

Dia Art Foundation

# Geoffrey Young and Jack Kimball

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

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## Introduction by Vincent Katz

**Jack Kimball** was born in 1954 in Boston. He is an "after-language poet" (his term) and editor of Faux Press, Cambridge, which he founded in 2001. He has taught at Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and in Japan. His books of poetry include *Post~Twyla* (Blue Lion Books, 2006) and *Post~Twyla Reset*(Faux/Other, 2010); *Manship* (Detour, 2001); and *Frosted* (Potes & Poets Press, 2001). He lives outside Boston.

Jack Kimball's writing is some of the hardest for me to parse, which is why I've stopped trying to and just sit back now and enjoy it. For enjoy it I do, that much is certain. I know of his degrees in linguistics, so I can try to read it from those angles, language as a social construct, perhaps. That is a big perhaps, though, as Kimball, the poet, is always jumping from place to place. I feel in a way as though his critical reviews and blog posts (available at [pantaloons.blogspot.com](http://pantaloons.blogspot.com)) are also forms of his poetry. Here, for example, is part of a recent post: "The tank smoke is elevated. (Parens are helpful.) // I'm back with my typos, a hiatus to find my mind breathing, so much so this looks stupid. Start over. Whom will you discover?" He just lets loose like that, and his poems are similar, though probably less loose. Some have a found quality, while others seem to be randomly tapping into various zeitgeists. There is sometimes a queer element that might or might not be found, as in "Lacing My Skates," which begins:

"When I turned around and saw him, that was it. I knew as soon as I looked, that is the man I'm going to spend the rest of my life with. Burgundy cashmere V-neck. Silver watch by..."

This reminds me of no one as much as Joe LeSueur. It is beyond conversational, beyond poetry of the daily, which is what makes it so intriguing. The facing poem in Kimball's 2008 chapbook *Pathologies*(Faux Press), entitled "Shit," takes a completely different tack to contemporary life:

"Don't stab me, Ra, you put stuff out there it comes back, god bless. My shit is real you can see thru snow pants, the runny kind, it's a joke..."

So it's about setting up a rhythm, I hear that. Perhaps we can find an answer as to where Kimball is intent on guiding poetry in this sentence from his prose text "Crabs Nebulae": "Poetry requires a few portable desks with secret drawers packed with repressed impurities, as well as crystal goblets and tools for investment, promissory notes on friendship to burn directly from the can, and falconry, along with newer initiatives." What those newer initiatives may be, I leave it to Jack Kimball to present or not, as he chooses. I however, with certainty, present to you the stimulating, enigmatic, Jack Kimball.

**Geoffrey Young** was born in Los Angeles in 1944, and grew up in San Diego. He moved to Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1982, after living in California, New Mexico, and France. His small press, The Figures (1975-2005), has published more than 135 books of poetry, art writing, and fiction. Young's own recent books include *All the Anarchy I Want* (Lonely Woman, 2013), *Dumbstruck* (Yawning Abyss, 2013), *Get On Your Pony & Ride* (Non-Fiction, 2012), and *The Riot Act* (Bootstrap Press, 2008). He is also the author of previous works, including *Fickle Sonnets* (The Figures, 2005), *Lights Out* (The Figures, 2003), and *Cerulean Embankments* (Living Batch Books, 1999). He has directed the Geoffrey Young Gallery for the last 22 years and written catalogue essays for numerous artists.

As co-conspirator of the Language Poets, it is no surprise that some of Geoffrey Young's work is Language-inflected, some of it, such as the rules-based 1,000-word opus "Mount Trove Curry," to an experimental extreme. What might not be predictable, perhaps, is that Young is also one of our most accessible and funny poets. The sexuality in Young's poems is that of a straight male, but it reminds me of the way sexuality functions in Frank O'Hara's poems, creating a buoyancy that propels the poem forward on the feet of Young's precise words and rhythms. Buoyancy is much harder to maintain than it appears. In fact, it is close to impossible. It is relatively easy to hit on a rhythm that seems to give the poem a lift, but more often than not, the following effect is one of an inevitable letdown. Ebullience, from the Latin to *boil*, *bubble*, and the following related terms all apply to Young's poetry: jauntiness, elation, euphoria, animation, vivacity, bounciness, or as we might say today, bounce.

Young is sometimes a formalist, at least one bent on stretching form as far as humanly possible, as in his book of *Fickle Sonnets*. He is

adept at playing the hopeless romantic, as in his sonnet, "Nowhere Man," about a young woman named Valentina he encounters in Rome. Young is a deft practitioner of the poem addressed to an artist, whether someone he knows personally or not, and of the poem as an account, as in his hilariously life-like "Rene Ricard Night At Bill Berkson's Frank O'Hara Talk At Poets House On Spring Street," which concludes,

...Then the reception ended. Rene and Raymond dissolved into the night. And I remember wondering, if on their way down, Rene would have asked Raymond who that guy was he was talking to? Or if by the time they hit the street it would even matter?

Young is a master of restraint, which enables him to write deeply affecting poems of break-up, memory and elegy. In "Elegy LY III," one learns the poem is an elegy for the poet's father by piecing together information, rather than being told directly. What makes this poem so interesting is that Young never leaves his ground as a modern poet. Perhaps Young's greatest elegy is not to a person at all but to a city, Rome. Young writes, "Dear reader, I am sorry. You go in my place. Let me / Wave goodbye and swear never to mention Rome again." But he will, we are sure, as he will continue to mention, or at least configure, the many passions that fire him. Please join me in welcoming Geoffrey Young.