

B A P

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Brooklyn Arts Press

WWW.BROOKLYNARTSPRESS.COM

info@brooklynartspress.com

Brooklyn Arts Press (BAP) is an independent literary press devoted to publishing poetry chapbooks and full-length collections, art monographs, and lyrical short fiction by new and emerging artists.

Please enjoy these selections from some of the artists we've been privileged to publish.



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Matt Shears is the author of *Where a road had been* (BlazeVOX, 2010). He lives in Oakland, California with his family.

“Amidst a rural landscape bombarded with technology and the aftermath of history (both real and imagined), Shears creates poems of wonder and wandering, poems of longing and regret. Tidbits of mythology collide with folksongs and lullabies to create a fantastic place where “the Poem arises beauteous” yet “false projects glitter in the wind.” In these poems, bits and pieces of broken things do not add up to or equal their whole. Shears’ range of voice and unpredictable grace provide an exquisite backbone to the time/place/space that encompasses this vibrant collection.”

-**Megan Johnson**, author of *The Waiting*

“Matt Shears invents new worlds in *10,000 Wallpapers*. This long lyric is full of brute terror and bucolic beauty, exploring individual consciousness unmoored by our present “thundering interconnectivity”; *10,000 Wallpapers* chronicles “the everyman meandering through this digitized countryside,” questioning how we can truly inhabit the world when reality has become denatured by the image. The speaker in this poem sings like Prufrock, in a lyric that is searing and true, as he searches for the possibilities of pure utterance and perception amidst what is manufactured.”

-**Cathy Park Hong**, author of *Dance Dance Revolution*

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Selections from
10,000 Wallpapers
poems by
Matt Shears

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from ***Alter(n)ations #30***

& so my figurations filled with mythic animals
& that golf course just went on forever
(so trim, so green)
spread out underneath the drawl of that Sunday morning quarterback
with his leftover sausages and his pedagogical horses
inflamed, in stride, so frothy—
O passion!
What miseries await the hackneyed,
the Everymen meandering through this digitized countryside,
codes assembling their brains from spectacular stimuli?

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from ***Alter(n)ations #31***

& the Poem arises beauteous,
an unrealizable sensation,
a distortion within the ungraphed terrain
of perception—

And what upsurges?
What urges configure there beneath the decomposing matter,
the toxic waste, this streaming mediation
of our New Life?

And what restlessness inhabits the rest?
& the Poem shimmers there
just over the next rise,
where your plane went down ,
where they sent out the Search Party
to recover you—

but you had escaped from the wreckage,
and you clambered through the yucca and the joshua trees
into the stars above that desert city
and you returned, unholy, an amazement—

& the Poem escapes
& you walk the streets of a life bereft,
thinking of the THING that once inhabited you,
the THING that leapt up,
and out of your arms,

and away!

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Alter(n)ations # 34: 10,000 Wallpapers

& I waited there in that elemental repository
for the Allegory to detrain,
(A rustling gusted in the inertial sepulcher of our love—
O doves! A processional processed!)

the station burbling within a fuzziness I couldn't quite shake,
like some itinerary I once deemed "riddled with inefficiencies"
back there in the incidence and the coincidence
of my specialized declensions—

& the highlighter scrub-brushed across those mawlings
& that correction of crows invisibly cawing,
puncture wounds pocked upon the branching autumnal streets
of my naked imaginary past.

*

"At last!" I cried to the substitute harbinger,
"My Totem precedeth me. Let us inoculate the Dream-We-All-Share!"

& the tails of the roadrunners flecked away at the evening.
& the armature of armadillos trundled out that same old argument.

& the Dream-We-All-Share leapt into our Tour Bus
& zoomed off into the profound obscurities of The Evidence.

*

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*

How my self-assessment turned up nothing whatsoever!
I was the mole hollowing out my own tunnels,
(Creator god of that embodied earth)
the familial rabbit curled up in my own uncomplicated warren—
I was the infestation that I doused with bleach,
the burning jellyfish on that empty metaphorical beach,
the Self that washed up:
the rot, the stench; the rot, the stench—

*

How those shamanic deliveries just tapered off then
like forbidden frequencies,
(O, infinite de-sign)
10,000 wallpapers papering the un-rooms of my life,
10,000 wallpapers cracked in the deserted desert sun—
(O infinite de-sign)
10,000 wallpapers vaporizing in that false house, my nomadic
10,000 wallpapers pasted to the excavated walls
in the night-mirage of my mirror image—
In 10,000 crumbling winds, 10,000 granular cities—

O bird-encircled songscape

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Carol Guess is the author of seven books of poetry and prose, as well as three forthcoming collections: *Doll Studies: Forensics*, *Willful Machine*, and *My Father In Water*. She is Associate Professor of English at Western Washington University. Follow her at: www.carolguess.blogspot.com.

“It’s commonly posed that history unwinds itself, that the events of a people or life reveal themselves to the eye, that the fibers of a story are made loose with investigation and discovery. The opposite, however, is true in Guess’s *Darling Endangered*, in which as you read you are closed tighter, sewn closer, bound better to the life and lives of the narrator, the narrators, the speakers of these stories. The words and images of these pieces—the stairs and stages and studios, the kisses and misses—accumulate like coats, heavy and harrowing and grave, yet all the while precise, lovely, and true.”

—**Joseph Young**, author of *Easter Rabbit*

“Hand-over-heart, with pink beds, green plastic guns, clicksliver needles, and cardboard-giving milk, the fictions of Carol Guess’s *Darling Endangered* are the most darling gifts. Even with their parasitic twins, they are not to be endangered. A lovely, lyrical must.”

—**Kim Chinquee**, author of *Oh Baby* and *Pretty*

“I love this collection of very short fictions. Carol Guess builds the most wondrous word-nests, each one holding something precious, each one surrounded by the world-at-large, afire. In remarkable lyrical fiction after another, Carol Guess writes her darling heart out.”

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lyrical short fiction by
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Nostalgia

We spun a radio out of the wreckage. Sidereal songs echoed over our cereal. Leaves tangerined. Surrogates shoved children on swings, hoping chains would make astronauts of all of us. In gym we could choose Flashdance or Golf. Once a week we stitched the flag, mending snags where wind got grabby. Everyone mouthed a different pledge. Cows grazed on chocolate and cardboard gave milk. Sometimes aloud, sometimes in silence black letters made meaning by crossing the page. Pain was a story we couldn't explain, and night, how it held us handcuffed to pink beds.

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Coyotes, Motor Oil, Chiffon

Wings shake dunnage off union docks, slough rockslides onto Chuckanut Drive. Bird of the harbor, of the terrible temper—I let you lure me *up up up*. Teach me how to build a city out of touch. Mornings I enter a room full of music. Scribble *No Exit* on the door in lipstick. Others move with crowds through crowds, thoughts entombed in cocktail chatter. The football player in my neighbor's window is a cardboard figurine. Jeans on the line, a three-legged tabby, strawberries nesting in a cracked blue bowl. At noon-plus the noon bus pushes off from the station. Fear of dying like Isadora Duncan inhibits the driver from putting the top down. This is a city of bagpipes and re-ups. Pick up the tempo of *Scruffy Allegiance*. Come nightfall children drop books to win kickball—no, they're kicking a soft-spoken boy.

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Sonatina Americana

Balustrade (The Lost Ballet)

Twin trees and a balustrade toy with bourrées. Lost choreography battles lost socks for resurrection. On TV Cylons battle humans, becoming humans who were already Cylons, awaiting rebirth in the beds of toy gods. Music lures dancers from trees to light. Socks brighten night at the foot of a bed. Balanchine later reused the Concerto. He twinned a new toy from the old.

Stravinsky Violin Concerto

Release her wrists. Round her down to dissonance. Squeak her knees into bouquet. Wrongness of thigh must be set right; port de bras relaxed to slump. Retract, retreat with spat and kick, then kiss (if elbow may be mouth; it is).

Chaconne

The girl runs toward the boy too fast, not in time as they've rehearsed. She lifts herself before he lifts her, long enough for him to catch. Risk draws genius to her dress. Dressed in street clothes past the theater, she flings herself at cabs and snow. Her jeans sign autographs. She starves to make you think she floats.

Don Quixote

Some love on horseback, tilting at song birds. Some love the wrong one. She swells religion, as door adheres to jamb and will not open. Dulcinea's return means real girls vanish. Curtain, applause. Old man rides off. Some love ether more than earth.

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Serenade

Blind, he's guided to the fallen girl. Blue tulle pools where she slipped and cried, where Balanchine said *Stay*, in waiting for the one who rushes in, off cue. No men in White Plains. An odd number of women, piano hidden behind rhododendron. The Sonatina starts with first: shoes snapped like fans. Tchaikovsky's elegy comes last.

The Four Temperaments

The shape of the thing becomes the thing until it's something else. Tumult turns caress turns flight path, as if a circus, drained of tulle, played out in urban haunts. Phlegmatic's surrounded by stilts and knives. Hindemith holds him in the tiger's mouth. Girls stagger, pulse, devour the highwire. The audience exits in bright yellow clown cars.

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Christopher Hennessy is the author of *Outside the Lines: Talking with Contemporary Gay Poets* (University of Michigan Press). He earned an MFA from Emerson College and currently is a Ph.D. candidate in English Literature at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He was included in *Ploughshares'* special "Emerging Writers" edition, and his poetry, interviews, and book reviews have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Verse*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *The Bloomsbury Review*, *Court Green*, *OCHO*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Brooklyn Review*, *Memorious*, and elsewhere. Hennessy is a longtime associate editor for *The Gay & Lesbian Review-Worldwide*.

"If I were to reduce this book to a single letter, it would be O. Opulence, obsession, orgasm and opera all start with an open throat, a gape, a release of pent-up desire. So, too, does Christopher Hennessy's *Love-In-Idleness* emanate from the opening of the throat to the shudder and release of the last and final word. *Oh*, I thought, reading these urgent, physical, dangerously beautiful poems, with 'the terror ripping open my mouth at the corners'. Yes, and *Oh*, yes and O..."

—D. A. Powell

"Christopher Hennessy's poems yearn for a sense of certainty, feel their way for a foothold that, ultimately, may not be there. From childhood poems of family and farm (as unsettling, in their vivid realism, as Roethke's greenhouse poems) to persona poems of deep erotic longing, Hennessy maintains an artful and risky determination, in each poem, 'to understand the need its song speaks.'"

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CHRISTOPHER LOOKS

Christopher looks like he's been spit out,
like a too-salty piece of meat,
like an unwanted thought.

Like a mannequin, a man made of teak,
a talking prune.

Christopher looks like I'm having trouble creating him,
or like he could be the father of purpose.

Christopher looks like a turtle negotiating
a path of slick stones. If you don't know
what Christopher looks like, visualize
a garden gnome in crisis.

Some days Christopher looks like an ordinary young man;
others, like a man dying to get out alive, gone
into his dead man's suit at the first sight of blood.

Christopher looks like someone you will recognize
if you go to heaven. Christopher looks like he's in hell
as he stammers through an apology for not calling.

Christopher looks like a frightened scarecrow,
like a little boy wrapped in a bumblebee bowtie.
Like he's trying and failing
to strangle himself with his black cravat.

Christopher looks like your trunk is full of bodies.

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TO MY FATHER'S BLUE TUXEDO

The winter I turn 17 I find you hiding
in the back of his closet, wilting
on your hanger. Rumpled, crinkled,

dusted with age's mothwing fuzz.
Your blue is powder-soft,
with baby-blue trim and lapels ruffled,

but you slump, hang limp like a faggot
has just fled you, like he will at his prom,
eager for a jerk-off to a tableau of tuxedoed jocks.

You won't recall, but I saw you once before
in a photo, posing on the body of a man
who looked like me, his hair so wet with sweat

bits of rice stuck in it. His face flush
with June sun, cheap champagne—
simple abundance and simple poverty.

Outside ice hangs on trees. Limbs
snapping like balls smacking
open hands in an end zone.

Winter will never marry us: the fag
sick with threat, the ex-quarterback slamming
a meaty fist into his reddening palm.

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LOVE POEM TO CARL LINNAEUS

Would you bring me to Sweden,
like the rhubarb—sticky, sweet
rhubarb—you somehow grew there?
Sing to me the litany of other delights
you hoped would take hold
in your frigid Nordic homeland?
Tea plants, coffee beans,
ginger and coconut, silk worms,
cotton and clams!

Write across my body syllables
of fauna and flora, a patina of Latin
taxonomy etched onto my back.
Each *-us*, *-it*, and *-ate*
makes me stiff as the ivory bill
of the *Campephilus principalis*.
Hard as *Rhinoceros unicornis*
and *Rhinoceros sondaicus*.
Let's do it like *lepus californicus*,
bay at the scarlet moon like *canis lupus*,
and eat our luxurious binomials.

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THE BLESSING

Neither of us knew,
but I was as cruel as his April
ritual of trapping toads, crawdads,
snapping turtles, easy quarry, then
duct taping each alive and wriggling
to M-83, the highway sucked clean
and black by sheets of white rain.

Neither of us knew, being criminals,
why this arcane fetish, why the want
of squash and the taste for gush
of what's inside, turned out.

Could it be it was too simple
to refuse to turn away from
his lean torso as passing cars
ripped apart his helpless targets?

What followed was a blessing,
watching as he dipped his naked body
into the deep, rain-filled ditch—white
underwear hanging like a torn flag
from the broken, hung limb of an oak.

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Joe Fletcher is the author of the chapbook, *Sleigh Ride*, published by Factory Hollow Press. Other work can be found at *jubilat*, *Octopus*, *Slope*, *Hoboeye*, *Poetry International*, *Hollins Critic*, *MoonLit*, and elsewhere. He lives in Carrboro, NC.

“Joe Fletcher’s world is so rich in language and dense in experience, I wonder where it all comes from. He seems to have lived a thousand lives, each deep in feeling and insight. These are authentic adventures no matter where they take place, and each one brings us closer to the truth. What joy they bring to the reader who loves words and is willing to let go for the ride.”

-James Tate

“Powerful, fully-realized complications, by which I mean accurate demonstrations of the twists and turns a human mind can take, of the serious dark deep dangerous and beautiful kind, that's what *Already It Is Dusk* is. When Joe Fletcher asks, ‘What helps?’, it's not a rhetorical question. In his poems he never stops searching for what might help us. Consolation, contradiction, awe, punishment, banishment, abandon, love, ache, hope, and fate intertwine and expose our humanity. This poetry is never slight, often nearly fatal. And it sounds so good.”

-Dara Wier

“The poems in Joe Fletcher’s *Already It Is Dusk* have a dark and old-world feel to them that I love. It is a time when men carry ropes of jerky; a time when cows ride on ships and the children’s heads are dented by doctors’ tongues. ‘Don’t go too near yourself,’ we are warned. ‘You are not who you say you are.’ This is the voice of our guide. And he has his gloved hand on your shoulder.”

-Michael Earl Craig

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Selections from
Already It Is Dusk
poems by
Joe Fletcher

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BEN NEZ THE WINGED

told me to be calm and I tried.
Told me to burn my shirt, stained
with salt rings and stale sweat.
Told me to burn the straw inside
the violin case protecting the glass cube
within which was a cocoon plucked from
a verdant sprig abloom on an Asian hill.
Before the valley was smote by passage.
Before the placentas of the women emerged
gray and splotched. He told me.
He touched my neck, which trembled
like a pipe carrying smoke under a mountain.
I threw a handful of gravel at the mirage,
which stayed. I wanted to be protected.
He told me nothing could be. He himself
was naked and large, a pale
mushroom from some barren zone.
He looked like he didn't have any bones.
He told me his roots grew inward.
He wore a makeshift crown of shingles
ripped from the plunder of the previous village,
bound by a vine dangling withered leaves.
He wore it over his bald and peeling scalp.
I pointed to his crown: *that's protection.*

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I pointed to his crown: *that's protection.*

He told me it was an offering, that every-
thing was federated in a general sacrifice.
He was sweating and drawing up tufts
of parched grass and stuffing them in his sack.
The sun was very very hot and we hung in that land
like game skewered above the makeshift pyres
of splintered carts. I brooded and backed away.
To avoid a quarrel? Because I wearied of what
he told me? I didn't know. I slid away on my rail,
he on his, each to his own traversings, each
with his own idea flickering in the great dark.
But he called to me over the cooling dunes,
a strip of sunset on the rimrock.
He told me to be prepared and I wasn't.
He told me he'd come to suck in my last exhale.
Now I drag my boots to smear my tracks.

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Now I drag my boots to smear my tracks.

NEED

Monsoon light. Wind-lashed copse.
A riverbird startles from cattail.
I hurl a cinder to waters. I shed
a layer of the lie and by
a cedar fence I sour the moonrise
with jagged song. Something is
here to keep me in my urn, something

prevents my descent to straits where
one is raked by scathing tides.
I'd be found there. I cannot stay.
Will someday? Will see. What do I want?
To unravel beneath a cloudswept sky
where everything watches, where
a deed casts no shadow on thought.

A barge laden with mounds of ore passes.
A boy hails me behind a reeking flock.
Have I over-pruned my orchard—
I, the wayward and divided ear with my
twine-bound summerbook and the
minnow tattooed on my neck?
I bite the mouth that eats me.

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HUNTING

I tear feathers from chickens.
I stuff them into hot and
spattered chutes where
blades twist, where fire grows
pale and slack on the sheer
steel tables of our hunger.
I'm the one who throws them
from their bodies into meat.
I'm the one who cinches the thread
and dangles them in the smoke.

How do I catch them?
I lie in the damp moss and the chickens
walk right up my outstretched arm.
I feel a god fastened to us,
a god coiled at the bottom of the sea.
Then I pry the chickens' chests open
with my beak and with a fly-buzzing sack
of them I ascend the road to work,
my talons plunging in gravel, my head
jerking beneath a frenzy of stars.

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Broc Rossell was born in Los Angeles and lives in Vancouver, British Columbia. He attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop and is completing a doctorate in literature and creative writing. This is his first collection.

"But I don't know but a book in a man's brain is better off than a book bound in calf – at any rate it is safer from criticism. And taking a book off the brain, is akin to the ticklish & dangerous business of taking an old painting off a panel – you have to scrape off the whole brain in order to get at it with due safety – & even then, the painting may not be worth the trouble."

– **Herman Melville**

"Susie, what shall I do – there is'nt room enough; not *half* enough, to hold what I was going to say. Wont you tell the man who makes sheets of paper, that I hav'nt the *slightest respect* for him!"

– **Emily Dickinson**

"I am the outskirts of a nonexistent town, a prolix commentary on an unwritten book. I am no one, no one. I don't know how to feel, how to think, how to love. I am a character in an unwritten novel, passing by, airy and unmade, without having existed, amid the dreams of whoever it is who didn't know how to complete me."

– **Bernardo Soares to Fernando Pessoa**

"You can't derange, or re-arrange, your poems again. (But the sparrows can their song.) The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change."

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Selections from
Unpublished Poems
poems by
Broc Rossell

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Unpublished Poems
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VESTIGIAL

When you fell into your feet
The torso tied off
And the night crept into another small country of grief

I walked from room to room
Flipping switches

Taking things from drawers
And bringing cups into the kitchen

Like a tree whittled down
To the handle of a bucket

Whittled by the wind over the gray green sea
That prunes each of these afternoons

Cleaned, then cooked
Down to something almost useful

Though you are no longer here to see
What remains of me
When I'm paying for this whole apartment

In a world where night begins
Among the grasses

And you rise from the ground
A reclamation of speech

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A CLOUD OF FAITHFUL WITNESSES

Hope is a form of penance

Like an oil rig
Spouting as it bores,

I climb to discover the rock

Or the Virgin of Guadalupe visits
And labor assumes a purpose.

Romance purports a dialectic between loss and solace

But this clerestorial poem
Has no house

Admits no refuge
Denies anything I can remember

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SUMMER FIRES

Beyond the flaming pines
I stood selling melons
Perpendicular to everything I love
Each melon like a note from the Diabelli Variations
Into this smoking dark world

The sky still blue
I flowered above the smoke
My skull turned into paper
Fingers elongated El Greco

Lurch-sailing through a thorny crowd
And home with a truck bed of melons

The driveway at dusk is the real home the home sits next to

On each brown brick a mute brown bird
Struck and still like hammers on strings
As in the white air to every black branch
Art lost, and lost, and lost

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THE SIDE OF THE PAGE WITH INK ON IT

Giving what goes away,
A name of something, a face
On its core, its windspore, winding
From terra to terrace,

Earth takes of earth
What nurtures itself,
We speak of ourselves
On the tip of its tongue

Magma and temperature alone in the dark
Happily so
Enough with stars and instability
Enough of the digressions
That work on my heart,

Do not hearten me
Do not scold me with your kisses
Or caress me, stranger, with blows –
Lead me to the end
Where simplicity begins,
Begift the silence of a tired planet,

Let us wander
Far from the woken,
Far from the wonder of words.

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LAUREN RUSSELL is the author of one previous chapbook, *The Empty-Handed Messenger* (Goodbye Better, 2009). Her poems and reviews have appeared in various places, including *Eleven Eleven*, *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, *Harp & Altar*, *Lyre Lyre*, *Boog City*, *The Recluse*, and *Van Gogh's Ear*. She is an M.F.A. student at the University of Pittsburgh and counts the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, AmeriCorps*NCCC, and Goddard College among her alma maters.

Lauren Russell casts a sharp eye on the urban landscape around her, carving profiles and cutting out silhouettes from real experience. The strongest influences on her are the people she deals with directly—lovers, roommates, ogles from the subway, fellow patients, pets. “The lover, as artifact, is constant as long as the jewelry remains broken,” she writes, dismantling her attachments to fluster assertions of overarching facts. Russell favors a singing absence, where each detail is a transitional truth, and each word a temporary home. “It may be known that she allowed a dismantling.”

—**Edmund Berrigan**

Lauren Russell's poems remind us what authenticity might mean and be. They are full of “the possibilities of grief” and “insubordinate frizzle.” Simultaneously raw and crafted, these poems bubble and boil with life.

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Selections from
Dream-Clung, Gone
poems by
Lauren Russell

Selections from
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Style

She wants to contain hair
like a nonrestrictive phrase
flanked by commas

“, running away from school bus and braid,
white flecks flaking from the awkward itch,”
or
“, at eighteen shorn with sewing scissors
in frenzied pursuit of butch,”
or
“, picked and ’froed and temporary home
to six-legged squatters on an Arkansas trail,”
or
“, grown out and seized by a printing press,
wound around an ink roller, warping impressions,”

but the strands unravel, crisscross
punctuation, mirrors converging like parentheses to reflect
snarled splices, split-end infinitives, tangled transitions, two-toned
inversions, matted connections, broken-off interjections,
insubordinate frizzle
spiraling
in run-on unconstraint.

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Unpacking

“Categorizing can become a spiritual practice,”

I explained to the potential roommate who remarked
on the verbosity of my moving box labels:

Lit Journals & Anthologies P-Z,

Reference inclu. cookbooks & misc. papers,

Wall Decorations: Pictures, Broadsides, Hangings, etc.

“Eventually,” I said, “You find something that cannot
be categorized, that you don’t know how to pack or unpack,
and then you’ve reached the uncertainty of enlightenment.”

In which box, I wonder, did I put the bottle of long-expired
disinfectant, held onto for years because a dead man
once used it to clean a cut on the sole of his foot:

Photos, Childhood Diaries & Sentimental Stuff

or Misc. Bathroom, inclu. pills?

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I Slept in a Maze-Pacing Boat

I slept in a boat studded
with hubcaps, with beer caps,
with castanets at the prow castanets
painted violet and gold.
I slept in a boat sometimes
with a woman and sometimes a man
and always a cat called
Two-by-Four
for the planks he pawed
for the planks he stamped
with his paw print cigar print:
catnip ash clawed-up mast.
The cat and I and the boat we stole—
we always fled when the full moon foaled.

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Dream-Clung, Gone

Undertow of dive bar juke unboxed
Driving past a rust-red door unjambled
Coin-operated groove side-shimmies, unflung
A seamlessly upholstered stool's unwound

Once I fell in love with an Absence. It outgrew the apartment and wouldn't take off its clothes. After we moved it turned taut and slinky, hid in shadows or slid provocatively beneath my coat. Three winters now and the Absence is restless. It's blown across the river, arrives late when it meets me for beer. The Absence is singing:

This is the song of a dawned dance
This is the dance of a dusk-drawn song
This is the fall of a moaned trance
This is the clang of a dream-clung gong

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"Chris O. Cook's *To Lose & to Pretend* is evidence of a fine mind at work, a collection of poems that never settles for the obvious. His work probes the apathy and alienation of his generation, wielding poetics like a cudgel to extract the essential from the incoherence of pop culture vapidness that we have accepted as our metaphor. Startlingly honest, unafraid of humor, these poems force you to sit down and take notice."

-Srinivas Cheeni Rao

"Chris Cook is a true Original, in that he is a Classic."

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To Lose & to Pretend
poems by
Chris O. Cook

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To Lose & to Pretend
poems by
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Velveteen Intestine

The flirtatiously smug empath with the bob near the papasan
took her time in late Summer comparing my soul to the age
when she'd wrap, to the light of one unshaded lamp, herself
in garbage sacks, pretending they were leather.

Parties are like involuntary debates over belief in talent.
It's time I started dealing with the fact I won't be famous.
When you see me, apologize. I'll apologize back.
Faith is the easiest thing in the world

not to have, so cut it out already. Get to the point
where the language eclipses the grating like rising dough;
where the Poem is a grey cat that acts like it wants to be petted
but doesn't. Gangster-flip an oversized coin skewed *guilt & shame*.

Skim it down your culture like a dimmed Hall of Fishes.
Wait for it to once-around & back up your spine.
Girls imagine wearing things & boys imagine touching them,
only most things aren't being touched most of the time.

When Edna Millay was 24 she cut herself with a stage
knife somehow over the heart in Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*,
then later became like a story someone tells about how
there used to be a rosebush in some certain place.

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but doesn't. Gangster-flip an oversized coin skewed *guilt & shame*.

Skim it down your culture like a dimmed Hall of Fishes.
Wait for it to once-around & back up your spine.
Girls imagine wearing things & boys imagine touching them,
only most things aren't being touched most of the time.

When Edna Millay was 24 she cut herself with a stage
knife somehow over the heart in Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*,
then later became like a story someone tells about how
there used to be a rosebush in some certain place.

Admirable Fooling

There are more Good Nerds in the world than Evil Nerds,
& that's why Evil will one morning lie buried
like broken toy guns beneath snow & sawdust.
I can get away with the word *heartbreaking*
because I used to cut myself making paper wizard hats
with a whoop-jug, before passing through the hedgerows
to seek out the other gifted children.

The first was Rufus, deadliest on the seaboard with a crayon
but only if you cooperated. He had a real record player.
The last was also Rufus. He retired undefeated
to a mysterious island. Every Sunday
he sends a few jokes I never get. If the world were my dream
people would worship waterslides & chill with rhinos.

You wanna die? Simple. Put on a Star
Wars movie & do a shot every time something comes
across as a double entendre. I want to know
how old you have to be to start calling people "son,"
because the world isn't anyone's dream.
Whenever it's a month, I'm amazed it's that month
& it's, like, always a month.

Oh World, are you onto something or on something?
Oh World, if you've got questions, we've got dancers!
World, the thing about a whoop-jug is,
we're bound to brim it with what we love.
Oh & World...when I save you, there'll be this one part
where I jump a bridge in a speedboat. It's gonna be so cool.

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Beginning with a Line from Mitch Hedberg

But isn't every picture of you a picture
of you *when you were younger*? At Smith & 9th
I thought the shredded newspaper was a dead pigeon
until the wind took it. Murder, Words, & Well
are all spoken 3 times in a row in *Hamlet*,
a little charm for the inexorable.

I didn't know
that deadly nightshade grew in Brooklyn, up trellises—
the flowers laid out like the universe dying a heat-death,
even curved a little like time. Susan bought me
a root beer & brought me to Prospect Park. That morning,
from Danny's place in Greenpoint, I'd walked out to buy a towel
& realized there aren't many places you can buy a towel.
All in all, Fall felt like there was no such thing
as temperature.

No-one really ever asked for any of it.
No two people believe they're in the same story.

A student first asked me the opening question
of this poem. It made me laugh all day.
Almost nothing had made me laugh since I'd gotten back
from New York, the *Free Radicals* reading at St. Mark's Church
with its flat graves. The editrix was tall & pale.
A lot of tall, pale girls write Poetry. I like
trains, *Hamlet*, trees, baths, Fall, tall pale girls, & saying *editrix*.
That's about everything. My other student is a dancer,
but everyone expects comedy because he's a boy.

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One! One Poem! Ah, Ah, Ah!

Once my uncle who stands funny asked me if a million was a lot. I told him numbers, like sadness or skyscrapers, are only big or small by what you put next to them. Approximately one-sixth of the people I invited to my *Midsummer Night's Dream* Party actually showed up—but that would have been enough if they were dancing.

Fucking over & again one day becomes Winter, closer but more oblique the light & heat. In a flowy magenta skirt a girl is worth six girls. You hear *inordinately* as an adverb, but hardly *inordinate* as straight-up adjective. If my heart exploded right now this would be my death poem. Dickinson made it to one poem less than 1,776.

People think stuff's in the *Iliad* that's actually in the *Odyssey*, & that stuff's in the Bible that's not in *anything*. People want there to be beginnings & endings, & want numbers to mean things all by themselves. A Master told me Poetry is about beginnings & endings & that people who like middles should write fiction.

I once tricked a kid named Adam into believing they'd discovered a new number, & that we were going to have to change math. I wonder who he thought *they* were. One day machines will write music. "I love you" just means "I forgive you for not being perfect," & you should never forgive anyone for not being perfect.

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Joe Pan grew up along the Space Coast of Florida and attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His debut poetry book, *Autobiomythography & Gallery*, was named "Best First Book of the Year" by *Coldfront* magazine and was shortlisted for the Yale Younger Poets' Prize, the Walt Whitman Award, and the National Poetry Series. His work has appeared in such places as *Art World*, *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Greensboro Review*, *Glimmer Train*, and *The New York Times*. He is the founder of Brooklyn Arts Press, an independent publishing house, and lives in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

"*Autobiomythography & Gallery* is the best new book of poetry read by this reviewer this year. It is incredibly strong."

- **Matt Soucy**, reviewing for *Coldfront Magazine*

"In his passionate response to Jonathan Franzen...Ben Marcus hails 'writers who have pounded on the emotional possibilities of their mode,' who 'bend the habitual gestures around new shapes.' I celebrate every time a book with Marcus' sensibilities rolls off the press. Joe Pan's first collection of poetry is such a book."

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"Joe Pan's stunning debut collection explores and collides the dual experiences of self and world in a language and music superbly calibrated. There is an authority of voice and a sweep of experience that graces each of these beautifully made poems."

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Selections from
**Autobiomythography
& Gallery**
poems by
Joe Pan (Millar)

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What is Given

All things being equal, I'd say the world was most interested in its own piracy, engaged in constant erasure. The February snow a kind of performance art involving light and weight dispersal, the wind hastening behind like paparazzi in a celestial cover-up. The earth immured, retracting. A neighborhood dog kennels its muzzle in a dead tire, scavenging for warmth. If death is natural, as we believe, then the death of the world is natural. Nature's mistake was creating its own weaknesses, and all things are made in the likeness of that divorce. The red truck sliding through a stoplight near Governor Ave is a form of subtraction, the twin bars of an equals sign narrated by tire tracks. It jumps the curb, careening headlong through a chickenwire fence. When the driver gets out, he is shaken. He cannot articulate. This narrative should have ended in death. The world retracts. Between conscious moments lies these moments of stilled belief, of inquisitive imminence. There in the snow the driver looks awkward, looks skyward, looks down. He discovers only himself, but that is a given.

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Gin

The linkages (bare-wired) gone watt & red hot,
sun-stamped earth, wait for me seamstress
of the double hemisphere, ruby-clawed hopeful bird.
Berry-ginner of the lower Guadalupe, when in flight
you danced my twin dreams of you: cross-current dandelion
freed of concentration / unbidden wind-driven dart.
Wick-feathered funky dropped-down smoothed-over
thing, light chasing from your movement, announcing
your arrival in broad colors. The stars reconciled & remitted:
there should have been no world not blue for you, warmed
about a dew-dipped belly, caramel & yellow dappled
Pekinese of the Pouty Lip, but beakwise—the whole
stage gone sour beneath: the proliferation of garbage piles,
the railway intracoastal and toxic sludge puddles. If I
found the right words (redressed?) I could keep you
safe in language, syllable bound & yes, language a trap
in itself, validation through intonation, not much braver
than silence, but hopeful. Man's unmatched missions of mutability
unwound your wristwatch, warbler, leaving you fobbed
& forgotten. It's hard to convince the living the value of
the near-dead not dying when death confirms their living;
no chain of being but a coat which fits us all just once.
The linkages burn & burn—a white needle thinning
through thinning fabric like a javelin unraveling air.
The world's great coat tightens like a lozenge in the throat.

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Zero Effect

It seems that everything is moving
away from me, boxy compacts
driving beyond the last fenceposts,
pool balls dropping into pockets.
A kind of theft, really, how the small dog
inhales my breath as I reach down
to pet it before it scampers away.
Even my most insidious poker face
has seen my well-earned dollars
drift southward in the arms of friends harvesting
their shiny cranberries from the money bog.
Wanna go another round? Hell, hit me.
Vector formulas and stratagem of battle,
pickup lines and names for faces, stout
and slippery as language. There is nothing
so silent as soup mopped up with wheat bread,
a cat eclipsing pages from a book, and there I go,
outgrowing the sweat and skin of me,
fidgeting to loosen each ribbon of nuance.
There was a time once when I would never
have said there was a time once.
See that nothing flowering
between each star? So what about it.
There's me pondering the twenty-seven
corners of my apartment from the tub, twenty
minutes behind schedule, that person I could be
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a bagel in his mouth. I go after him
but the floor is wet. Perpetually wet.
The flakes of dead skin remain innumerable.
There's this hat I flip cards in, black and oval,
lined with silk, inscribed with a name
in black magic marker. I try on the hat. I try
on the name and it fits.

Slight Fit

All clouds are the new
retro.

Each mystifies
the next, an apparition
of apparatus.

Here comes the next big
thing—a camel squeezed through
a needle squeezed through the engines
of a private jet.

Reality is just Time slipping
on a skin. War is a lonely
hot date with itself.

Sit back. Here's the part
we imagine ourselves.

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