

Dia Art Foundation

# Clark Coolidge and Edmund Berrigan

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Tuesday, March 10, 2015, 6:30 pm

## Introduction by Vincent Katz

**Edmund Berrigan** was born in Colchester, England and raised on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He received a BA in Literature from SUNY Purchase and has lived in San Francisco and Brooklyn. He is the author of two books of poetry—*Disarming Matter* (Owl Press, 1999) and *Glad Stone Children* (Farfalla, 2008)—and a multi-genre memoir, *Can It!* (Letter Machine Editions, 2013). He is editor of the *Selected Poems of Steve Carey* (Sub Press, 2009) and coeditor with Anselm Berrigan and Alice Notley of *The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan* (University of California Press, 2005) and *The Selected Poems of Ted Berrigan* (University of California Press, 2010). He is an editor for *Vlak*, a poetry magazine based in Prague, and is on the editorial board for *Lungfull!*, a poetry magazine based in Brooklyn. He is also a songwriter, recording and performing under the name I Feel Tractor.

Eddie Berrigan's poems resist an easy read; they are impossible to parse. He travels as long, or as little, as he needs to, on a line, then stops, then starts again. In that way, he is like a traveler, not a traveling salesman — he couldn't care less whether you get it or not, or what is there to get, sometimes? — but a traveling singer, like a modern-day troubadour. Only, being the modern day, he doesn't actually have to travel.

As he writes in the poem "3-20-05": "I'm for taking walks into strange bus fatigue & border talk / like does everything have great ice plates of fire & legs of poem talk."

But then Berrigan hits directly in unexpected places. In "What's his 5th-inning velocity?" a more recent poem, he brings the disparateness into a logical, that is a musical, flow, interrupting himself with "O shit. I wasn't going / to write about myself anymore." In this poem's final line, the poet allows himself to cut viscerally, and you can't tell whether he is lashing out at an interlocutor or at himself.

His new lines are rounder, more resonant, and this seems like an exciting development. We are lucky to be here to witness it. Please join me in welcoming Eddie Berrigan to Dia.

**Clark Coolidge** is the author of more than thirty books of poetry, including *Flag Flutter & U.S. Electric*, *Clark Coolidge, Ing, Space, The So, The Maintains, Polaroid, Smithsonian Depositions/Subject To a Film, The Crystal Text, At Egypt, Own Face, Far Out West, This Time We Are Both, 88 Sonnets and A Book Beginning What and Ending Away*. His *Selected Poems 1962–1985* is forthcoming from Station Hill Press. In 2011, he edited a collection of Philip Guston's writings and talks for the University of California Press. Coolidge's *Space* sports a cover by Jasper Johns, *ING's* cover was by Philip Guston, and *The So's* by Brice Marden. Far from anomalous, the relationship of Coolidge's writing to visual art, as well his relationship to music and sound, proves essential. Initially a drummer, he was a member of the group Serpent Power with poet David Meltzer in 1967 and Mix Group from 1993 to 1994. Currently he has returned to active drumming in duos with Thurston Moore and the ongoing free-jazz-band Ouroboros.

Clark Coolidge has astounding stamina. As he puts it in one of the sonnets from his 2012 book *88 Sonnets*,

There's bound to be greenery in it somewhere  
and white tacks    swarms on the bourbon  
red at all points    nothing you could call a stop

His poems come to an end, but the energy of his poetics does not stop. He is processing language from popular culture, from academic journals, from anywhere. Anything could end up in a poem, but, as I say, processed. A process similar to John Ashbery's, but with a different tone. As with Ashbery, Coolidge has stamina from book to book, each book a conscious decision as to form, subject matter, rhythm, and style.

In an astonishing number of books published since 1966, Coolidge has proven to be restless, consistent, and prolific. He has never stayed in one mode, or scale, of writing. Readers have long recognized and looked forward to the appeal of Coolidge's intellect, his brilliant handling of the English language, and his ability to make words sound, or play, against each other, so that hidden assonances and meanings pool up from beneath the literal text.

Just as Coolidge is capable of minute dissections and expansive, book-length texts, likewise is he capable of denying language's seemingly innate desire to make sense in one project while adhering to it in another.

My personal favorite out of his immense trove may be his 1978 publication, *Own Face*. Here, Coolidge's range of structure and surgeon-like word-placement is evident on the page. This is a bravura display of poetry events, not "texts." It has the perfect blend of connection and disconnection, as the best of Coolidge's poetry always does:

And somehow the set of things has you again,  
a fascination in love of self.

(from "At The Poem")

Here we are. And now we welcome Clark Coolidge to Dia.