

Dia Art Foundation

# David Trinidad and Joanna Fuhrman

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Tuesday, April 7, 2014, 6:30 pm

## Introduction by Vincent Katz

**David Trinidad** grew up in Los Angeles, lived in New York City, and now resides in Chicago, where he teaches creative writing at Columbia College. His books of poetry include *November* (Hanuman, 1987) *Answer Song* (High Risk Books, 1994), *Plasticville* (Turtle Point Press, 2000), *The Late Show* (Turtle Point Press, 2007), *Dear Prudence: New And Selected Poems* (Turtle Point Press, 2011), and *Peyton Place: A Haiku Soap Opera* (Turtle Point Press, 2013). Trinidad is the editor of *A Fast Life: The Collected Poems Of Tim Dlugos* (Nightboat Books, 2011).

From seemingly mundane materials — Barbie, *Valley Of The Dolls*, *Peyton Place*, *The Patty Duke Show* — David Trinidad has fashioned a body of poetry that seems ever-more substantial for all its apparent fragility. And that fragility extends beyond its materials to its emotional life as well, in which readers are enmeshed in all the contradictions, desires, and fears of a typical young person growing up in late twentieth-century America, then entering middle age in a new century, finding many of his icons — and friends — gone or at least distant. Trinidad's poetry unfailingly brings these friends and treasures back to life in work that is disarmingly daily and toes the line between formal and informal.

And yet, Trinidad's poetry is much more than memoir and reveries on TV-Land artifacts located via Ebay. Explicit sex is another kind of subject matter he uses to decorate his songs, as in the chant-like early poem "Lover," which begins, "My lover who is black / My lover who is blond / My lover who is Italian / My lover who is well-hung . . ." In this poem, I can hear some of the daily-language litany-like verse of Trinidad's Brooklyn College professor, Allen Ginsberg. There are also tender love-songs in the commonality of Trinidad's oeuvre. Nor does he shy away from the brutality embedded in the dystopia of The American Dream. In this, Trinidad's work has something in common with L.A. visual artists Mike Kelley and Raymond Pettibon.

That we can use the word oeuvre to speak of David Trinidad's work tells us something important: that over the years, working with iconic material of daily life — some of it kitsch, some of it simply mundane — Trinidad has amassed a monumental body of work that no one could have predicted. He is here tonight with the key to unlock this magic kingdom for us. Let's put our hands together and give David a warm Dia welcome.

**Joanna Fuhrman** was born in New York City and has lived and studied in Austin and Seattle. She has taught poetry at the University of Washington, in homeless shelters, and in public schools. She is the author of four books of poetry, *Freud In Brooklyn* (Hanging Loose Press, 2000), *Ugh Ugh Ocean* (Hanging Loose Press, 2003), *Moraine* (Hanging Loose Press, 2006), and *Pageant* (Alice James Books, 2009), as well as the chapbook *The Emotive Function* (Least Weasel, 2011). She teaches creative writing at Rutgers University and lives in Brooklyn.

The first poem in Joanna Fuhrman's first book begins, "A blue arm stuck out of the train's window / and a cat-shaped figure wavered, suspended // over moving ground." (from "Watching Trains"). From this modest, and somewhat Surrealist opening, her poem arrives at a moment of wonderful mundanity. She gives us details of wet hair, drinking cola from a straw, a flute on the radio. But the drama is certainly outside the window, both in and outside the silently passing train. There is a dreamlike quality, but the conclusion, as in many of Fuhrman's poems, packs a punch that is beyond realistic. It gains power through its drop to reality from the metaphysical zone in which the poet observes it.

Her lingo is meritorious, to steal a word from the title of another early poem. Fuhrman speaks, in her poems, as a person from a specific part of New York City. A linguist could probably pinpoint the block. I love the way she uses "us" instead of "we" in the line, "By the five and dime, us brains hung," and the fact that she identifies herself, not as a freak or a geek or a nerd, but as a brain. Her pride has unified her colleagues, even as they drift apart.

In a more recent poem, from her collection *Pageant*, Fuhrman writes, "Try to drape yourself / in Edwardian post-punk glory. / Look into the mirror. Erase the idea / of what you thought of as a self." (from "The New Realism"). More and more, Fuhrman's poems are attempts to make sense of the senseless. Well, this goes back to that first poem. The world she observes is crazy, and her lines try to put that insanity into palpable form. Her tools are humor, grammar, sex, and television. But we feel something lurking behind that as well, or beyond it, and that something is breaking out in the poems that compose her new manuscript, *The Year Of Yellow Butterflies*, from which she will be reading tonight. Please join me in welcoming Joanna Fuhrman to Dia.