

Dia Art Foundation

# Peter Gizzi and Franck André Jamme

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

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## Introduction by Vincent Katz

**Franck André Jamme** has published numerous volumes of lyric and concrete poetry as well as collaborative works with artists James Brown, Suzan Frecon, Jaume Plensa, and Jan Voss. He was awarded the 2005 Grand Prix de Poésie from the Société des Gens de Lettres, and he is the editor of the 1983 Pléiade edition of the complete works of René Char. He has curated exhibitions in Paris, San Francisco, and New York at venues including the Centre Pompidou and the Drawing Center. He has studied and published works on the tantric art of Rajasthan, most recently in the Siglio Press publication, *Tantra Song* (2011). Many of Jamme's books have been translated into English, including *New Exercises* (Wave Books, 2008), *Another Silent Attack* (Black Square/Brooklyn Rail, 2006), *The Recitation of Forgetting* (Black Square, 2003), and *Moon Wood* (Selavy Press, 2000). He has translated John Ashbery's *Three Poems* into French. Ashbery in turn translated Jamme's *La récitation de l'oubli*. Jamme divides his time between Burgundy and Paris.

**Norma Cole** will present her translation of Jamme's long poem *To The Secret*. Norma Cole's most recent books of poetry include *Win These Posters and Other Unrelated Prizes Inside* (Omnidawn, 2010), *Where Shadows Will: Selected Poems, 1988–2008* (City Lights, 2009), *Spinoza in Her Youth* (Omnidawn, 2002), and *Natural Light* (Libellum, 2009). Cole's collaboration with painter Marina Adams — *Actualities* — is forthcoming from Litmus Press. Cole's translations from the French include Danielle Collobert's *It Then* (O Books, 1989) and *Journals* (1989) and Jean Daive's *A Woman with Several Lives*. Additionally, Cole edited and translated the anthology *Crosscut Universe: Writing on Writing from France* (2000).

Franck André Jamme has worked in a multiplicity of ways, from the prose-based approach found in *Another Silent Attack* to the visually-driven stellae of *New Exercises*. In *To The Secret*, his brand-new publication from Cole Swensen's La Presse, in Norma Cole's translations, Jamme seems to take on a new persona.

Failure, loss, regret and a halting rhythmic flow characterize *Another Silent Attack*, almost in the tradition of Kafka and Saramago, albeit in a much more restricted spatial scope. "Sometimes he thought that maps could no longer be trusted. You couldn't read roads on them any longer. Only faces." Lucidity is "the lethal friend," Language, "the deceiver." Although, later, language is "the scout."

In *To The Secret*, and in particular in Cole's translation, the movement of ideas feels more open, less constrained: "the being / of the rope dancer // as precise / and light / as his steps". There is room for "dreams" and "tolerance" — in fact, these seem igniters of a new, more peaceful path in the mind's journey. A list-like procession of images, ghosts almost, but they are more than that. The paratactic structure employed by the poet allows space around these images, and none lasts long enough to exert undue influence. These are some aspects of what feels like a contemporary epic, a poem able to transcend its elements, to exist on a plane where memory and imagination co-exist, and the doubts and recriminations that remain are balanced by a significant state of emptiness. I present to you, first, Franck André Jamme, reading in the original French, followed by Norma Cole, reading her translation of the same section of the text. Please welcome them to Dia.

**Peter Gizzi** is the author of six poetry collections, including *Threshold Songs* (Wesleyan, 2011) and *The Outernational* (Wesleyan, 2007), and numerous chapbooks and artist books. He recently published a retrospective volume titled *In Defense of Nothing: Selected Poems, 1987–2011* (Wesleyan, 2014). His honors include the Peter I. B. Lavan Younger Poet Award from the Academy of American Poets and artist grants from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, the Howard Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation. In 2011 he was the Judith E. Wilson Visiting Fellow in Poetry at the University of Cambridge. He works at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

Peter Gizzi has been steadily working out a poetics that is central to the concerns of many writers and readers of contemporary poetry. When he started publishing, his work could be contextualized within parameters established by John Ashbery in preceding decades, and there is definitely a strong relationship, especially in Gizzi's early work. Both poets take the narrative expectations erected by seemingly rational syntax into strange and unexpected alcoves. Gizzi's unexpectedness differed from Ashbery's though, even then.

Gizzi is a lover of form. You can see, scanning his books, different formats, on the page, and on your tongue. "Go with a simple song, unbind yourself / Making sure to hide your giddy surface," he ends an early poem, "Toy," as a reminder to the reader and himself. Through the years, and not without difficulty, on the part of poet and reader, a complicity has built up. This is made clear on a perusal of Gizzi's *Selected Poems*, the provocatively titled *In Defense of Nothing*.

There is a Romantic stringing together of language in many of Gizzi's poems, but there is also the rupture of reality the poet characterizes by the metaphor of piercing: he uses the term in several poems, most notably in the title "Pierced." Yet, his poems do not describe piercing, as much as enact it. Everything is what it is. "the actual bone is bone" : "come as you are" [both from "Pierced"].

He is not afraid of tenderness, witness his sweet elegy for Gregory Corso. As one goes on reading, the lyric nature of much of Gizzi's work is clear, but it is a lyric, if founded on tradition, that is true to the present, everyday, as in the best of James Schuyler's work. Gizzi writes, in "Stung":

We too are sprung and wound  
with evolution, I want to say.  
That's it: love. Not spring.  
I have felt it also  
in quilted drowning snow  
under the sheets  
in a clanking house.  
Clank, I love you.  
Clank. Not spring.

Clank. I present you Peter Gizzi.