

LITERANT

Issue #2 Oct 2020



ITERANT

ISSUE #2—OCTOBER 2020

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**WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS OF EXISTING
(ONE BRICK AT A TIME)**

POEM FOR THE FIRE SEASON

early in the morning
 when it was dark
the electric wires

cut weird black shapes
across the sky

 the little silver fox
came to our lawn

his ears kept swiveling

 he looked away into the trees

 little fox
 with silver ears
 I watched you

so long I forgot
the spider god

 was angry
 I had crushed
 its child

under a box of expensive water

last October a wire fell

and everything burned

so this year from the bare hills
 down the foxes came
with silver ears

I know those crows
 will eat

my stupid hopeful sunflowers
their big green leaves

 in rare pure sorrow

plunge up

toward their mother

in the night
whatever they dream
is part of some solution

people of the enclave

do more than listen

to the tired ones

straggling up the hill

to the police station
chanting the names

listen to the cave

off in the distance
say to the hammers:

when I am sleeping
I am working
on understanding

what we must do



THE FLOWER, THE GUN, THE GIFT

GENTLE DEATH POEM

is what I had written in my sleep
with that hand that belongs to no one
I wish I could remember that world
it probably had some birds in it
alien punctuation marks
clarifying the sky
here in this one
we stare and stare
a blank grey that is basically
a color that isn't even one
bouncing off the leaves in the yard
making everything lunar
my waking hand doesn't believe
my dream hand
it says death can be gentle
I'm out of time to argue
it's easier just to stay inside
the idea that I get to choose
which one of us will go first
and which one will stay
here to take care of the little leaf
that fell into our house and now hides
from the darkness of the actual
from the wind's eternal certainty

POEM FOR WITOLD GOMBROWICZ

I'm reading your diary
is a weird thing to say
even to someone dead
who lived in Argentina
furious at Europe
for all its stupid museums
full of poor people crying
for the amusement of strangers
I can vacuum all day
and the book will be waiting
open all the wrong doors
and your voice will be there
saying poets are enemies
of anything real
they think flowers love them
and every pastry
deserves an elegy
I took a train to Poland
and breathed in
so much black smoke
near to the odd rust colored
monument to your birth
made of local stone
the train hurtled through
vast forests whose names
sound like monsters
I took so many notes
about vital matters
of the heart and mind
it's a kind of discipline
not to remember
who I was in the past
I hoard all my energy
for future atoning
on your birthday
to honor you
I will pull down my trousers
with total disrespect
and pee on a very old tree

Trying to Speak Woman in My Own Tongue

because, I be bride,
sometimes, I be taken...

My hunger produces
lost friends, apartments,
their hunger expands
into labyrinths

I am rebirthed by
First Lust and Jealousy
Here, I be a xenophobe
estranged from

adapting to their
custom, their
language. My body
as wonderland, as

kept, as what
happens to me
while I've gone
missing

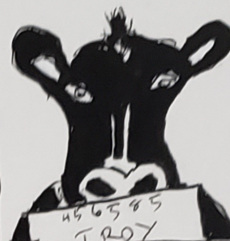
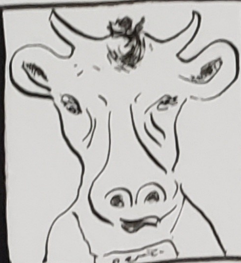
Me as their Minotaur,
an exotic of their
imagining.

The children of
Lack & Plenty
have nothin on me

ROSANNE BRUNO & ANNE CARSON

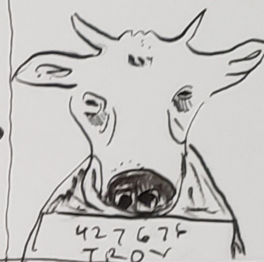
ENTER CHORUS OF COWS AND DOGS, SINGING ENTRANCE SONG OF THE CHORUS ANTIPHONALLY WITH HEKABE

CH: WHAT ARE THOSE CRIES? H: OH MY CHILDREN.



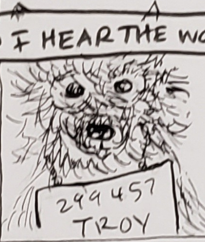
CH: ARE THE GREEKS ON THE MOVE?

H: WHO CAN KNOW.



CH: DO THEY PUSH FOR HOME?

H: PLEASE NOT KASSANDRA.

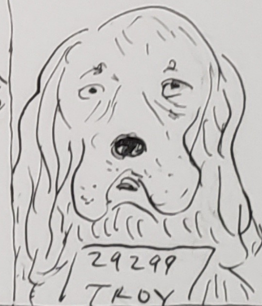
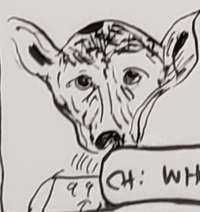


CH: DID I HEAR THE WORD SLAVERY?

H: STIFFEN YOUR SOULS.

CH: HAS THE HERALD COME?

H: IT'S THE LOTTERY NOW.

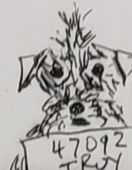
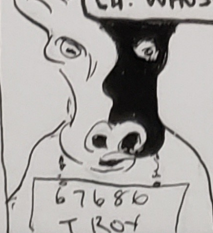


CH: WHOSE SLAVE WILL I BE?

CH: WHOSE SLAVE WILL I BE?

CH: WHOSE SLAVE WILL I BE?

CH: WHOSE SLAVE WILL I BE?



H: WHOSE SLAVE WILL I BE?

ENTER ATHENE, A BIG PAIR OF OVERALLS, CARRYING AN OWL MASK IN ONE HAND



A: NO LONG FACES, POSEIDON.
WAR'S OVER.

CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?

P: CAN I PREVENT YOU?

A: NO. HERE IT IS. A PROPOSAL OF INTEREST TO US BOTH.

P: IS THIS A MEMO FROM UPSTAIRS? LIKE ZELUS?

A: OH NO. IT'S JUST - I'M FEELING SAD FOR THE TROJANS.

P: YOU? YOU HATE TROY! YOU HAPPILY SAW IT FLATTENED TO THE GROUND!

A: TIME TO LET ALL THAT GO, SWEETIE.

YOU AND I ARE ON THE SAME TEAM NOW.

P: WHICH TEAM IS THAT?

A: OKAY FORGET TEAMS. THE TROJANS WERE MY ENEMIES ONCE BUT NOW I
WANT TO CHEER THEM UP AND GIVE THE GREEKS A REALLY BAD VOYAGE
HOME.

Black Book of Creation

I.

How far can you? she said, *far*, he said.

How far? she said, *so far*, he said, *that*

remembering all of them becomes

a chant, he said. *I only* she said

can go this far she said, *Great, great, gre.....*

II.

Some sounds invite eavesdropping to all

the before. Before all the gates of

never return, before tongues couldn't

be trained in what they no longer are

Before they knew about choosing

between leaving of will or leaving

of force, before the before that is time

we didn't call time. Before there

was anything colored about it.

That is - then, here, and there - are not

separate but on a table

III.

Mother sits fashioning her children.

Cosmic clay, stardust, and obsidian

for resilience. Dreams for seeing, and

the things not contained by language, and

hardships sometimes cloaked as nightmares

Story stitched into DNA like

home -distant -multiplied by

separation anxiety, forgotten

becomes the exponential force that
becomes a country expanded beyond

its own self. Beyond the shell that
holds it all together

IV.

Creation is the conversation,

What do you want to be? said she

Anything we choose, said we, *But what*,
said she, *because the world* said she, *will*

choose if you don't said she. *Magic, the*
ability to manipulate

circumstance, said we. *It shall be*, said
she. *Time lords*, said we, *to collapse and*

expand time at will, said we, *Visibility*
and invisibility at will,

said we. *It shall be*, said she. *But*, said
she, *as gifts are given, they can be*

can be stolen, said she. *So, with each*
of these things, said she, *it shall be a*

veil of forgetting, a spirit that
resists destruction, and these wings,

said she, *Don't let anyone tell you*
they don't exist! Don't let anyone

ever tell you they are wax!

V.

Funny how the universe beats
against itself creating echoes.

How far can you go back? they said, *Far*,
she said, *how far?*, they said, *So far*, she

said, *It becomes a chant*, she said, *I*
know all the names of my mothers...



WEIGHTED EXPRESSION (WHAT IF THERE WAS NO HIERARCHY)

Anatomy Lesson for the Officer

That is your head. That is your heart.
Elbow, bicep, knee, thigh.
And the valve in back of you, your behind,
I think it may be a genital part which
holds your genital part from in front.
I am not saying Go f. yourself.
You have done that. You have fd our species.
I am saying, That is your holster, your gun,
your handcuffs. And those are his hands in your cuffs.
And that is a human throat you are kneeling
on. That is our throat, our brother's,
our son's, maybe our father's throat.
That is your mother's, your father's, your son's,
your daughter's throat. That is your daughter's throat.



THERE WAS DECAY ONCE, THERE'S STILL DECAY (REVOLUTION)

String Theory

What colors mark our lives?

Today I spun a future in vivid juniper
green, in melancholic rose, in hushed gold
touched dawn, and deep ambrosia red—
the shade of nightfall over the Sinopah.

The names of each painted strand were chosen
by someone else, but like a child learning to speak
or a visitor in a foreign language, I blended the sounds
of their names together. Each hue was a mirage—
a trick of light, a fascination. Each fired
an unpredictable rhythm of cones and cylinders
in the eye. If color was biological, automatic,
mechanical, what sense could the eye hold?

What meaning eluded the tongue?
The name of each color wrapped itself
around filaments of silk and wool,
but each strand escaped embrace

like some possible love too hard to grasp,
like the wooden umbrella that danced
in the air much faster than the gears
could pull it, turning threads into a tarantella,

a glide of tambourine, a flash of insight,
an arm raised high, a ribbon flying
forward, a human form almost divined
then lost in the commotion.

The yarns spoke no truths,
they only provided a future.
On the unvarnished wood,
their mad dance left behind just

a few scraps of juniper mint, gold
like the dawn on her cheek, a quiet
red blossom, and the nightfall
over the Sinopah. The moments mixed

like velveteen where they had been
forgotten. Strings ran parallel, intersected,
spiraled out. They made an uncommon nest,
which I placed in my palms and embodied

for a moment the hues and rhythms
of their enchantment. The colors startled
in their connection and dissolution.
They wove an entire cosmos in my hands.

Sunlight over Reykjavík

Since I've been gone, I've had this theory
that relatives, friends, even great loves
continue to live wonderful, peculiar,

cinematic lives at a great distance,
even if I couldn't see them everyday,
every year, or even once again—

This is what makes distance possible:
to live alongside but separate.

They would live parallel to me in India
and Singapore and Germany, in Japan
and England, in Australia,

down the West Coast and the East—
And every few years, we'd meet
and be surprised at how a nephew

seemed taller, a beloved cousin
a little bit more plump, and a great aunt,
quirky but a little slower.

This is what made distance possible,
but all those years ago, it was hard
to watch Nani's long hair grow silver,

the light of her smile softer,
her eyes just a bit more tired.

I think of her often when gliding
past cumulus clouds that turn
into waterfalls and castles
over new planets like Reykjavík.

She was the first woman I knew
driven by words and wanderlust.
That is to say, it feels mystical
the way we love and exist
in separate times, that continents

and oceans, satellites
and telephone wires hide the interplay
between night and day,

that affection and touch
are our waking shadows, that this
is what makes distance possible.

Words and wanderlust
are his day and my night—

What good is distance
when you're entangled
for good?

Ensnared by gestures and words
and the promises of touch
that reverberate and rewrite the body.

Spooky action at a distance:
a bit like the sunlight over Reykjavík,
a bit like the luxury of being a passenger

and rejoicing at leisure, rejoicing
at having the time to watch and read
and write and remain remote.

But even for the closet voyeur,
who steers the journey—the pilot
or your eyes? When we see the hurt
distance causes, is it not the same?

In waking sleep, in the dawn's glow
over Reykjavík, the first words that come
to mind are: glacial planes, mountain fog,
hot-spring skies.

The air is occupied by a blue so true,
so finite and impossible to break,
it could only belong to Reykjavík
and to one devastating morning
in September nearly twenty years go.

The plane descends below
the cloud bank and suddenly
everything is chemical gray

and cotton. The ground is black-green:
a lava-rock speckled brown.
The tarmac glows:

we glide between
dotted aurora borealis lights

and parallel lines.

But who conducts us now?

Is it me, or him, or love,

or is it you?



POSSIBLE PIG

BIANCA STONE

Of Delight

The first time I knew we had made it to Paris, was when, after watching the New Year's fireworks illuminate the evening sky, we returned to our room, and I slipped into the bath and watched the water magnify the light against the blue-green tiles. The faucet rushed on as I settled in, and my fingers, sliding to turn it, shook off small drops. Each fell back like a diamond. The water around me glittered and swayed, catching the crisscrossed shadows and luminosity of the overhead lights. The room was warm and silent. And for a quiet moment, the water falling from my fingertips felt like an unasked wish had been granted.

The hotel must have been made during the fin-de-siècle, and was somewhere on the edge of the 17th and 8th of Paris's snail-like arrondissements. It was a place that felt sleepily suburban. The neighborhood was quiet and full of immigrants and döner-kebab shops and young families pushing strollers passed stores that had closed earlier that night.

Our hotel was outside of the city's charmed inner life. You had to cross a bridge to cross a bridge to get to a place where you could hear the murmurs of dinnertime conversation. And the clinking of glass and cutlery as the bateaux mouches radiated down the Seine at night. It was an even longer walk to all those celebrated icons of tourism. A stroll down the Champs Élysées or an amateur photoshoot under la Tour Eiffel seemed miles away.

But we hadn't come to Paris to be tourists. We were here to peak at the storage rooms of the Musée Guimet to decipher if the Buddhist statuary they had recently purchased were in fact authentic Gandharan art or just forgeries. You were here to read the ancient inscriptions and decipher their value. And I had come to the city to relearn a life of art, to figure out how one became just a poet.

It was my first time in France. When we left Boston, I was twenty-six going on twenty-seven. And when we arrived in Paris, I was shocked by how the air even felt lyrical that evening as the city shut down around us. It was mid-winter, and by the time we carried our suitcases up from the metro to the hotel, almost everything was closed around us for Saint-Sylvestre. We checked in, watched the clock's hour-hand inch closer to midnight, and hurried to deposit our luggage in our slim and compact hotel room. It was a place where the bed hit against the wall, which bumped against the desk. There was just a small alcove for an electric coffee pot and a folding stand for one of our suitcases. The other remained on the floor as we darted out to get dinner before the lights of the remaining restaurants closed.

But a few blocks away were the open-air night marchés, and there we picked out a small round of gruyère and some light bread and strawberries for desert before the joyous crowds on the streets dispersed. Back in our room, we made a picnic on the bed and opened the porte-fenêtre into the courtyard below. Beyond the white-gauze drapes was a December night about to greet a New Year. Friends and families finished late-night dinners. Pre-war jazz played from the ivy-covered windows. Somewhere, around the corner a couple made love. They sounded nothing like the movies. A pair of men smoked over their balcony with drinks in hand.

A few minutes to midnight, we would run to the nearest bridge to watch the fireworks. From some remote corner of the Seine, as we kissed and embraced at midnight, I would think how funny it was that even gunpowder was first invented to celebrate art and joy. We had been together then for nearly two and a half years. And I was sure that on that bridge, under those fireworks that exploded like diamonds and decorated the night sky with streamers of flickering gold, orange, bronze, and blue, one of us would surely whisper to the other, *marry me*.



BUT WE KEPT FIGHTING

If We Could

turn time into space
it would take some unknown
number of years
for you to catch up to me
not that catching up
except in the casual
way we mean let's tell one another
what's of significance
or memorable, of consequence
or worth repeating or meaningful
in order to see if we still like one another
as much as we think we do
is more reasonable

Alexithymia

What I feel says it is stronger than me
 Name any object a person carries everywhere
 I overheard someone say
 It is a great relief to understand
 We remained strangers
 She put the crow's long tail down in the dust
 What is your dad's girlfriend's dog's name?
 When did your mom save the baby deer from the wolves?
 Our town's Tree Warden and its Shade Tree Committee
 Discussed solemnly what's wrong with my Metasequoia
 I call it a cypress because I need to call it that
 They say its own roots are strangling it
 They say it's unlikely anyone can save it
 That was said a good decade ago
 This makes me feel stricken with thoughts
 About New Jersey's Pine Barrens
 Because I haven't seen them
 I want to mention the cypress trees
 Of Deer Range, Naomi and Jesuit Bend, Louisiana
 I heard a friend say
 Who is/ by what/ somewhere/ today/ reminded of me?
 And I liked it well enough to repeat it
 On the solemn elevator an agitated man
 Looked at me apologetically
 His t-shirt said REPEAL THE DEATH PENALTY
 In the solemn cafe diners in black suits
 Exclaimed over WaWa scavenged ramen
 While breaking eggs over steaming bowls
 They took hopeful pictures to send home and around the globe
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a little dismal, a little fabulous
 We wanted to visit the Rosenbach Museum
 To admire Marianne Moore's rooms
 But we arrived too late
 A man attending to the Rosenbach Museum
 Liked us a little more once he learned
 We came from Amherst, Massachusetts
 Not because another beloved poet entered into our conversation but
 Because he once lived in Amherst and liked its trees
 It felt like a National Park he told us but he still couldn't let us
 Into Marianne Moore's rooms
Another time, we said as we passed out the door.
 One of us said, yeah, there should always be another time
 I think I did
 But it may have just been me wanting that to be true



ALWAYS SAYING I, MEANING WE

No Way to Be

I feel as if I've already died

in too many ways I feel
as if I'm already dead
I take in trash tv, politics, and emotional junk

& think

that's the god-awful truth
maybe not
the most obvious parts

but more likely

the real living people
whose work it is to act
as if it is

to make a living

I feel as if how I feel now
feels how it is when you're already dead
and life goes on

The Difficult Decision

has now been made
so many times
by so many
it is a wonder
how it keeps on being made
as if it has become necessary
to tell ourselves
when we come to the moment
when the decision must be made
things have to have changed
& it becomes once more necessary
to take into consideration
the same concerns though necessary
to pretend we have come to this conclusion
independently without noticing how uniformly
the difficult decision is being made
as if it has never been made before
just about everywhere on earth



**THERE IS RARELY A MOMENT OF TRUE VULNERABILITY WHERE THE
TRAUMA AND PAIN FROM SIMPLY EXISTING CAN BE EXAMINED
OR DIGESTED**

Ghosts of Petrified Broccoli

I.

We returned, overdue by half a year.
I hadn't opened our refrigerator in six months.
What does consistent cold without care do to a garden of vegetables
in an abandoned New York apartment after how many blurry days?
I beheld my new bouquet of petrified broccoli—
burned green-black by turning unto itself during the doom.
A dried out dream deferred, to say the least.
I married it to the trash which was a pile on the floor.
There were other forgotten things I needed to toss
in the re-do of re-leaving the right way.
There were twelve pork dumplings
that now looked like hairy dark-gray storm clouds,
a herd of them rotting in a plastic container.
I was afraid it was sushi at first.
For that, each of the twelve would have been breathing.
Upon opening the door the alive things could shut me out of my own fridge,
a favorite place I hadn't peered inside for such a long time.
The almond milk was ahead of the butter
smooth
slippery
gold
contained in its clear incubator.
Long ago, a wife lived here.
Long ago, a life lived here.
I had left in such haste.
Whatever I was running away from did not catch me.
This rush could not hush.
It was beside itself with filth
and mayhem
and confusion
and dream.

II.

I thought I had left the apartment fit for kings.
All the dishes washed and set.
When we walked in, it looked like ten boss-giants had lived and fought there,
maudlin fools in a loud shebang of war.
The house was an angry fuss.
Papers everywhere. Purple curlers on the cable box. A sock on the kitchen table.
Home Depot boxes tossed like brown dice. Broken art. Dishes in the sink. Dishes in the sink?
Other than that, I had done pretty well.
Still, I raised both eyebrows at my own self,
judging the woman looking back at her own Pompeii.

III.

We had grown so heavy and fat wherever we came from,
that we broke the futon where we slept.
We took the cracked wood down to the street in an elevator,
setting it steady in front of neighbors who carried the broken thing away before sun up.
Our neighbors laughed loudly and chased each other up and down the block
well into the night.
They held an island techno party hosted by the boom boom bass of somebody's car.
The hooptie DJ in charge never needed to sleep.
I complained to my lover from the bed we had made on the floor.
We had to keep the windows open due to my hot flashes.
Do you hear that? We never hear such loud noise in the country.
He laughed and laughed, pussy-whipped by the city's clangor.
The next night, on our walk, a rat flashed across the sidewalk
before the next step of my green orthotic boot.
I screamed, Did you see that— rat?
My friend pretended not to see it,
skipping ahead with only jazz in his ears.

IV.

I cried when I saw the city, rolling into its lights from the car on a bridge.
A trip and a trump, a glamorous dump that felt like my old friend.
The hellos were sweet, and the gas was off, no hot water.
The moon was an orange pill to kill.
The burritos from the bodega were stuffed.
The croissants owned their butter and the carrot cake was as thick as bricks.
The accents sold me soda and gave me ancient faces from other places.
We dragged our blankets to the laundromat, a load so heavy—
it broke the handle off my 99 Cent Store wagon
tinkering only half way back up the concrete hill.
We jangled our keys while busses belched on down the road.
A sister moved me out the way with the same teeth-sucking and scowl
I save for my best private aggravations.
We were home. Phantoms on the elevator.



**I THOUGHT TO MYSELF ONE DAY AND I FIGURED I'D SHARE, THAT IF IT
CAME DOWN TO IT, THE SYSTEM WOULD DESTROY ITSELF BEFORE IT
LET SOMEONE TAKE OVER.
(WHAT IS THE SYSTEM YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT?)**

SHE SAYS

when you die, I will still live
here in this house that is not really

a house it's an apartment with no stairs
to the bedrooms, with no garage only

lint and spare change below the couch's
belt. When you die, she says, I will wear a belt.

See these unused loops at my waistline? These
tunnels? I will thread them. When you die,

I will expand to fill the spaces. And I will
have a child, a girl, like myself, with hands

like these. Did you always want a girl
with hands like these? When you die, I will reach

the highest shelves, my fingers, tough
and nimble as giraffe tongues. I will be

so grown up. I will eat like this. Sleep
when I want. The city

will be mine. See those trees outside my window? See
that store on the corner, a frosted cake

filled with cream? See how the road,
slick with rain, becomes a path of light?

When you die,
I will brush my teeth like this, my teeth

new and large as temples
around the flower market of my tongue.

ODE THE DYING

to slow pockets
in the work day
blinds drawn
like sheets
over the still
vacant
blue
body of the river

to crossed legs
which feign to sleep
forever

to time
spent surfing the web
for new couches
velvet green with single
rectangular mattress-like
cushions to receive
the exhausted bodies
of my friends
Sarah Kevin Xela John
to sleep upon if not
like kings then like men
who feel like kings

to the blood
of my loved ones
stored in the tender vaults
of their bodies

no one
in New York
has died

I know

it's slow here
at the transplant office
because
you have not yet drunk
the last sip
from that paper cup of air
not in the ER or ICU

or in Comfort Care
where they no longer come
to take blood cultures
or to test for infection
but deliver instead more pillows
and dope patients
into a cozy haze

sweet stranger
gazing for the last time
at your grown son

I will be right here
browsing for couches
I will drink the cold dregs
of my coffee
I will lean back
nearly tipping in my chair

to stretch my boredom
and spread to your hospital room
the strange magic
by which the secondhand
of the office clock bobs
like the head of a young boy
nodding off beside his mother
on an early train



ALWAYS SAYING I, MEANING WE

ALL OF THIS

We could spend
all of our days

paying rent

or taking out
the garbage or

mowing the lawn

each week
in a different

direction

so the grass
lays down better

and call it love

and it wouldn't be
wrong, but that

isn't what matters

most, only
makes our lives

not less but

more as we get
ready for the big

day—waiting

for those who will
take us away

from all of this—

THE POET

How can I live
with you when we

can't agree

on where's
the best place

to break the line?

SO LONG

It's my turn
to go

rogue. Last

night I went
to bed

after feeding

the cat
and thought—

I hadn't

written you
in quite

awhile

and probably
wouldn't

for all I knew

not because
you mean

so little

to me
but just

the opposite—

how too much
of a good

thing can be

enough
to cancel

everything out

and I don't
want that

right now,

maybe not
ever—took me

so long

to get
the flowers

near the lawn

to grow in
just the right

direction—



IT STARTED AS A MISCOMMUNICATION, BUT HOW DO I ACT
WHEN YOU SAY I'M THIS WAY (1)

ARTWORK IN THIS ISSUE

“Da Ep” by Charles Mason III

Charles Mason III (based in Baltimore, MD) received his AA in General Studies from the Community College of Baltimore County, 2010, BFA in Graphic Design from the University of Maryland Baltimore County, 2014, and his Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 2019. He has curated several shows in Baltimore and Philadelphia as well as had solo shows in Baltimore, MD at Maryland Art Place, 2016, and Philadelphia, PA, at Spillway Collective, 2019. He has participated in group exhibitions at Hudson Valley MOCA, Peekskill, NY, the Woodmere Art Museum, Philadelphia, PA, Radical Reading Room, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Harlem, NY, Breaching the Margins, Urban Institute for Contemporary Art, Grand Rapids, MI, and Proximity, Anna Zorina Gallery, New York, New York, to name a few. His work has been included in articles in both the Baltimore Sun and BMORE Art respectively. He has work in the permanent collection of the James E. Lewis Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD, and he is also a recipient of Maurice Freed Memorial Prize.



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