

City Works

Vol. 26

Preface

From the early '70s until 1993, *Fabulous Realities* was San Diego City College's literary voice. Since 1994, City Works has been publishing the poetry, fiction, prose and artwork of City College students along with the work of local and national writers and artists. This year's edition includes Featured San Diego Writer, Adam Deutsch. In addition to this, over 50% of the work in the journal is by student writers, poets, and artists. These pieces were chosen by the student editors of the Introduction to Creative Writing course that was team-taught by Manuel Paul López and Hector A. Martínez. The students in this course evaluated every submission and their rankings determined the Best Student Prose Award, the Best Student Poetry Award, and award for the Best Cover Design. The Featured Writers were selected by faculty editors from a pool of emerging local writers. Finally, the remaining written and art work was selected by the faculty editors from a pool of submissions sent in from around the country.

The City Works staff would like to thank the City College Associated Student Government for its generous support.

We hope you enjoy the 26th edition of *City Works Journal*.

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Featured Local Writer



This year's featured local writer Adam Deutsch is both a writer and publisher. City Works Journal had a chance to catch up with him and ask about his work, his process, and his views on the San Diego Writing community:

Adam can you share with readers how you arrived at poetry?

I got to poetry through being a lousy musician, then a class at community college. I took lessons in guitar for a while, sang in chorus in high school, and even studied music and the music industry my first year of college and played bass in a band with a few friends. But the thing with music is that you have to practice, and there's so much repetition involved. I took a workshop at Nassau Community College on Long Island (where I'm from), and was excited to find another form that handled sound and rhythm, and would let me do something new each time I came to it.

What excites you most about poetry?

There's a transportive nature to some poetry that's exciting, so I'm always looking for the poems that welcome me into some space, or

that pull me there. It's something in the energy of the language that changes us.

What were some books and/or authors that were most influential in your formation as a writer?

The first time I read something and really felt like I got it was Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," and I recall the class being disgusted because they didn't see the satire at work. Then there was a workshop with the 6th edition of the Poulin/Waters anthology, that had some amazing poems by CK Williams, Ai, Li Young Lee; then I discovered Charles Simic's work, and started to really appreciate the painful power of humor in poetry from writers like Jennifer L. Knox, Jennifer Micheal Hecht, Robert Creeley, and Russell Edson. Oddly, however, studying Milton was one of the most important experiences—the endurance and grammar of *Paradise Lost* are still exciting to me.

Can you share with us a little about your writing process? Do you commit to a strict daily routine?

I write daily, but mostly for teaching and other projects. I catch lines and jot them in a notebook, but it's not strict.

Do you write in bursts and then cool off for a time?

I organize in bursts, and I'm usually a couple of years behind my notebook (looking just now, there's writing in my notebook that hasn't been typed yet going back to 2015. I value time, want to divorce the writing from my own memory. If something waits years to be revisited, I've usually forgotten the specific context from which the lines arrived, and I think that helps me write a poem that grants more access. In a sense, I get to discover the meaning of the language without the distraction of my own identity in an experience.

Is music an important and inspiring force in your creative process?

Not really. I listen to either music or news almost constantly in the background, but I don't need it to write.

How important is revision?

Revision is everything. I can only think of a single poem that I conceived, wrote, and put out in the world in the period of a few hours. Everything else is rewritten and revised repeatedly, often for months or years. I don't track drafts or old versions, but writing without revision, for me, is like trying to eat a burger by biting a live cow or having a salad by sticking your mouth in the ground.

How has your approach to generating new work changed or evolved since you first began?

I really started writing in college workshops, so that process of being generative and producing at least one complete-looking piece was a powerful discipline. Though I always had other jobs while in schools, making poems was part of my work that needed to get done. Now that I'm not in that formal workshop environment, it's a little more organic and sporadic.

Do you have a new writing project that you are excited about? Can you tell us a little about it?

A recent project involved taking 4 manuscripts I had considered done, pulling all the published poems from those, and boiling down those into a new manuscript I'm sending out now, with the title *Every Transmission*. Making it felt like a decade of spring cleaning, and now the sun can hit the ground in the house.

I also recently spent a lot of time thinking about things like my cultural context, aesthetic tendencies, and the subjects that consistently haunt me, and that's been exciting to help gain a critical understanding of what I have been and what I intend to do in poems.

In addition to being a published poet, you are the publisher and editor of Cooper Dillon Books founded in 2009. Can you give us a brief origin story of the press?

Briefly, a friend who had another publishing project wanted to start an all poetry press; I was unemployed, but excited to stay in literary publishing somehow (after working on journals for a long time), and we

decided to make books outside of the popular contest model. That partner had to bow out for personal reasons, but dear friends and collaborators Max Xiantu and Christine Bryant have stuck with me. We publish books with “the values that makes poems timeless,” which I think means they’re books that have replay value and have that transportive energy I always want to feel.

What has been most rewarding about this venture?

Cooper Dillon has been able to bring life to some important work by voices that are often fresh. I’ve always been committed to equity with other writers, and split profits 50/50 with all the poets on the press. Other editors in the industry think that’s crazy, but I think it’s vital to make sure poets get compensated for their art.

Beyond the poems, I’ve also really enjoyed building the skills that come with publishing, like typographical and graphic design. Those aesthetics feedback into my own work in a way that I think has taught me to experiment more than I would have based on reading alone.

Have you confronted any challenges, and what we think most would like to know, how did you and the press overcome them?

The biggest consistent challenge of having a press is probably money and the business logistics, but doing the design myself, and also general changes to the publishing business in the last 20 years—has been a huge help, and has made things manageable.

The most difficult challenge I think I’ve faced to date is having to drop an author from the press, due to losing trust in the community. The details of the whos and whats aren’t my stories to share, but community has always been a priority, and people need to be held to account for behavior that harms others, It’s the responsibility of a press to make ethical choices.

As a writer-educator-editor-publisher, what do you make of the current literary landscape in the United States?

It’s awesome! There’s so much poetry being generated by so many powerful and important voices. There are more journals and

presses than ever, and I don't see them in competition, since none of the work is the same. I came up as young writers all had blogs, and I think a lot about how social media has been so essential to keep writers connected, and having conversations and relationships over seemingly insurmountable distances, physical and cultural.

Who should we be reading at the moment?

Kaveh Akbar, Ada Limón, Danez Smith, and Eve Ewing. And Jericho Brown and Ilya Kaminsky. And I am excited to read Tarfia Faizullah's new book, Fatimah Asghar and Terrance Hayes's *American Sonnets for my Past and Future Assassin*.

Can you shout out some recently published or forthcoming Cooper Dillon collections that we should go out and buy immediately?

Our two most recent collections are Linda Dove's *Fearn*, where each poem title starts with "Fear is," going into complex metaphors, fear changing into all kinds of wonderful elements that get into depths I'm excited to spend more time in. We also have Mónica Gomery's *Here is the Night and the Night on the Road*, which has a gorgeous density and cantorial music I hope people hear. There's grief that is surrendered, and transcendence.

If you had the opportunity to edit and publish one of your favorite long dead poets, who would it be and why?

It's hard to take a long dead writer and pull them into a contemporary context. Maybe if we can go back to Whitman in 1855, and just tell him to work on something else, that would be cool. Each subsequent edition of *Leaves of Grass* just gets weaker and more problematic as he goes.

I also think a lot about Emerson. I don't want to change anything he wrote, but I want to give him a hug. We largely celebrate him for his work in transcendentalism, but he was also dealing with tormenting grief of losing his son at 5 years old, and that's a pain people might not be aware of. I just want to be there for him.

What is it like to be a poet in San Diego? In your opinion, is San Diego a nurturing environment for writers? What are some reading series, literary organizations, and/or local publications that are doing a lot of the heavy lifting these days in San Diego?

San Diego is a good place for poetry, I think. At least in 2001, there was an open mic almost every night, and though that's not my scene anymore, there seem to be events all over allowing people to come in and get involved. The events I enjoy most are the NonStandard Lit series (at Gym Standard and Verbatim Books) and Now That's What I Call Poetry (hosted at the magnificent Tiger! Tiger!). Those are two curated events that usually have excellent local writers, and writers touring. I've discovered some of my favorites from these events, like Shannon Tharp and Lucy Ives. Between these two events, and the writers who come through CS San Marcos, SDSU, and Grossmont's Literary Arts Festival and Fall Reading Series, we have solid programming of diverse perspectives and innovative writing. I heard Tracy K. Smith was recently at USD, but didn't hear about it at all, and think that points to some disconnections I hope the various communities can bridge at some point.

I think the SDZineFest is also doing some heavy lifting. I bring small chap/zine projects to the annual festival (when I'm lucky enough to get a spot), but that community and event is one of the most inviting and accessible cultural events we have in San Diego. The community isn't focused on poetry, but zines are a literary art form, and are a vital tool to amplify oppressed and marginalized voices, and to introduce people do a variety of creative processes. Anyone can make a zine, and I hope everyone gives it a try.

Outside the Alibi

To remain a lousy detective,
mystery, hung plywood
over that corner house's door,
the distraction of a newly
groomed poodle who can sit,
shake, give kisses, but never
speak. You curl on couch
snore soft in whimper pillow,
then a fresh hauled fist
knocks, calls action, bark.

Where are we? The wall
keeps changing. People chalk
this list of things to do before
they die, and we read
for clues to the community's
code, discover a self among selves,
basic utilities cut off/paid on.
A mockingbird in a pepper tree
sings back cars' alarms,
what you'll use as excuse.

The Sounds

Gut grunts and their gradual
ramping up to holler, the neighbor
seemed more a human like me
pinned under a car
trying to get stubby fingertips
to catch the edge of that damn bolt.
There're tings like turning forks,

sockets hitting the garage floor
that pile up just out of reach, a freeway
collision: articulated smashings.
He calls this lack of peace an asshole.
We're told he has some kind of rot,
a variety of terminal conditions,
allergies that rupture silence.

He might be like you, starving
through lunch for project focus.
I pray he's simply building ships
in bottles, and really sucks at it,
moans how he can't take it anymore,
Just. One. Decent. Day
a cat's body stretched out longest
in the shadows noon omits.

In the Streets

You have seen the design
 on the tree stumps
the city won't grind
 until their budgets heal.
Some painters were paid
 to art all over
the electrical boxes.
 On Adams, the portraited
people have these
 wide open faces
and someone else
 rattled bloodshot cans
and put gushing
 third eyes in heads,
the kinds of orbs
 that aren't looking
but deserted keyholes
 to peep through
at remnant minds
 if they'd dry out.
The purple Dearly Beloved
 Prince mural
got swastikaed yellow
 touched-up proper
less than ten hours later.
 We're witness
in all states, living
 wrapped in this.

Krakatoa

Waking up on their side
of town is always the same:
our uncombed embrace,

then entering into a cafe's social contract,
lingering long in roast, foodstuffs,
the pit bull who must sit and shake
before resting fully down.

There's these premiums paid
to become lit dizzy, dormant warmth.
So much begins and ends in these mouths.

I drift within the local hardware store,
beyond the bulbs and plugs,
the aisle of lacquer and varnish.

A list of things I need
escapes in the vapor,
so there is this wonder,
and captivation of every little
chirping and rumbling thing.

On Flight 401, Above a Low Cloud Layer

Allowed to stay belted
in shoes, we're told to keep our pocket things
where they belong through simple metal-detectors,
the dignity of remaining put together, this time.

What's smuggled in our stomachs
to sooth our eyes is ours. We're forced to watch
people with faster hearts get naked to the dark
beyond quietly funded curtained stalls.

We tap elbows to each other's ribs at altitude,
accidental kiss, press and hurling through air.
There's a bit of blood wiped on the white
cabin wall, a flight attendant's effort to erase it.

I pull the thin tissue out his delicate powder glove
fingers, destroy clean someone else's
discovered evidence. Who would give up
all the ice in this sky. Who'd give up this sky.