

Dia Art Foundation

Norma Cole and Julian Talamantez Brolaski

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Thursday, December 6, 2012, 6:30 pm

Introduction by Vincent Katz

Julian Talamantez Brolaski was born in 1978 in California. He received a BA in Literature and Creative Writing from UC Santa Cruz and an MFA in English and Creative Writing from Mills College. He is a PhD candidate in English at UC Berkeley. He files his dissertation, "Rhyme and the Poetics of Authority," later this month. Brolaski is the author of multiple chapbooks, including *Hellish Death Monsters*; *Letters to Hank Williams*; *Madame Bovary's Diary*; and *A Buck in a Corridor*. He has published two full-length collections of poetry, *gowanus atropolis* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011) and *Advice for Lovers* (City Lights, 2012). Brolaski has been an editor with Litmus Press since 2007. He is an editor of *Aufgabe* magazine and is co-editor w/ E. Tracy Grinnell and Erica Kaufman of *No Gender: Reflections on the Life and Work of kari edwards* (Litmus/Belladonna Books, 2009). Julian lives in Brooklyn, teaches at the New School, and plays country and old time music with Juan and the Pines and the Invert Family Singers.

The poems in Julian Brolaski's *gowanus atropolis*, couched though they are in reading and in curated usages, still include a seemingly identifiable narrator, present in the line: "we've all crossed thresholds we don't brag about". Brolaski likes to keep the i.d. shifting quickly, though. The following lines are: "iphegenia oxling / when arbolaf dies / one is hailed to arden / as one goes hitherto / asphyxiating along the gowanus".

Certain phrases are repeated: "a buck in a corridor" "damesirs of fishairs".

Brolaski's most recent book, *Advice For Lovers*, is a whirlwind of personae — interweaving, seducing, and fucking. Much of the language and many of the tropes are gleaned from the annals of literature. We read the names Herbert, Browning, Ovid, Solomon, Jakobson, Stein, Arnaut, Keats, Pope, Shakespeare, Dante, Sidney — along with names of contemporaries. One particular influence is that early master of bawdry — Geoffrey Chaucer. Mythology abounds, but what is remarkable about the best poems in this book is that they simultaneously present a vivid contemporary personality while giving convincing senses of the folk on whom they posit. In the opening to "Dido To Aeneas Having Left The Cave," we experience the scene from multiple perspectives, past and present: "But hark me, m'adam, despite my duller tongue / That I may ease my victory with oil / That you may lap up all my tears for fun / And count my ass among your booty's spoils." Speaking of rhyme and the poetics of authority, there is an authority in these lines that speak for the abandoned Carthaginian queen with the same ease as elsewhere the poet compares terms for marijuana.

Julian Brolaski sings — hopefully he'll sing tonight — but his poetry sings itself. Here to sing it to you — Julian Brolaski.

Norma Cole was born in Toronto in 1945. She received a BA and an MA in French from the University of Toronto in 1967, moving to France shortly afterward. She relocated to San Francisco in 1977 and has lived there ever since. She is the author of, among many others, *Spinoza in Her Youth* (Omnidawn, 2002), *Where Shadows Will: Selected Poems, 1988—2008* (City Lights, 2009), and, most recently, *Win These Posters and Other Unrelated Prizes Inside* (Omnidawn, 2012). A book of essays and talks, *To Be at Music*, was published by Omnidawn in 2010. Cole's translations from the French include Jean Daive's *A Woman with Several Lives*, Fouad Gabriel Naffah's *The Spirit God* and the *Properties of Nitrogen*, Danielle Collobert's *Notebooks 1957-1978*, and the collection *Crosscut Universe: Writers on Writing from France*. Cole has received awards from the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Gertrude Stein Awards, the Fund for Poetry, and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. She has taught at the University of San Francisco and currently teaches at San Francisco State University.

Norma Cole's sense of form is accreted, defined by action, by time. "The poem is an abstract space defined by its being," she has written. Occasionally stanzaic, her poems are more often in groupings, stanza-like clusters of expression. Elision is so much a part of this mind's work in word, and, though her words do not parse into easy narratives, they express a clear sensibility defined by listening, perceptive, sharp, and with an ear for the music and rhythms of speech.

There is humor, too, as in her poem “NASDAQ NASCAR,” which begins, “thick psycho circuit / history re asphalt / and the plains / herm // herm / ‘n / neutics” (*Do The Monkey*, 2006, Zasterle).

The poems’ sly wit is ballast for the terror, facts of reality the poet weaves into her cloth. These glints shock and provoke further thought: thought as action leading to more harmonious ways of acting in the world.

“*there is no metaphor for war*” (from “Mercury,” Mars, 1994, Listening Chamber)

There is a run-on quality to Cole’s early poems. Apostrophes and other punctuation are omitted, causing meanings to shift and blend. Prose forms alternate with poems that restrain and compact meaning, enabling vivid metrical lyricism.

Cole’s concisions cause readers to examine words, question their valences and limits. Eventually, one internalizes these shifts; as in her poem “Return of the Self from Lisbon to Sofa,” where “nether” conflates with “neither,” “couch” is both a noun and a verb, “sofa” a thing and a place.

“...thinking penetrates slowly
start over a sensible solution...” (“A” *WSW*, 9)

Be prepared to experience thought as never before and join me in welcoming Norma Cole to Dia.