

Dia Art Foundation
Readings in Contemporary Poetry
Rosa Alcalá and Laynie Browne

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Dia:Chelsea
535 West 22nd Street, 5th Floor
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Introduction by Vincent Katz

Rosa Alcalá is a poet and translator originally from Paterson, New Jersey, who has published three books of poetry: *Undocumentaries* (Shearsman Books, 2010), *The Lust of Unsentimental Waters* (Shearsman Books, 2012), and *My OTHER TONGUE* (Futurepoem, 2017). Her poems appear in *American Poets in the 21st Century: Poetics of Social Engagement* (Wesleyan University Press, 2018), among other anthologies. Recent publications include two edited volumes: *Cecilia Vicuña: New & Selected Poems* (Kelsey Street Press, 2018) and *Spit Temple: The Selected Performances of Cecilia Vicuña* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012). Alcalá teaches in the department of creative writing and the bilingual MFA program at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Rosa Alcalá is one of the most dynamic poets writing today. By that I mean her observations, stances, and the language and rhythms she chooses to couch them in, are always surprising, and fresh. Another thing I like is that her musical phrases are so craftily welded together that it is difficult to quote an excerpt; one is forced to take in the entire stanza whole. Here's one from her first book, *Undocumentaries*:

From tourist fat
to kingdom of nil
the bus loops
to where I tinker
at sandwiches without spoiling
the natural sullenness of my kind

(from “Jobs #3 & #4”)

I like the “at” in her phrase “tinker at sandwiches,” as opposed “with,” for instance. Do you see what I mean? It is very carefully considered, and yet, simultaneously, it feels completely natural. How does she do that? Also, words are enabled take on double meanings. “Kind,” for instance means “type,” but somehow, in Alcalá’s hands, means “kindness” as well.

Nothing is gratuitously humorous in these poems, as it is in a lot of contemporary poetry, and yet almost every phrase bears wit that brings a smile to your lips. I end up reading these poems with a greater interest, wanting to find out what they are saying, while the pleasure lasts, or after it subsides.

Please welcome Rosa Alcalá.

Laynie Browne is an editor, poet, prose writer, and teacher. She is the author of the poetry collections *Pollen Memory* (Tender Buttons, 2003), *Daily Sonnets* (Counterpath Press, 2007), *The Scented Fox* (Wave Books, 2007), selected by Alice Notley for the *The National Poetry Series*, *The Desires of Letters* (Counterpath Press, 2010), *Lost Parkour Ps(alms)* (Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2014), *Scorpyn Odes* (Kore Press, 2015), *Practice* (Split Level Texts, 2015), *You Envelop Me* (Omnidawn, 2017), and *hot off the presses* from *Tender Buttons*, *In Garments Worn by Lindens*. Browne teaches at University of Pennsylvania and at Swarthmore College.

Laynie Browne is one the most assiduous poets working today in the conscious melding of poetry and prose in her writing. Favoring neither, she instead mines the possibilities of their overlaps, their interleavings. There is a lot of gentleness in her poetry, which distinguishes it. While many poets settle for easy, crowd-pleasing effects, Browne prefers to focus on moments that almost pass unnoticed. Her attention brings a calm to the reader.

“Later everything is later” is typical of a kind of sententia she likes to sprinkle in her texts. “The day presses, and I resist...” is another line from the same poem (from *Pollen Memory*) . On the facing page, a one-liner, in this case: “Spring is in the paper dress; wear carefully, and last, to save trees”. As in many of Browne’s books, this is a format for the entire project. One notices how she has rhymed “presses” and “dress” across the page. She is so attentive to those kinds of correspondences.

Her Daily Sonnets take a different approach, with simple language easily spread in lines that embody the sonnet form in all

its elasticity. They give themselves up to the obligations and confirmations of family circumstances. One begins,

I have a friend I'd like to see who exhausts me
When we went away it was still summer
I was still myself wearing this circlet to bed

Before getting swept up in the mayhem and music of little children, then settling in again in the final two lines:

This music repeats itself night after noon
Accompanying affectionate newts in all endeavor

Welcome to the intimate world of Laynie Browne. Please welcome Laynie Browne.