

Dia Art Foundation

Laura Moriarty and Kimberly Lyons

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Monday, January 14, 2013, 6:30 pm

Introduction by Vincent Katz

Kimberly Lyons was born in 1958 in Tucson, Arizona. She lived in Pennsylvania, California and Minnesota before moving with her family to Chicago. She attended Chicago's Columbia College and in 1981 graduated from Bard College, where she studied with Robert Kelly and Toni →Morrison. Lyons took workshops with John Yau at the Poetry Project, where she also taught and was program coordinator. She is the publisher of the poetry press Lunar Chandelier, which has published books by Vyt Bakaitis, Joe Elliot, John Godfrey, Toni Simon, and Lynn Behrendt since it started in 2010.

Lyons is the author of several books of poetry, including *Abracadabra* (Granary Books, 2000), *Saline* (Instance Press, 2005), *Phototherapique* (Ketalanche Press/Portable Press, 2008), *Rouge* (Instance Press, 2012), and *The Practice Of Residue* (Subpress, 2012). Her broadside *Asterisk 12* was published by fewer and further Press in 2012. Lyons has also published criticism, including an essay on the work of Bernadette Mayer in a recent issue of *Aufgabe*.

The epigraph to Kimberly Lyons' book, *Abracadabra*, reads "Accumulation. / Love, degeneration,... / and regenerated dives." It is a quote from the poetry of Joseph Ceravolo and could serve as a standard for much of Lyons' impressive achievement as a poet. Her lines accumulate, rather than bind together via standard syntax, yet they shy away from parataxis as well. There is something in her adopted New York roots that keeps the flow of a day going and coming into her poems in unexpected ways and places. She updates Shakespeare in a way only a suave denizen of urban poetry could. "Where is this place" she asks, and answers herself,

But that's a sucker's question
I mean really
is it better to improve and
improve at a defined game
or to fuck-up
in continuous instances
in a situation only possibly
a game
(from "Chez Es Saada")

Her process yields unpredictability, her music mellifluous. Wit reigns over all, avoiding the pratfall often encountered in verse this wide-ranging, which is to resort to a laugh-effect. Even "an ugly pink & gray Montefiore Hospital mug" in her poems retains seriousness, its facticity, especially as a receptacle here for "perfect coffee."

Daily excursions, in word, by foot, and the familial, too, are part and parcel. But love goes beyond, even to the overview and view of detail. Lyons' rhetoric holds it all together. In *Rouge*, published in 2012, Lyons creates a register of days passing, speed, and the inability to freeze an image or sometimes even locate one. "between this afternoon and tonight, a pale blank book / that washes out the word's ink / so that the message so to speak is a kind of soap" (from "Wash Out" *Rouge*). Kim Lyons will take us on a rapid ride through cities we never knew. Please welcome her to Dia.

Laura Moriarty was born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1952, grew up on Cape Cod, and has lived in Northern California since 1966. She attended Sacramento State University and the University of California at Berkeley in the 1970s. She has taught at Naropa University and Mills College.

Moriarty was the Archives Director for the Poetry Center and American Poetry Archives at San Francisco State University from 1986 - 1997. She has been the Deputy Director of Small Press Distribution in Berkeley, California, since 2004.

Moriarty is the author eleven books of poetry and two novels.

Her books include *Persia* (Chance Additions, 1983), *Rondeaux* (Roof Books, 1990), *L'archiviste* (Zasterle Press, 1991), *Spicer's City* (Poetry New York, 1998), *The Case* (O Books, 1998), *Cunning*, a short novel (Spuyten Duyvil, 1999), *Nude Memoir* (Krupskaya, 2000), *Self-Destruction* (Post-Apollo Press, 2004), *Ultravioleta, a novel* (Atelos, 2006), *A Semblance: Selected and New Poems, 1975 – 2007*, (Omnidawn, 2007), and her most recent book, *A Tonalist*, published by Nightboat Books in 2010.

Laura Moriarty's poetry begins from speech. That is, her poem "Persia" begins from sound, poetry as music, as:

a woman much withered, a maid
a maiden with a wand a handsome
maid, white wand with a peacock of
solid gold on its tip

but that poem continues in the vernacular: "who did you meet?" Phrases subvert expectation, gently, as when she writes, "The blue crack as the snow / Unfastens the house." That we think we are hearing "unfastens the blouse" is confirmed some 20 lines later, when Moriarty writes, "Blouse crumpled my / breasts unbuttoned into sleeping / lips" (all from "Waking from Sleep a Thousand Miles Thick"). This kind of mental play is typical of the erotics Moriarty continually introduces. "A trap is laid / or a tramp" she writes in "The Tenth Card." Or "one entire piercing / me hard thoughts for once / for to me they're both him" (from "six histories").

Moriarty varies her use of form, working in rondeaux, in projectivist spread forms, and in hybrid forms, combining poetry and prose. She is also a master of prose as poetry — not the prose poem, which she can also write, but the novel-poem, as in her book-length work *Ultravioleta*. Yes, it has a story, but the whole effort of it is poetic. The effect of wordplay and abstraction is, if anything, more intensely felt.

Her writing is deeply invested in the most careful study of words, while simultaneously giving evidence to a particular woman's experience. It empowers all humans, instructing and delighting. In a recent poem, "Transposition," she asks:

Is there a transposition
When sound imitates music?
As Duncan wrote
He loved Levertov
In the letters
That make love
evolve as a consequence
Of telling

Laura Moriarty's music tells us what it is to be. Please welcome Laura Moriarty to Dia.