

Dia Art Foundation

John Yau and Arlo Quint

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Monday, May 13, 2013, 6:30 pm

Introduction by Vincent Katz

Arlo Quint was born in Waterville, Maine in 1977. He studied with Robert Creeley, Benjamin Friedlander, and Jennifer Moxley at the University of Maine at Orono, from which he received a BA in English literature in 1999, followed by an MA in 2004. He is the author of the chapbooks *Photogenic Memory* (Lame House, 2007) and *Drawn In* (Fewer and Further, 2010), and he collaborated with Charles Wolski on *Check Out My Lifestyle* (Well Greased, 2012). Quint's first full-length collection, *Death To Explosions*, is forthcoming from Skysill. He is an editor of *Brawling Pigeon* and program coordinator for The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in New York City.

Arlo Quint disarms language in his poems. His use of phrase, while in the lineage of the John Ashbery of **The Tennis Court Oath**, has a different effect. Rather than being disjunctive, collage-like, Quint's phrases, which do not go together under the frames of logic or normal syntactic connectivity, are also not paratactic. Their tactic, by contrast, is one of harmonic connectivity. In a poem from *Drawn In*, Quint writes,

when is more there than some
in the sense of time as blocks
other coordinates that are still here
(from "at a distance in another tree")

This harmoniousness has a social component, made explicit in the chapbook, in which each poem is dedicated to a specific friend. Quint's ownership of a poetics of coterie comes not literally, from within the poems, though personal glints are apparent, but rather from a sense of the sequence of poems itself as a personal, and therefore political, statement.

Quint's new collection is divided into three parts — two long poems and a section of sonnet-length poems. While maintaining his adversarial stance towards commonplace poetics, Quint is working more and more deeply into traditional forms, or formats, and we can feel (and see) his emphasis on the caesura and internal rhymes, bringing to mind some of Robert Kelly's recent rhythmic explorations. In the sequence "Commemorative Thought," Quint writes,

in high fever in ordinary times
either next year altered be alright
hollow empty sphere pale blue dot
so daily appears light with dark

One feels Quint is working up to something big. This may be coming in an evolution of the formal, rhythmic, pieces into a larger communitarian/historical context. Whatever comes next for Quint, tonight we are about to be treated to the current incarnation of his far-reaching poetics. Please help me welcome Arlo Quint to Dia.

John Yau was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1950. He studied with Robert Kelly at Bard College, from which he received a BA in 1972, and with John Ashbery at Brooklyn College, receiving an MFA in 1977. He is the author of over 50 books of poetry, fiction, essays, and collaborations with visual artists. Yau's poetry books include *Crossing Canal Street*, *Broken Off By The Music*, *Corpse And Mirror*, *Borrowed Love Poems* and most recently, *Further Adventures In Monochrome* (Copper Canyon Press, 2012) and the chapbook *Egyptian Sonnets* (Rain Taxi, 2012). He is also an editor and the publisher of Black Square Editions, a press devoted to poetry, fiction, and translation. He was arts editor of the *Brooklyn Rail* from 2007-2011 and is now an editor of the online magazine *Hyperallergic Weekend*, where he regularly posts his reviews and commentary. He was named a Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters by France's Ministry of Culture in 2002. He teaches in the visual arts department of Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. He lives with his family in Manhattan.

In his poem, "The Reading of an Ever-Changing Tale," the title poem from his 1977 chapbook, Yau wrote,

Certain colors got lodged under
the fingernails before their names
came to grace our speech.

This could be taken as emblematic of Yau's entire approach to poetry and a key to a large part of his achievement. That is to say, Yau has an uncanny ability to fix on the moments when language fails, or becomes unintentionally funny (it's a neat trick — the poet is aware, but his language is not). But the key word here is "colors". Yau is precise in pouncing on images, sounds, phrases, and turning them, so that they do something unexpected. Part of this was imbibed from the poetics of John Ashbery, but another part is specifically keyed to Yau's personal experience as a Chinese American man living in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the USA. In "Genghis Chan: Private Eye XIII," Yau writes, "It is hard to keep pretending / You are a yellow chink / In a hall of dusty linen // You begin believing / You are just another handkerchief / Wiping away the laundress's tears".

Yau's poems, though they contain the veracity of a lived life, begin in the imagination. "A Child's Vi[r]gil" from *Further Adventures In Monochrome*, begins,

Led by a talking
blue-and-red frog

a wooden cart
trundles treasure

up mosaic mountain
collection of talismans

in which heroes and heroines
have taken flight

It is the tone in a John Yau poem that tells us the most — about the poet, his culture, and particularly the take of the specific poem. "I have a sampler in my brain / that takes what is said and feeds it to me / with an electronic spoon" is a typical line. There is a self-deprecating deflation that is endearing as it is funny, but it is countered by a just-as-omnipresent undertone of romantic lyricism. For John Yau is one of our most engaging, if, again, not literal, love poets. For this remarkable achievement, and in anticipation of a night of enjoyment, please join me in welcoming John Yau to Dia.