

Dia Art Foundation

Joanne Kyger and Stephen Motika

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Tuesday, May 12, 2015, 6:30 pm

Introduction by Vincent Katz

Stephen Motika was born in Santa Monica, California. His first book of poems, *Western Practice*, was published by Alice James Books in 2012. He is the editor of *Tiresias: The Collected Poems of Leland Hickman* (2009) and the author of the poetry chapbooks *In the Madrones* (2011) and *Arrival and at Mono* (2007). His articles and poems have appeared in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *BOMB*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *The Constant Critic*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Maggy*, *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, *Staging Ground*, and *Vanitas*. He has held residencies at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Workspace, Millay Colony for the Arts, and Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik in Berlin. He is the publisher of Nightboat Books and the artistic director of Poets House in New York. He lives in Brooklyn and Mileses, New York.

Stephen Motika's lines sculpt elegant forms across the page, their visual acuity every bit as evident as his activism of syllable, sound, syntax, and image. That he is able to leverage these technical feats into work of surprising political and personal potency is even further cause for delight. In his poem, "Why Do We Live With Animals?" he writes:

- hare light of executed paths rejoin
- &because and for/after crater path
- must count the night we came moon to
- and seen
- before light the after glow of eclipse

Motika's active pushing blends animal and human; there is also direct body-consciousness, the sexual-equating-nature implicitly combating mechanized suppression elsewhere. For these poems are seriously focused on a "here" — often the west exemplified in his collection, *Western Practice*, with its photograph by Eadweard Muybridge of Mount Tamalpais on its cover.

Western Practice covers much of the Californian edge, from the L.A. of Charles Mingus and Art Pepper to the mystical Harry Partch and into the Panthers' black Oakland. Partch called his music "corporeal" (opposing it to "abstract," which he considered all western music since Bach). Maybe "corporeal" could be a useful term to characterize Stephen Motika's poetry as well. It works within and beyond the abstraction of the intellect. This double shift makes it intriguing. Like the poetry of Leslie Scalapino, Motika's often works by accruing. Not exactly parataxis, more organic than that, it develops strands and pores of sound/thought that add up to a world. Tonight, we have the distinct pleasure of sharing that world. Please help me in welcoming Stephen Motika to Dia.

Joanne Kyger is the author of over thirty books and chapbooks. She lives on the coast north of San Francisco and teaches at the Summer Writing Program at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. Her books of poetry include *The Tapestry and the Web* (1965), *Places To Go* (1970), *All This Every Day* (1975), *The Wonderful Focus of You* (1979), *Going On: Selected Poems, 1958-1980* (1983), *Just Space: Poems, 1979-1989* (1991), *As Ever: Selected Poems* (2002), and *About Now: Collected Poems* (2007). Her books of poetry and journals include *Trip Out and Fall Back* (1974), *Mexico Blonde* (1981), and *Strange Big Moon: The Japan and India Journals, 1960-1964* (2000). Her most recent book is *On Time: Poems 2005-2014*, published by City Lights.

All this lightness, over the years, in the sense of a light touch, the topic can be heavy, but the person handling it is not thrown off her balance, but rather has devised a method that seems to take it all in and reflect back calmly — sometimes with humor, sometimes in rage, occasionally embarrassed — but never thrown over by the weight of what reality would seem to wield.

Joanne Kyger's poems — increasingly in her recent work — spin understated, everyday, observations that suddenly resonate with philosophical depth and political commitment. Her masterful freedom with form accumulates visual power across the page in laconic, down-home notes on, for example, the septic tank, teenage horror movies, her neighbor's son, and insomnia. Her wit enhances the journey; she's in it for the long haul, and when she writes about the government, you want to pay attention.

Kyger is one of the central "outrider" poets of our time, and one of the most glamorous. From Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer's Sunday Meetings to Japan and India with Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, to becoming a mainstay of the poets' community in Bolinas, California, Kyger has always tapped into poetic energies at once everyday and metaphysical.

Dreams populate Kyger's poems, earning a reality as vivid as that of the wildlife noted in her yard, and much realer than the Maya-veiled military-industrial complex, which she also assiduously monitors.

"I was born old" she writes " / that's why old things are so familiar / like the return of the now ever present mocking bird // Take it easy, when you return, don't let anger mar your entrance (from "Really There Is No Solution").

Nothing can mar Joanne Kyger's entrance or anything else about her performance. Please give her a special welcome to Dia.