

Dia Art Foundation

Tracie Morris and Shelagh Patterson

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Tuesday, October 13, 2015, 6:30 pm

Introduction by Vincent Katz

Born and raised in Brooklyn, **Shelagh Patterson** is an activist, poet, and scholar. Her poems have appeared in anthologies, newspapers, magazines, journals, experimental theater, bureaucratic documents, and a feature film. She has received fellowships from the Bronx Writers Center and Cave Canem, and was a resident scholar/artist at the Urban Issues Institute at Essex County College. Recently, Patterson was the humanities partner for JACK, an arts center in Brooklyn and developed an after-school theater arts curriculum for the city of Newark with the administration of Mayor Baraka. Patterson has an MFA in creative writing from the City University of New York, Hunter College, and a PhD in English with a focus on critical and cultural studies from the University of Pittsburgh. She lives in Newark.

In Shelagh Patterson's long poem "Dear Anna," she manages to transform her desire and admiration for a fellow poet into a work that, while seeming to be made of literal transcriptions of prose text messages, also stretches out into a new poetic form:

If we swallow it to transform it we regurgitate bits like candy with which others can sweeten their mouths. Taste our futures as shared desire.

dear anna
sometimes we wake up on a sunday
and choose not to go for a run and instead
make a cortado and sit down to comment on papers.
but sometimes the news of the day before weighs heavily. sometimes
in those times we turn to poetry.
some of us even have large collections of collections
from which to choose in that moment.

Everything in Patterson's poems is there for a reason. There is always muscle, an idea, behind the words. It is personal, but is attempting to push out to the larger world. Nothing is pure embellishment, or pure sound, or fancy. In "A Shady Promise," she seems to be writing out of the classic Anthropologist Manifesto of the Brazilian Oswald de Andrade, who believed the new world chews up the influences that infuse it, creating a new, more powerful, amalgam. Patterson writes:

If we swallow it
to transform it
we regurgitate bits like candy
with which others can sweeten
their mouths. Taste our futures
as shared desire.

Prepare to taste the future of shared desire in the poems of Shelagh Patterson. Please join me in welcoming her to Dia.

Tracie Morris is a poet who has worked as a page-based writer, sound poet, critic, singer, scholar, bandleader, actor, and multimedia performer. She is the author of *Intermission* (Soft Skull Press, 1998), *Rhyme Scheme* (Zasterle Press, 2012), which includes a CD, and *handholding: 5 kinds*, which will be published by Kore Press later this year. She is co-editor, with Charles Bernstein, of *Best American Experimental Writing* (2016) from Wesleyan University Press. She has contributed to, and been written about in, several anthologies of literary criticism including: *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind*, *The Break Beat Poets*, *What I Say: Innovative Poetry by Black Writers in America*, *Eco-language Reader*, and *An Exaltation of Forms*. Her sound installations have been presented at numerous institutions, including the Drawing Center, Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* presented by Dia Art Foundation, The Kitchen, The Museum of Modern Art, and The Whitney Biennial. Morris is a professor and coordinator of performance and performance studies at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

Tracie Morris's poetics is sexy. Not only in her jazz poems. Jazz is always sex. Not only, but always. Her poems are sexy, but so is her

poetics. Her tics are sex.

But she is also seeing things that are out of time, those histories of families, places, people. Everything is color, and color always has meaning, but Morris lets the meanings come to you, if necessary. The words in her poems signify without being literal, as in this excerpt from "If I Reviewed Her":

The grey is Tin Pan Alley's. The percussive keys, New York. There is not the softness the name implies but the black and white holds up. Color? That quick rhythm. The 88 lucky numbers one hope one hits. Dark custom and no greyscale. A hardened snapshot, snaps shut.

Tracie's poetry speaks for a generation, for generation. But she also goes way back, all the way back, and part. Her poem "Premie: Baby Girl Morris 2 lbs. 0 oz." has an almost Elizabethan tone:

"My coating color of an artificial sun / Already bored with repetitious day / asks me 'What's night like?' / We need to be reminded / so brief was our stay"

Enjoy her stay here at Dia, before she moves, and after. Please join me in welcoming Tracie Morris to Dia.