

Dia Art Foundation

Joe Elliot and Sara Jane Stoner

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Tuesday, March 8, 2016, 6:30 pm

Introduction by Vincent Katz

Joe Elliot ran a weekly reading series at Biblios Bookstore in New York for many years. He is the coeditor of two chapbooks—*A Musty Bone and Situations*—and is the author of numerous others. Granary Books published *If It Rained Here* (a collaboration with artist Julie Harrison) in 1997. His poem *101 Designs for the World Trade Center* was published by Faux Press as an e-book in 2003, and a collection of his work, *Opposable Thumb*, was published by Subpress Collective in 2006. In 2010 Lunar Chandelier Press published *Homework*. For many years, Elliot made a living as a letterpress printer. He currently teaches English at Edward R. Murrow High School in New York and lives in Brooklyn with his wife and their three boys.

Joe Elliot's poems feel like encomia on human realities, and they are that, but they slyly subvert their adopted genre at the same time, so his achievement is double: not only is he able to revive the seemingly moribund forms of topical poetry, but he is able to make the reader or listener smile simultaneously. Thus, a poem bemoaning faking it in bed (that is, bemoaning that you are faking it!) ends with:

...envy for the real
the indescribably complicated
ability to be simple
and look someone in the eyes
and fuck them truly
(from "She's Sleeping with Someone else")

Elliot is like a Pre-Socratic philosopher, able to turn simple truths on their head, so that they still make sense, but a different, more accurate, funnier sense, as in this short untitled poem:

God is a fish
who lets himself
for us be caught
in a net of words.

Pleased with ourselves,
we carry him home
in a tin
bucket of a book

and serve him
up for dinner.

Elliot is a master of rhythms and of forms, and they shift from one book to another, but always there is this sensibility, wedded to wisdom earned through living, that roots his poems to the ground. There is melancholy too, but appreciation arrives just in time in the form of heightened awareness. Please help me welcome Joe Elliot.

Born and raised in Colorado, **Sara Jane Stoner** holds an MFA from Indiana University and is pursuing a PhD in English at CUNY Graduate Center. Presently, she serves as the Reviews Editor for *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. Her work has been published in the journals *Diagram*, *Fence*, *Esque*, and *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. Her first book, *Experience in the Medium of Destruction*, was published by Portable Press @ Yo-Yo Labs in 2015.

Regarding her academic work, she writes, "I am writing essays about teaching, its immateriality and relationship to abjection, how subjects are produced in conventional classrooms (teacher as subject, student as subject, course matters as subject), and thinking about what kinds of resistant writing and writing subjects disrupt, queer, or radicalize that subject production--I am experimenting with modes of thinking about how the poetics/politics of a subject as it might emerge in the collective environment of the classroom allows us to manifest a poesis/politics of the self-in-relation, in writing and in the world."

Today the 28th Annual Lambda Literary Award Finalists were announced, and Sara Jane has been nominated for an award for Lesbian Poetry. The Lambda Literary Awards celebrate achievement in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) writing. Submissions came from major mainstream publishers and from independent presses, from both long-established and new LGBT publishers, as well

as from emerging publish-on-demand technologies. The winners will be announced at a ceremony on June 6, 2016 in New York City.

Sara Jane lives in Brooklyn with Madness, her cat.

“How queer it is to body the loss, inescapable, that should level.” This first line from a “Note” to Sara Jane Stoner’s book, *Experience in the Medium of Destruction*, can serve as a harbinger for what is to follow and a motto for her work thus far. “To body” the loss, as she writes, implies receiving it, incorporating it, and therefore living with it. It *should* level — destroy? or create a level playing field? — but does not. Even though it cannot be avoided, loss does not have the final word, which is the first word, queer.

She writes in prose, but is understood to be a poet, not simply because she circulates among poets, speaks and eats poetry, but because her sentences, for all their dizzying intelligence, do not make sense, but rather partake of the glorious, continuous, necessity to stop making sense. In that, they are a refuge from normality, from job, from academics, from politics as it is presented, and from the straight world in general. “Poetry is a kind of fatigue in poetry,” she writes. Poetry is always an exception, even to itself.

Elsewhere, she cites Fernando Pessoa and really drifts into poetry’s non-syntactic, unpunctuated, realm. And she can tap into a poetics as experimental and unmoored as the farthest reaches of Joe Ceravolo, as in this passage:

My land mass—sure, you sat my sum. Limes peel mutts lie days fan heathen, deeds spite fleeing. The woman, cut my hay to sigh haze...

— from “Fuck Mariner”

Yet, there is tenderness in this book as well, surprising to the speaker as to her listeners.

Her most recent work is thrilling in the mastery of its experimental rhythms. Hopefully, she will read perform some of that work tonight. Please join me in welcoming Sara Jane Stoner to the stage.