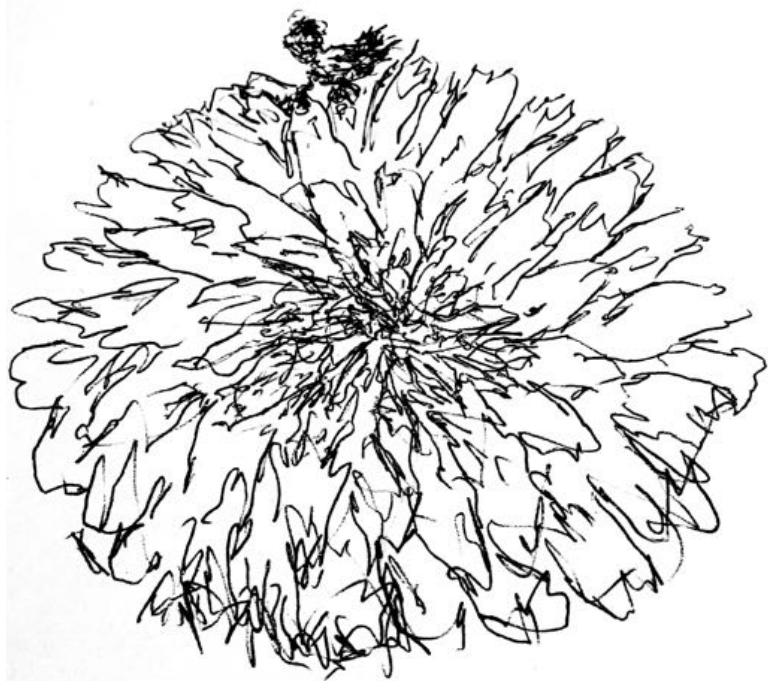


Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



March, 2024 Volume 44 No. 9

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Volume 44

Number 9

At city's edge, far out, lightning
skirmishes then slinks off,
far as it can get
from inner city marigolds.

from "Marigolds & Moonpiece" by M.M. Nichols
Waterways: volume 17 number 5

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Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 44 Number 9

Designed, Edited and Published by

Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel

A. Thomas Perry, Outreach Consultant

contents

Barbara Fisher	4
A. Thomas Perry	10
Robert Cooperman	14
Deborah H. Doolittle	15
Jane Stuart	16
Pat Anthony	17
Sylvia Manning	18
Bradley R. Strahan	20

Drawing by Barbara Fisher

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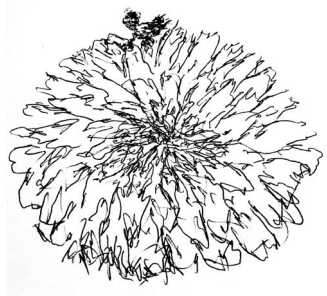
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Barbara Fisher

**Excerpts from a Report on the Last Year (2006)
Of Our Partnership with the High School on
Rikers Island**

1

It's always noisy in the jail;
Rikers Island is close
to LaGuardia airport.

The rush and grinding whine
of planes in the air
passing several times an hour

over the barbed wire fence
cuts through the voices
of the teacher providing instruction,

the poetry performed
by a visiting artist,
the curses of an angry adolescent

The original version of Barbara Fisher's report can be accessed online at
— <https://www.tenpennyplayers.org/evals.html>

You cannot plan for a security lockdown when no one is allowed on or off the island.

Access - egress becomes moot.

Admittance first to the jail and then to the school must be approved by NYCDOC*

Teaching artist without DOE** credentials are not given access even after

the school has been told they had received clearance.

*NYC Dept of Corrections

**Dept of Education

3.

Thomas Perry
made his first visit
to the school
on September 30
for a planning meeting
with the assistant principal,
Dolores Jefferson.

She was his onsite supervisor,
mentor, and made the decisions
as to which class he'd visit.

He made 38 visits
to the Annex, working
with 2 separate classes
at each visit.

Although the principal dissolved
the Empire State Partnership
following an April conference,
Ms. Jefferson informed the principal
that her teachers expected
Mr. Perry to work with them
through the semester and so
he continued through June.

4.

He worked primarily with Ms. Harris the skills teacher to provide one on one writing instruction to students with minimal literacy skills.

At the request of other teachers he also visited their classes and assisted them at less formal Friday afternoon clubs.

5.

Gary A. is a 44 page chapbook by a student mentored by Thomas Perry. 60 copies were distributed.

After the partnership he brought 5 additional chapbooks to distribute among students and teachers.

The door to the Annex is downstairs from a corridor. The students in the entry area leading to the doorway were single file leaning against the wall with arms outstretched and hands flat against the wall.

They were frisked by the COs before being admitted to the school. Strange as that seemed, we knew that frisking happens all the time although we usually weren't witness to it.

Particularly spooky was the short corrections officer, female, in full riot gear, black clothes, vest, baton and white helmet with bars shielding her face and covering the nose and mouth area

Whatever she was prepared for had nothing to do with us as no one stopped us from entering.

All the COs we passed on the way to our first class greeted us warmly. 'The happy family' is what they generally called us.

There were interruptions in every class
by COs appearing in the doorway
to call out names of students
that needed to go for meds,
for exit counseling, or to talk to a therapist.

There were moments of tension
when the young man in protective custody
felt someone had dissed him
because of his appearance. He'd jump
from his chair, get ready to hurl
a punch, had to be talked down.

One morning a fight was averted
when Ms. Colon quickly put a salsa cd
on the machine. We were
at opposite sides of the room,
grinned at each other,
and both of us did a quick dance step.
It broke the tension
and one of the boys snapped his fingers,
pointed and laughed
about teachers being able to dance.

A. Thomas Perry

What Am I? Who Am I?

I am a man who stands
on his own two feet, who
stands for the right to learn,

to teach. The feeling is
oh so sweet. I am an
artist, who is proud, young

and strong. I am an artist,
who reaches and teaches
poetry to our students.

You ask me, "What are you?"
and "Who are you?" I am
a man who is strong in

mind, heart, and soul. I do
my best to stay focused
and powerful with my poetry,

not my fists. You ask me,
"Are you really a teaching artist?"
"Can you really teach the

young generation poetry?"
I say, "You're damn right I can."
Why? 'Cause I am a teaching artist.

I am a strong man with
a lot on my mind. I
teach the younger generation

poetry and writing
and love every minute
of it. You turn around

and disrespect me, say
that I cannot do it.
I cannot teach poetry.

Am I not real? You don't
know me to judge what I am,
who I am. You say I

am no poet. Try teaching
my kids, work in my classroom,
and attend the summer seminars.

I look at you and say,
"Excuse me?" You put me
and my peers down and I

say, "What? What? What? You can
never fill the shoes of
all the teaching artists

who bust their ass doing
what is right. You could never
be like us when it comes

to the arts. Who the hell
are you to judge me? Who
the hell are you to judge

my peers? What am I?
I am a man who tells it
like it is. I am a

teaching artist. I am
a poet. I am a
man who loves the job that

I do. I am a proud
member of Summer Seminar,
that takes place year after year.

In 2006
I'll still be what I say
I am — an artist,

a proud artist, A Teaching Artist.
My poetry, my students' poetry,
my peers' work that they are

proud of says it all.

I am what I am.

Don't forget that. My time

is the present. Our students
are the future. Hate is
in the past. Now you know

who I am. Now what are
you? Who are you?

Peace Love

Robert Cooperman

Now That Colorado

Now that Colorado's legalized marijuana,
its skunky aroma is everywhere.

Like this morning, when I drove my wife
and a visiting research colleague of hers
to the college for an early business breakfast,
the highway was a humidior of weed.

And later, when I pulled into our driveway,
from our next-door neighbor's late-spring
open-window, the Pepe-Le-Pew bouquet.

Something bothers me about this, not
that the whole state's going all Lotos on me,
thus ripe for the Islamic and Mexican invasions
certain politicians preach will keep America
from being great again, but that any schmuck
with enough money can buy excellent pot,
as if selecting a cigar or bottle of wine.

In my day — geezer that I am — it took
some discernment to score prime weed,
and always the fear the dealer was a narc,
or if you sweated sauntering past beat cops,
they'd stop you faster than Killer Kowalski's
professional-wrestler Atomic-Drop-Kick move.

And now the Girl Scouts are going to sell cookies
outside pot shops! I ask you, is nothing sacred?

First appeared in the collection, Reefer Madness

Deborah H. Doolittle

Jack Kerouac's 24th Nervous Jonquil

Nobody knows how broken this house,
this corner of earth,
this garden patch, has become:
 worn out, tired, as my feet
repeating the same old beat on the concrete.

Winter has a purpose that we must
 buy into, again and again,
on a daily basis. Until something changes,
 and it does change. Little nubs
of green parting the dirt one day,

leaping full-blown spikes of leaves the next,
 flowers popping open
like kernels of corn, dressing up in crisp
bonnets and starched aprons,
the frills of two dozen porcelain teacups

and saucers serving their slivers of
sunlight. Quivering, shivering
in the cold edge of winter, eager
 to deliver this dispatch freshly
hatched, with tenderness and care.

Jane Stuart

Inner City Marigolds

No one can ever say
without looking back
over his shoulder and across the wind
why city flowers bloom inside a storm
then disappear in flashes of cold lightning
deserting beds of marigolds
and trees that dip and sway
under a mellow moon.

When you see the sparkle and glow
at the city's edge
you have to wonder why
anyone would put a garden
where a highway crossed itself
and we lost touch with the way
of the distant world.

You Watch Moonrise

desiccated through the blinds
see its face in the pale yellow
petunias draping the whiskey barrels
wonder about those casks
evolved from mountain shine
made by the light of this same moon
and being made even now
copper still furtive beneath
its cedar camouflage
that race through the cornfields
for late night deliveries
revenueurs still on the scent

and how much else under this
same lightening, the night's
version of day, the glowing
illusions of night not quite dark
and these tiny yellow and white faces
holding an entire glowing orb
rays shattering on the mason jars

Sylvia Manning

All Flags Turn White in Time

“All flags turn white in time,”
my Paducah grandmother told me.
Now in mid-March, named for us
for the Roman god of war
(Quaker Third Month)
—judged once to be the first month in the year
when folk preferred to start out in good cheer
with Eirene, Roman Pax,
goddess of peace and the seasons —
the iris blooms one sees around here
are a paler shade of lavender each year.
Paducah got one of our first two
atomic production operations:
the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant,
ready for the new Cold War by 1952,
touted proudly by Harry Truman
who for that and other reasons
was why my Paducah grandmother
couldn't vote a fourth time for FDR.
She was born in Missouri, the Show-Me state.
Truman her fellow Missourian had indeed
shown her what he and atom bombs could do.
She smelled something dirty, one could say.
The PGDP's a clean-up site today.

The tradescancia keep purple,
in livid protest to the name spider-wort,
except for the small blue ones
some know to call “widow’s tears.”
But meanwhile, paler every year,
iris flags that survive the heat turn white.

Bradley R. Strahan

White Rabbit Soliloquy

There must be a whole
somewhere.

That white rabbit, the one
with the gold watch,
keeps retiring there;
keeps popping out of hats
and tales and details
of accidental photographs.

There must be a hole
somewhere;
a whole sea of them,
each one popping out
into a sea of sunshine
or a sandwich of sea
cucumbers.

Our Geography of Poets

Colorado

Robert Cooperman

Kansas

Pat Anthony

Kentucky

Jane Stuart

New York

Barbara Fisher

A. Thomas Perry

North Carolina

Deborah H. Doolittle

Bradley R. Strahan

Texas

Sylvia Manning