seems like prose, but the sound exerts a dominant force on the sequence, subtly shifting it to poetry.

In *On Walking On*, published this year, Swensen shifts from the speed of the locomotive to the relative languor of ambulation. She takes up some famous walkers — Chaucer, Rousseau, Thoreau, De Quincey, Dickens, Sand, Apollinaire, Woolf, et al — and writes through their experiences into her own. In a piece titled “Nerval,” she writes:

...now we fall upon Apollinaire spread out in a thin layer
over the whole of Europe in a single night's walk across Paris.

On Walking On is a book dedicated to wandering, to detour, to the *dérive*, to *la flânerie*, but it is simultaneously a book firmly rooted to a clear-eyed literary investigation of how these writers, mainly men, were able to envision their own times and, on occasion, under the right influences, to break free from their strictures. It seems Swensen in her poetry is involved in a similar quest. Please welcome Cole Swensen to Dia.