

Dia Art Foundation
Readings in Contemporary Poetry
Steven Seidenberg and Alan Felsenthal

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

Steven Seidenberg's recent publications include *Itch* (Raw Art Press, 2014), *Null Set* (Spooky Action Books, 2015), *Situ* (Black Sun Lit, 2018), as well as numerous chapbooks of verse and aphorism. He coedits *pallaksch. pallaksch.* (Instance Press), an occasional journal of experimental poetry, and organizes poetry events at The Lab in San Francisco. Seidenberg's photo collections include *Pipevalve: Berlin* (Lodima Press, 2017).

Steven Seidenberg has published prose works that verge on speculative philosophy. I am intrigued by how he shifts, from those expansive modes, to a poetry that is so focused on specific points, glints of sound and meaning that strike the reader's mind and listener's ear with a strange familiarity. I love how he rhymes "scrape" and "crepe" in the lines:

pushed through the noisome tallow
of the scum and scrape, the scum and squall
of lunar husk undreamed from crepe
of wanton gash and startled river

(from "To the kelp")

There is a lot of erudition in Seidenberg's poetry, a lot of wisdom too, but a lot of it passes by so fast, almost too fast to capture. You have to be on your toes. And then something else happens. The whole, the entirety of the poem, projects from sharply evinced details a wider picture that gathers an unspecified social and historical relevance.

Seidenberg's poetry seems to sail across the centuries, gleaning usages from Old and Middle English, while keeping the snap of contemporary poetic modes. It is in the precision of his language, I believe, and the strangeness of the world it

conjures, that Seidenberg's rhythms and sounds can best lead us to insight. Please welcome Steven Seidenberg.

Alan Felsenthal runs a small press called the Song Cave with Ben Estes. Also with Estes, he edited *A Dark Dreambox of Another Kind: The Poems of Alfred Starr Hamilton* (Song Cave, 2013). Felsenthal's writing has appeared in *BOMB*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Critical Quarterly*, *Fence*, *jubilat*, and *Harper's Lowly*, published by Ugly Duckling Presse in 2017, is his first collection of poems.

Alan Felsenthal has been a force on the poetry publishing scene for years. The publication last year of his debut collection, *Lowly*, focused attention on his talents as a poet. Some of his poems wander down the page, informally miming prose structures, then suddenly posting an unexpected answer to an unasked question. His images have multiple ramifications, making the poems feel, sometimes, like psalms. There is a prayer-like quality to these poems.

Other poems have a more chiselled quality, as though they had been carved in stone outside temple precincts. There is a metaphysical aspect to Felsenthal's poems that cannot quite be parsed. The body is also a major factor in the equation, but the physical/metaphysical relation is not solved for us by the poet. Here is his poem "Beginning with a Horse," in its entirety:

A horse has six legs
two belong to a man
who might be Pluto
disguised as the devil
abducting a unicorn
whose horn was used
to purify a spring
that whetted the infinite
now behind us

Reading this poem aloud, I am reminded how important the line is in some of Felsenthal's poems; it functions almost like a refrain, a rhythmic plaint that somehow speaks to the difficulty of existing in a body in an unfathomable universe. A recent poem, which I hope he'll read tonight, reminds us, "you belong to your times — / but above, commit to spirit, yours." Please welcome Alan Felsenthal to Dia.