



# around the bend



## GET READY TO BEND IT...

Residency is just around the corner and there's much to smile about. Not only will we be meeting face to face, which is strange and wonderful, there are also some exciting things to experience.

The biggest event is the [art+words literary festival](#) beginning Thursday evening, June 9th with the opening reception and check-in. This event is organized collaboratively by OSU Cascades and [Scalehouse Collaborative for the Arts](#).

**art+words** is a multi-disciplinary event that convenes writers, creative thinkers, performers and artists to encourage collaboration and inspiration across artforms. Through a series of performances, talks, workshops, and interactive art projects, **art+words** aims to spark curiosity and deep thinking. Attendees will explore how different creative modalities inform one another to generate new narratives, with opportunities to present bold ideas and examine a broad range of perspectives.

Audiences are invited to explore how language can enrich engagement with art and how visual forms emerge from the written word. Meaning and interpretation of creative works shift based on ever-changing social conditions. **art+words** encourages audiences to consider the role of words and images in shaping social consciousness—while acknowledging the inherent power structures embedded in the language we use.

Readers, writers, makers and creatives of all experience levels are invited to get curious, share their stories and take creative risks. Grad students are invited to attend since it is included in the residency schedule (*you thought you had Friday to sleep? Au contraire mes amis!*) and will definitely refresh, support and enrich your writing.

The festival begins Friday morning with our program's faculty, [Raquel Gutiérrez](#), who is giving the Keynote, *ON WRITING RADICAL CONVENING: RENDERING THE CREATIVE COMMONS*. Following that, join one of three morning workshops: [Trevor Dodge's](#) *Craigstory: Conjurations+Reclamations from the Classifieds*, [June Park's](#) *Creativity Rooted in Who We Are*, or [Craig Brauner with Ellipse Theatre Community's](#) *Share your Untold Story*. After lunch, the day continues with the afternoon keynote and OSU alumni, [Irene Cooper](#), *More than the Sum: Contemporary Collaborations Between the Arts*. The afternoon promises the following three workshops to choose from: [Raquel Gutiérrez's](#) *LIVING BESIDES OURSELVES: Representing Place & Power On The Page*, [Irene Cooper's](#) *Writing Under the Influence: Ekphrasis & Beyond!*, and [V. Maldonado's](#) *Following Breath - A Reading & Artist Talk*.

The day will wrap with a reception at the Scalehouse Gallery with drinks and bites and Ellipse Theatre Community performances of *Share your Untold Story* writings.

## RESIDENCY EVENTS

JUNE 3rd TO JUNE 12th

\*Events in **yellow** are open to the public

### Friday, June 3rd

- 3-5 PM – Optional drop-in Office Hours w/Jennifer, Study Grounds
- 5:30 PM – Welcome event

### Sunday, June 5th

- 4-6 PM Program One-read with **Beth Piatote, Roundabout Books**

### Monday June 6th

- 1-3:30 PM – DVW seminar
- 6:30 PM – Discussion featuring: **Beth Piatote & Raquel Gutiérrez, High Desert Museum**

### Thursday June 9th

- 6-8 PM Art + Words Literary Festival – opening reception, **Scalehouse Gallery** (free for MFA students and faculty, ticketed for the public)

### Friday June 10th

- 9 AM – 4 PM - Art + Words Literary Festival, **OSU-Cascades** (free for MFA students and faculty, ticketed for the public)
- 5 – 8PM - Art + Words Literary Festival, Closing Reception, **Scalehouse Gallery**. (free for MFA students and faculty, ticketed for the public)

### Saturday June 11th

- 7:00 PM – OSU-Cascades MFA in Creative Writing Student Reading, **OSU-Cascades**

## 'Writing is hard, not coal mining hard, but it's challenging' - Roxanne Gay

I attended my first literary festival last weekend, **Wave In**, organized by the Black Mountain Institute in Las Vegas, Nevada. It was not unlike the first music festival I attended, a lifetime ago, only that the people seemed more sober and carried books. The anticipation in the hot, dry air of the first evening was electric. Of course, it could have been the static but I like to think it was that we were all delighted to hear Roxanne Gay and Dr. Eve L. Ewing in conversation. I was very excited (probably just being out of the house helped) yet unsure of what to expect. An excellent place to be, I think.

I have always been interested in the process of things. These days, I am interested in the writing process of others, and listening to Roxanne Gay was no exception. She had much to say about writing, and began by reading an excerpt about her dog:

*"I got a puppy recently, not recently --he'll be two soon. It feels recent because he's adorable and he's anorexic. I didn't know dogs could be anorexic, but here we are. Our vet said we need to keep a food log. So I thought I'd share that with you:*

*Dear Dr. Karlson,  
Please find a food log detailing everything our beloved multi-poo, Maximus Toretto Blueberry, ate this week, as well as any behaviors he exhibited around food.*

*On Monday morning at 8:30, we prepared him a bowl of dry dog food covered in chicken hearts. Max, as per usual, stared at the food, sniffed it indifferently, and walked away. We left the bowl of food out and it remained untouched. Around one o'clock, still untouched. On his afternoon walk, Max ate three dried leaves, a used band-aid on the street, an abandoned piece of pizza crust, and he also enjoyed some murky water pooling at the curb.*

*While I was running errands, I went to the rich people dog food place, where they use human-grade food and prepare it in front of you. I spent 112 dollars, and I was really encouraged because the food looked almost edible. We served it to Max, he refused to open his mouth, and I was like, **'What's going on? I just gave you chipotle style food!'** Later he took a single bite*

*and spit it back out. We broke down and bought Max a hamburger from Five Guys, broke it up, and seasoned it because he's a black dog. He ate it. Before bed, I had some pistachio ice cream, and Max enjoyed half a pint.*

*On his walk, Max dined on a styrofoam take out container that he found next to an overflowing trash can. There was half a taco inside the container. Good news! He seems to like Mexican.*

*Forty-five minutes later, I found Max in our bathroom with a tampon string hanging out of his mouth. After I gently pried his jaw open, the tampon, used, was nowhere to be found. When I relayed this very troubling information to my wife, she dry-heaved.*

*Around 2 pm, Max came to my office smelling suspiciously like shit, He looked really satisfied, supremely in fact. I asked him what he ate as if he was going to respond. He stared at me, wagging his tail enthusiastically. I had a sneaking suspicion that Max had done something terrible, so I went downstairs, where the smell of shit was even stronger. Just outside of the litter box, I found a smattering of cat shit. All of this to say that Max ate fucking catshit. We have a shit-eating dog!*

*On his afternoon walk, Max ate whatever the hell he wanted, torn newsprint, a piece of cardboard covered in duct tape, an abandoned barbie leg, the soiled portion of a diaper. He is an adorable dog, but he has a repulsive palate."*

Roxanne Gay continued for another 10 minutes reading about what her dog ingested. I was mesmerized. Then she read an excerpt from a forthcoming book about craft, titled *How to be Heard*:

*"There are a lot of books out there on writing as a spiritual practice, about the writing life as a higher calling. These books are lovely, and I return to some of them time and again. But this is not that kind of book, and that is not my ministry. This is a practical book about writing because there are more than enough people discussing the importance of creativity and how to live a creative life. There are not enough people discussing what you need to do, to make living such a dedicated creative life, a reality.*

# WRITING | EXPERIENCING A FESTIVAL CONT.

(cont. from p.2)

*What most writers want is a blueprint or map to help a writer get from where they are, to where they hope to be. That blueprint does not exist. Every writer is different. No approach is the same. There's no wrong way to be a writer unless you're not writing.*

*What I'm asked most often, is what's your process? Wish I had some sort of fancy and rehearsed answer, but I don't. When I write, I'm generally on the couch with my laptop in front of the tv, and I just do my thing. That's how I wrote every book thus far. I start at the beginning, and I work my way to the end. And then I feel like I'm doing all this wrong because I don't have a lot of fancy practices to generate words. I sit at my computer and stare at the screen. I procrastinate. I watch a lot of, mostly trash, reality tv. I type a sentence or two and move some words around. Writing is a joyful endeavor for me and it's not that it's hard for me to write, I'm just very good at procrastinating."*

**"There's no wrong way to be a writer unless you're not writing."**

Here Dr. Ewing entered the conversation to examine the joy of writing a little further, questioning whether writers hate writing more than other art practitioners hate practicing their art?

She quoted Alexander Chee from his essay collection, *'The difference between those who make it as a writer and those who don't is being able to stand it,'* and then declared that writing was not a joyful enterprise for her, and she wondered whether it was a writer's thing and whether Roxanne was the exception.

Roxanne responded, *"I know, I don't hate writing at all. I think, that it's just that sometimes, it can be so hard, like not coal mining hard, but it's challenging sometimes to have the inspiration, have the time, have the motivation to do something with the inspiration, and then hope that the alchemy is there, to write something that is good. Many writers tend to have profoundly low self-esteem and so it's never going to be good. And so, I think, that sort of constant chasing of good writing can be exhausting for a lot of writers and can engender a lot of antipathy, and I don't think it's unique to writers. A lot of artists simply don't love the process, but they love having made something at the end of it. And I think it's okay. Every writer has a unique relationship to writing, and there's room in the*

*rainbow for all of us."*

Dr. Ewing affirmed, *"I think writers have the verbose capacity to describe in the greatest detail the immensity of their self-loathing, like, I have so many words for how much I hate this!"*

I think it's all true, and yet, I am in love with writing. I, especially, have a big crush on poetry.

I can only relate to the agony of creativity when I consider my work as a visual artist. Then I can agree that living a dedicated creative life can be arduous, because it was often supported by work, albeit creative, that I did not necessarily want to pursue, (graphic layouts, weddings, sports events) but it paid my rent, and ultimately, I was, at the very least, living with my camera in hand. I can't imagine ever loathing the creative process, but perhaps, as already stated, we are all different. I prefer to think of the agony or discomfort of

the creative process as the place where growth happens, or that it is an indication that attention must be given to the very thing that it's agitating.

Dr. Ewing and Roxanne Gay continued their conversation discussing the need for writing with rage, the kind of rage that organizes and inspires action, marriage and the myths surrounding it, and circling back to the mental health of their dogs, and what they've learned from them.

Roxanne found that people have a profound capacity for generosity, patience, and kindness, but generally only to animals, and she wished that they could extend that grace and generosity to people as well. She admitted that her capacity for this had definitely increased with Max.

*"I think it was always there with the people I cared about but it blossomed with Max. The things I do for this dog! He is the Beyonce of the household. He lives the most amazing, charmed life. He gets carried everywhere, and he's cute, and when he looks at you, you're like, 'okay, yes, I'll buy you that Mercedes!"*

Imke Wernicke is a contributing writer

*Tracking down faculty in an online program is challenging, hence I was grateful when I discovered an audio file in my inbox a few days ago with Raquel's response to my questions.*

*Besides being one of OSU's faculty, Raquel is the morning keynote speaker and a workshop leader at the art+words literary festival next month, as mentioned in the previous article. Also, Raquel's book, Brown Neon, drops next month. Here's what they shared regarding that, as well as some thoughts on the writing life:*

**Brown Neon** is a book of essays that track a life in the Arts. The first section, *llorando por tu amor*, (translates as 'crying for your love'), is a lyric taken from Rebecca Rodriguez Spanish rendition of the Roy Orbison song, *Crying*. So this series of essays is in part an homage to my late mentor Gene Cordova, who's a giant of west coast lesbian organizing and someone who took me under her wings, as well as examining the generational differences and shifts between butch lesbians and trans men. So yeah, an homage and what I'm learning from the younger generation of queer and trans people. *Brown Neon*, ten essays about being a writer, an artist and coming to the desert, failed romances, self-discovery, self in transit, and also writing about artists, artistic kinship, critiques of land art, the border. It's an ekphrastic memoir.

Written in the four years of the Trump era, making sense of that and what it means for queer latinx artists to do work in this very contentious period that saw us, you know, as a community, as a people, witness the violences along the border, the denial of asylum, people being incarcerated, young people being placed in real hardness- in kennel-like environments in Torneo, Texas. It's insight into those four really challenging years. That's *Brown Neon* from my perspective.

***What's the most important thing for a grad student to remember in completing their MFA?***

The work that gets written during your time in the program is work that gets structured in a thesis manuscript to fulfill your necessary criteria to be given an MFA degree. You're writing a thesis. A thesis isn't always a book. A thesis is a culmination of a period in your grad school experience, also a starting point to what could potentially be a book. Remember, you're ultimately trying to get the Master of Fine Arts, trying to meet that goal. So to clarify, a thesis manuscript is different from a book manuscript. We hope that there is some critical bridging between the two textual objects but ultimately, you

know, you're there to fulfill your requirements to receive the degree.

***What do the words 'writer's block' mean to you?***

I think there are multiple ways to approach writing. I think of writing as a circle, with 360 degrees and each degree is a door to open, a possibility into inhabiting the obsession, the concern, the meditation, the proposition, the question, there's multiple ways to enter, and in a sense, producing fractals, fractions, but we don't have to get it, right out of the gate... so I think experimentation and, you know, moving off the page, into your body, into the space onto the wall, multiple ways to continue a work. Writer's block I think...it's just a little fear. Fear is sort of at the helm and if you can take the wheel away from fear, wrestle it back into your own possession. That's the most important part.

***What advice do you have for someone writing their first book?***

Just keep chipping away. Right? It's a beautiful slab of marble, and you only have one chisel and one hammer so just chip, chip, chip away. ***(in a sing-song tone that made smile)*** Keep at it. I think just return to the tale, return to the desk, return to the pen, return to your keyboard, just keep coming--not to be a 12 step adage or anything but keep coming back to the project, and it will reach completion.

***Do you have a regular writing practice?***

Not as regularly as I'd like... There are commitments I make that get in the way... so keep saying no to things and yes to your time. Protect your time...writing practice, little by little. Instagram is interesting because it can potentially be an archive you return to, you make on the go, on the cheap, without having to have any distinct preciousness about the artifact you're creating. Put your paper, posters on the wall, write on chalkboards, things that help you see the ideas, you know, in your own hand.

***If you could go somewhere for a week, no budget, where would you go? Would that place change if it was a month?***

I would love to go to the Atacama Desert in Chile. I think I love deserts. For a month? I'd love to go to Berlin, Lisbon--where would I love to travel? Brazil? I don't know. Everything is kind of on and off the table. I'd love to see the Philippines. I'd go to Brazil but there's some strong politics happening there--that kind of scares me. Yeah, (a sigh, a chuckle) I'd go somewhere where there wasn't a lot of people.

## 'I am happy to indulge most levels of curiosity,'

*declared the sharp and funny, Irene Cooper, OSU alum and afternoon keynote speaker at the Art+Words festival next month, when I asked her to share her thoughts on the writing life, being creative, as well, any musings about all things 'bookish'.*

*Please share a little about your involvement in the Art+Words festival happening in June, and also little about the poetry collection?*

René Mitchell of Scalehouse contacted me to ask if I wanted to participate in Art+Words. I was in Portland at the time, joining other poets and writers in a reading by Oregon Book Award finalists. It had been over a year since I'd read from *spare change*—enough time for the poems to become something new to me, and to remember, anew, how much they and I owed to poets and poems that had preceded us. I had read the books of my fellow finalists, and was so moved and invigorated by the work, and then, of course, thrilled to hear some of it voiced. For my bit, I read a few poems from the book, and then asked the listeners to make a cento, or collage poem from two poems—one by William Stafford poem and another by Hazel Hall—I'd cut them up, tossed them like a salad and separated the lines into two envelopes, which I distributed at opposite ends of the room. Everyone took a line, and one by one, read and built a new thing. It felt good to honor the namesakes of the award with a creative and audible gesture in multiple voices. All to say, I was full of collaborative adrenaline, and primed to consider a talk and/or activity to contribute to Art+Words. I'll be talking about artistic collaborations across

media, and leading a workshop wherein we can apply the concepts more concretely.

Speaking of which, I am currently working with a growing collection of concrete and otherwise shaped poems, and forms which take particular advantage of the internet.

Concurrently, I'm fiddling with a short story collection that came together over the last year, and will publish a domestic thriller concerned with body autonomy, friendship, and grief in the next several months.

*What three words best describe you?*

Tim Gunn already took, 'Make It Work', but that would be apt. Making is important to me—I was a professional chef for a number of years—and working, too, although I feel more ambivalent about what signifies “work.” Humor is essential to everything I do. Maybe, *Make Work Funny*, in no particular order.

*What do you consider the most overrated virtue? Why?*

This one's a sand trap. I had to look up what is considered a virtue. Aristotle apparently included modesty, which is, I think, of limited value for women and underrepresented people, a word that muffles. A lack of modesty does not equate with a lack of generosity. Another list included indignant, and really, who has time for that nonsense.

*What do the words 'writer's block' mean to you?*

They mean, maybe, that the path to productive association is somehow logjammed. They mean I need to switch gears, refresh my per-

spective. If I'm feeling “blocked,” I may consider that I'm judging the product before actually having made the thing.

*What advice would you give to a writer working on their first book?*

In *Poets & Writers* “Ten Questions for Sarah Manguso,” she answers the question about her biggest challenge in writing her first novel with, “Leaving aside my received ideas about what a novel was.” I like this. MFA or no MFA, most of us have ideas about form, and certainly, form is a useful and slippery animal to consider. Let the book chase its own ambition, and meaning. Revision is a holy place, AND, the generative space is necessarily irreverent. Take breaks, and come back. I have a t-shirt with a graphic of William Shakespeare and the “quote,” *This Shit Writes Itself*. It's a joke. This shit's hard. And doing the hard thing for your own reasons is a kind of ecstasy.

*Do you have a regular writing practice? If so, please describe what it is?*

I sit at my desk a lot. I used to sit on the couch, in the wee hours. Now, I feel lucky to say, I don't have to write in the margins of my day. Lately, I think of creative work as a kind of reward for completing—or at least addressing—editorial and teaching tasks. I'm not really a carrot/stick kind of writer, but it is satisfying to say, *OK, that's done (or en route), now I'm free*. The creative work is a privilege, and a pleasure. There are times, however, I blow everything off—my paying responsibilities—to try to catch the toe of a thing before I lose it, or to go deep on revision. I love spending Monday mornings

# ALUMNI | IRENE COOPER CONT.

(cont. from page 5)

submitting work to journals and presses. It's like, *Ha! How's that for productivity, hm, Monday?*—one advantage of the entrepreneurial economy. At the end of the day, I'm a deadline-oriented writer, so I make sure to make deadlines for the creative work as well as for the 1099 stuff.

***Is there a book you like to gift people? Why? Is this your favorite book? Or do you have another one? Please explain your choice.***

So many good, good books! So, no, I don't have a go-to for a book gift. Although, having said that, I'm thinking about buying a heap-*ing* stack of Diane Seuss' Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *frank:-sonnets*, to give away, because, holy cats, what a book. I was graciously gifted *New Poets of Native Nations*, edited by Heid E. Erdrich, and it's a book I cherish. Both are from Graywolf Press, so maybe just a gift card to Graywolf.

***Do you have a favorite children's book? Why is it your favorite? Was there a lesson it taught you?***

Also, a very long list. Sharon Creech has written some stunners: *An Uncommon Angel*, *Ruby Holler*...I still think about the lyric *A Cool Moonlight* by Angela Johnson. *Wind in the Willows*, *A Wrinkle in Time*...the Coretta Scott King Award and the Newberry Award lists offer such bounty. Then there are the picture books—we read *The 20th Century Children's Book Treasury* until it fell to shreds. As far as lessons, I like books that honor the sadness, the crabbiness, and the goofiness of childhood, the personhood of it.

***If you could go somewhere for a week, no budget, where would***

***you go? Would that place change if you had a month? If so, where would that be?***

No budget and with the least risk of exchanging harmful microbes, I'd default to a cliché: a warm beach. I was an exchange student once upon a time in Brasil, and I'd welcome the chance to speak Portuguese to random pedestrians. I'd take a cold beach, too, though. I grew up by saltwater, and I miss it, that horizon, the smell. Given a month, though, I'd take a Eurail pass and see some art. Anywhere, really, at this point. There's lots of places I've never been, and am curious about, and if I'm welcome, would like to go. Apparently my core reader base is in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I like cheese.

***What is your most treasured possession?***

A plastic palm-sized goat that screams when depressed. An anthology of JAWS-themed poems and other creative impulses curated by the eldest daughter, who solicited said art from close friends and family and surprised me at Christmas. It's called, *Poets & Biters*. Also, my SodaStream.

***Do you listen to music while you write — and, if so, what's your favorite?***

I, like most humans, enjoy music in great variety, but I do not generally listen to music while I write, unless it is germane to what I'm writing. That happens. The most recent example is Thomas Bartlett's collection of piano nocturnes, *SHELTER*. The younger daughter has two music projects, *Chiggi Momo* and another techno-pop dance collaboration called *Ruby Grey*. The eldest, a harpist, tuned me into Joanna Newsom and other string people. I have a

long-held fondness for Lyle Lovett and Nancy Griffith. Nina Simone. Erykah Badu. Sigur Rós. I listen in-between.

***What do you enjoy most about teaching?***

Students! I love going down a new path with a group, love hearing the actual sound of expansion, particularly in my own head, love smelling the dust disperse. Also, I like the exposure to texts, old and new, that creating a syllabus demands. Collaboration.

***What are your favorite and least favorite things about publishing?***

No surprises, it's marketing. That said, I enjoy talking to people who work in that segment of publishing. I just wish I could afford to hire them. Back to the modesty thing: it remains a very difficult thing to say, *I did this thing, I'm proud of it*; or *Pay me for this art*; or even, *I do this professionally*. Like, would you go to a neurologist that says, *Yeah, you know, I dabble a little in brain surgery?*

***Do you have a mantra, motto, or life statement you'd like to share?***

See: *What three words best describe you?*

Also, I am often oppressed by the cult of happiness, but I like, *All in*.

***Thanks, Irene! Having thoroughly enjoyed your candor, I look forward to the art+words festival, to experience, first-hand, how you MAKE WORK FUNny.***

Questions by Imke Wernicke  
Answers by Irene Cooper

# Just Kids

By Patti Smith

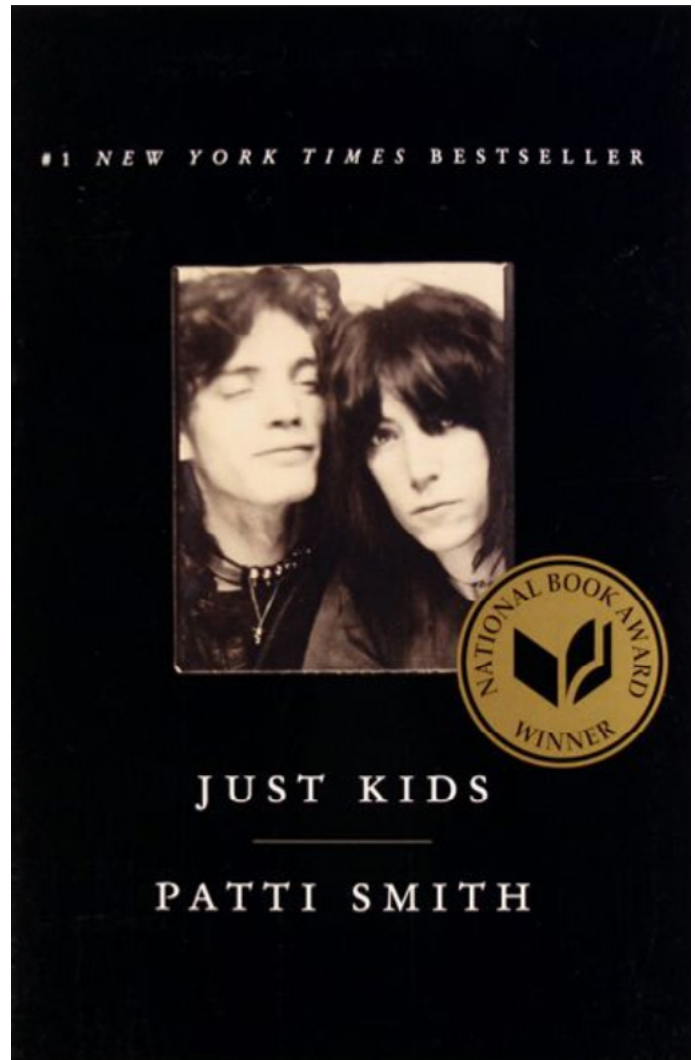
“*Just Kids* is so pure and honest so as to count as true rapture,” declares Joan Didion, on the inside cover of this award-winning memoir.

Patti Smith lets us into a vulnerable, intimate, and tumultuous time in her life with a person who saved her before it all began. This story details Smith’s long, winding relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe, as friends, lovers, muses, and soulmates before his death from AIDS in the 1980’s, a window view into the life of two incredible artists before they made it. We experience a time when they were still struggling to make something of themselves and what it took for them to not give up on that dream, even when everything seemed to tell them otherwise. Before Patti Smith’s hit single, “Because the Night” entered the Top 20 in 1978, and before Robert Mapplethorpe became a renowned photographer, we witness the most vulnerable sides of their lives, living together in the dingiest of New York’s apartments, growing their portfolios while at the famous Chelsea Hotel, a hotel that many other well-knowns frequented. Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol, and Jimi Hendrix, to name a few, either stayed there or passed a night at the bar connected to it.

A love story that ends as a requiem, this book also salutes a New York City of the late sixties and seventies, a New York full of hustlers and dare devils trying to find their way in the world, a city that no longer exists. Nonetheless, it’s a beautiful portrait of two artists’ parallel journeys towards fame.

*Just Kids* is about growing up, finding yourself, losing yourself, and then finding yourself again. It paints a picture of friendship that is so deep and true that as a reader, you wonder, how someone ever gets by in this world without what Patti and Robert shared. Patti Smith jumps around in time in her storytelling and yet her narrative is cohesive and clear in its progression.

While Smith is one of the iconic women of the Rock world, this tale is not focused on her career as a musician. Yes, it’s about her friendship with Robert, but also her drive to become a writer and a poet on her own, her drive to chase the things she



loves, one of them being words. It weaves together fate and fortunate happenstance illustrating how timing is indeed, everything, and how sometimes the blind faith of youth is worth keeping into “adulthood”.

Most of all it’s a reminder that we don’t often ever do it alone. Patti and Robert always tapped into each other for inspiration. Repeatedly Smith writes that Robert was the, “artist of my life”. Readers see this come to fruition when Robert takes the photo of Patti that will eventually be on the cover of her album *Easter*. Smith says it best, “When I look at it now, I never see me. I see us.”

*Send me your book review, and I'll include it in the next newsletter. Not only do we appreciate your participation but it looks great on your CV.*

*Email Imke at: [wernicki@oregonstate.edu](mailto:wernicki@oregonstate.edu)*

# FORWARD - OPEN CALLS

## The Black River Chapbook Competition

Twice each year Black Lawrence Press will run the Black River Chapbook Competition for an unpublished chapbook of poems or prose between 16-36 pages in length. The contest is open to new, emerging, and established writers. The winner will receive book publication, a \$500 cash award, and ten copies of the book. Prizes are awarded on publication.



Our chapbooks are perfect-bound, feature striking cover designs, each receive an ISBN, and are distributed nationally through Small Press Distribution, as well as on our website and at amazon.com. We treat our chapbooks just like our full-length titles in terms of aesthetics, production, publicity, and editorial love and care.

**SPRING ENTRY: APRIL 1- MAY 31<sup>st</sup>**  
**FALL ENTRY: SEPTEMBER 1- OCTOBER 31<sup>st</sup>**



# BOURBON • PENN •

### SUBMISSIONS - FICTION

We are looking for highly imaginative stories with a healthy dose of the odd. Odd characters, odd experiences, odd realities. We're looking for genre / speculative stories and are quite partial to slipstream, cross-genre, magic realism, absurdist, and the surreal.

We want character. For us, stories live and die by their characters. We're looking for fully drawn characters who surprise us with their honesty, complexity, and contradictions.

We want mysterious. We're looking for stories that grab the reader, make them ask, "what the hell is going on?" and then deliver on the tease.

We want ideas and we want action. We love exploring big, philosophical ideas, but we revel in suspenseful plotting. If you're adept at blending these elements, we can't wait to read your work.

We want fresh voices and exciting prose. We want to be surprised. We want to be inspired. We want to find stories that we can't wait to publish, promote, and evangelize. Of course, the best way to understand what type of fiction we're looking for is to read a couple issues.

Payment: 3¢ / word      Length: 2000 - 7500 words

Email formatted submissions as an attached .doc, docx, or .rtf file to [submissions@bourbonpenn.com](mailto:submissions@bourbonpenn.com). Use the body of the email for your cover letter.





# EVENTS - VOICES - ALEX AND MAGGIE

Another event I attended at the literary festival in Las Vegas last weekend, was, *'Queering the Memoir'*, a conversation between Maggie Nelson and Alexandria Marzano-Lesnevich.

I've been a big fan of Maggie's work, since I was introduced to her in Raquel Gutiérrez's class last year and have been captivated by all her books, especially *Bluets*. I was not familiar with Alex's work, *The Fact of a Body- A Murder and a Memoir*, their debut novel, which has won numerous awards and has been translated into 11 languages. That should be proof enough, but having now read it, I am awestruck by the exquisite craft of their writing, and how meticulously the two stories weave, and knead each other so profoundly and gracefully.

The writers had only met virtually and were delighted to be in conversation with each other in person. Maggie heartily stated that the kinship between them was real, both writers having written memoirs braided with a story of a murder.

As well as commenting on the genre of memoir, the writers were asked to comment on the use of their talk's title, *'Queering the Memoir'*, which both had mixed feelings about.

To explain, Alex used their deep appreciation for Maggie's book, *Bluets*, and joyfully declared that they were *"held by the book. You know when you feel like a book is written for you, a book that helps you understand your life, and your placement in your life and helps you connect to others and connect to the world around you. Bluets does all this and that is part of why I do think of 'queering the memoir' as a gesture towards hybridity, a gesture that says the self is not alone, I think we have this narrative tendency to-- people sometimes say with memoir, ME-moir, me, me, me-- but queer lives are interconnected and we know that, but really all our lives are inter-connected and so to me, queering helps to think about letting in other voices, letting in other layers, gesturing beyond the self."*

Maggie stated she has never used the term memoir voluntarily. The word is limiting, in part because the self is not unitary. There is no single story about a person, and one can use and re-use their work depending on the nature of the project and its demands.

Alex is a reluctant memoirist. Memoir is a means to convey other things. With Maggie having written ten books, all part memoir, Alex wondered, *"How many adorations of her are out in the world, as if there are stagnant forms of the self. We are all multiple selves and honestly, once you finish writing something you are not the same."*

Maggie agreed and spoke about being restless, always looking forward and not back. She spoke of writing about the personal, *"As a writer, you must ask: How does the writing stay alive? If you begin with something like an emotional confession, how do you build intimacy? Not just sharing but going beyond intimacy and doing things with immediacy and urgency. I'm interested in how those things get put together."*

Suggesting that as writers, we have a desire to claim things, Alex said, *"I am constantly thinking about absence, and how to give life to absent voices, and how to do this respectfully. It is wildly presumptuous to write in the voice of someone who is dead. Some have asked if it isn't better to keep the silence of the past as silent? (Indignant blank stare) We can hold a space for silence while finding a way to allow the silenced to speak. This is what I love about memoir."*

Representing other people, living or dead, in writing, is an ethically fraught business. Maggie offered, *"Some people might think that's not okay, and others might be grateful for filling the space. Knowing that you're engaging in something tender is the thing because you can't control the reader... You have to be aware of what you're doing for the nature of the project."*

It turns out that reporting on an event is a lot like writing a memoir. I am transcribing the words of two writers whose work I admire while remaining cognizant of voice and meaning. I hope I have conveyed their conversation's richness, respect, and learning.

Both writers spoke about craft and the responsibility of the writer's voice. Alex said that the only way they could assure that the voice of their character was different from the narrator was to retype the whole manuscript, until that was true, and the distinct voices heard.

Maggie shared that her book, *The Argonauts*, arose out of a provocation to bring together a collection of thematically different pieces, and join the disparate voices to become one sound.

She explained, *"I don't know why I think like this. I'm weird. I always think of it as a snake. It has to all become one body. And it's okay if it has printed sections, like a white underbelly, or weird things on top, but it has to become a body. So, I read it front to back, read it front to back, and any part that's not on this animal, I don't use, or it's rewritten. It has to be part of this animal."*

Laughing, Alex added, *"Last night, because we're in Vegas, there was a guy on the street, hoisting two giant snakes, with onlookers enthralled/horrified, and so yeah, you're basically going for inducing that feeling!"*

-Imke Wernicke is a contributing writer

