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# Lightning Strikes @ Dolby Chadwick

DECEMBER 29, 2015

by [Julia Couzens](#)



Since Beat poet Bob Kaufman spouted Hart Crane in the bars and coffee galleries of North Beach and Wallace Berman published *Semina*, San Francisco has nurtured collaborations between poetry and art. Silicon Valley may devour glittering art fairs byte-by-byte, while museum-size galleries become juggernauts of money. But the quiet, multi-faceted treasure that is *Lightning Strikes | 18 poets. 18 artists.* reveals the beating heart of San Francisco's abiding love for the poet's voice sharing space with visual art. Wallace Stevens understood that the poet and the painter were co-conspirators working in the ether between imagination and reality. He saw both arts as possessing a prophetic stature, offering a "vital assertion of self in a world

Matt Gonzalez, *Retract the word, forthwith*, 2015, where nothing but the self remains, if that remains.”  
found paper collage, 14 x 11”

Lisa Dolby Chadwick has long been a passionate supporter of poetry, offering her gallery as a site for readings, book launches, and fundraisers for Litquake and the literary arts program at St. Mary’s College. *Lightning Strikes* took over a year to assemble, beginning with wooing poets wary of how a single work might fare in the cross currents of multifaceted words and images. The roster she’s assembled is a distinguished mix of heavy hitters that includes U.S. poet laureates **Billy Collins** and **Robert Haas**; Beat Era icons **Lawrence Ferlinghetti** and **Gary Snyder**; San Francisco poet laureates **devorah major** and **Jack Hirschman**; and the actor, director and former SF Mime Troupe member, **Peter Coyote**. Having immersed herself in the tones, voices, and imagery of their work, Chadwick linked a gallery artist to each poet. Her pairings are inspired. Given the deep understanding she has of both poetry and the work of her artists, Dolby Chadwick provided a sort of synthesizing Third Eye, just as William Burroughs speaks of the “Third Mind” with respect to artist/writer collaborations. The connections were made not with the intention of asking the artist to specifically address or illustrate the poem, as is the case within the Greek tradition of ekphrasis, but rather to pair artists whose works might serve gateways into the writing, or whose work possesses a counterpoint, frame or even an alluring veil to the words.

As such, the exhibition requires time and attention to fully experience its gifts of wit, unexpected insights and slow-moving experiential currents. Take **Alice Jones’** poem *The World*. Its dense distillation of sensory experience is echoed by **Jenifer Kent’s** obsessive ink-on-clayboard drawing, *Score*, a radiant, starburst cluster of tiny, incremental lines splattered across the surface like the “thousand sharp leaves pressed against the window” in Jones’ poem. The staccato, flat-footed rhythm of **Truong Tran’s** *Speculative Notes* accumulates energy just as the found paper scraps and wedges do in *Retract the word, forthwith*, a collage by **Matt Gonzales** defined by herky-jerky turns and hard rights in a rectilinear thicket of gold.

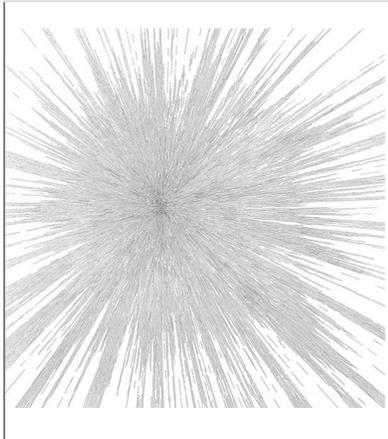


Vanessa Marsh,  
*Landscape 22*, 2015,  
archival pigment print from  
photogram, 20 x 20”

“Joint gunk and a quart of fleas —” leads the charge in the unexpected pairing of **Renny Pritikin’s** tersely witty haiku-esque *SCRABBLE #10* with **Travis Collinson’s** painting, *Joint gunk*, a painting that describes, in muted palette of greens, violet, and sapless blues, the foliage of a

forest floor. Like a medieval tapestry, the carefully drawn needles and leaves lock in a vision of a silently roiling and rotting wood.

The pairing of **Richard Blanco**, the fifth inaugural poet in U.S. history, and the first Latino, immigrant, and gay person to be awarded the honor, with painter **Vanessa Marsh** is one of the exhibition's highlights. Marsh's contribution, *Landscape 22*, a print from a photogram negative, uses palm trees silhouetted against a starry sky to lure us down a dark boulevard of Hollywood dreams.



Jenifer Kent, *Score*, 2015,  
Ink on clayboard, 36 x 36"

Blanco's *Looking for the Gulf Motel* takes us on a tender journey along the "whiter sands on the west coast of Florida" in search of childhood memories: his Cuban immigrant parents dancing in the long ago dark, and a brother building a vision of teenage desire in the sand. Without disparaging or sentimentalizing longing, the two works present a romantic exaltation of the senses in the interplay between the visible world and the equally present one unseen.

This richly layered (and star-studded) exhibit is accompanied by a hardbound catalog, which includes each poet/artist pairing along with insightful, inspiring essays by Chadwick, **Charlie Pendergast** and **Maria Porges**, a frequent contributor to Squarecylinder. All proceeds from the sale of the book go to St. Mary's College MFA in Literary Arts scholarship

program.

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"*Lightning Strikes* | 18 poets. 18 artists." @ [Dolby Chadwick Gallery](#) through January 30, 2016.

#### About the Author:

Julia Couzens is a Sacramento-based artist and writer whose work has been widely shown, most recently at the di Rosa Preserve. Her drawings and hybrid objects are in museum and public collections throughout the U.S. These include the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts; Berkeley Art Museum; Oakland Museum; Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina; and Yale University. She lives and works on Merritt Island in the Sacramento River delta.

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