

## **I'd Like to Tell Tune What to Do** **Robert Glück: Ceramics and Writing**

**6 - 28 janvier 2024**

**Treize**

**Organisé par Treize et Joachim Hamou**

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When Ethan Assouline and Julien Laugier of Treize and Joachim Hamou wanted to fashion a show about writing and ceramics, I asked myself, What does my writing have to do with my ceramics? Of course the answer is, Everything: scholarship and research, engagement with the past, the desire to animate, the desire to create risk, to tell stories, to bring my friends into it, to haunt.

I began studying ceramics at the College of Art in Edinburgh in 1966 and continued at UCLA, Berkeley, and San Francisco State University, and then at Ruby's, a private studio in San Francisco. When I lived in Edinburgh, I travelled around England and northern Europe, looking at late medieval art and ceramics, my first steps on a path that led to my novel, Margery Kempe, about a woman who lived in East Anglia in the 15th Century. I stopped working with clay around 1975 – earning a living and writing left no time. Instead, I collected ceramics from two obscure early 20th century Bay Area potteries, California Faience and Jalan. In 2015, I moved to Sweden with my husband and took up ceramics again. I love the Scandinavian potters – especially Gertrud Vasegaard, the Agnes Martin of clay. When we returned to San Francisco in 2017, I joined Ruby's again.

Ceramics begins with the mystery of spinning mud. Spinning electron, spinning earth, spinning universe. My pots display the spin that brought them into existence. Somewhere Joseph Conrad observed that he thought of Nostromo as spherical. That was good news. My novels end with an image of spinning, and I also see them as spherical. When I write I feel as though I'm attaching scraps to a sphere, and if the story moves forward, it's an effect of putting one thing next to another.

Making a bowl, a hollow form, is the creation or the acknowledgement of emptiness. Most of the objects in this show assert this emptiness – they are closed forms without access to the inside: rattles, genie bottles, and lingams. I want emptiness in writing as well, I want emptiness to travel along with the story as a kind of potential. I tell myself that clay takes me in directions I don't allow myself in writing, more sacred (for lack of a better word), but they may not be so different. I've fashioned quite a few urns and containers for people's ashes – is there a better thing to do?

I often make a chaotic ground with an orderly pattern on top. I confect this ground in a rather complicated process, with brush, underglaze, sponge, and sandpaper. It's like the poetry of my first hero, John Keats, an enameled surface over a welter of feeling. I am moved by the smooth surface and the chaos of feeling below. This may not be an exact description of each work, but more a feeling I have about words and clay.

If writing can be empty, clay can be full of story. Shapes and patterns travel through history. Slowly covering a simple form with a geometric pattern connects me to history's good side, as does, say, pouring tea. Think of Acoma ollas, think of fields of iznik tile, infinitely repeating, a culture goofing on eternity. Or the simple geometry that Vasegaard patiently applied to her forms. I see this as a noble activity, like choosing one word over another, but why is that? Its beauty partly derives from imperfection. Vasegaard struggles toward perfection and her mistakes are there for us to consider. The closer to perfection, the more evident the imperfections. We enjoy them as we do the spontaneities of a Japanese cup. The sheer aptness of her decoration unites with the form with a feeling of justice, and that somehow gives us a kind of consolation, that meaning exists in the world.

Sometimes my writing and my pots share a dark humor. Dark humor, obsessive subject matter and practice. Faces on the 'Make-It-Stop' rattles contort with exasperation and terror, but it's no use covering the ears because the noise comes from inside. Usually, they are faces of friends, or self-portraits. The 'Ghosts-and-Universes' rattles are droll memento moris, the rows of squiggle-ghosts barely exist. Nonsense is the language of the dead. If I were a shaman this would be my rattle.

Of course, I think about death. I'm seventy-six. I could live fifteen years, or I could die tomorrow. Neither would transgress the statistics. The thought of my death enralls me! And seems narcissistic to dwell on?

But that is modern thinking – in the past, I would be encouraged to think about nothing else, with idea that I would become more spiritual. But the odd thing is, I am becoming more spiritual, in my fashion.

Lingams are phallic shapes that are worshiped. They are emblems of creativity at every level, including its destructive power.

If you go back far enough, you find such votaries in most cultures – like the veiled phallus in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, or the gold phalli of the Philistines. Even the Israelites put up phallic stones, and they carried – according to admittedly sketchy scholarship – a stone phallus in the Arc of the Covenant. Google it! Lingams certainly don't mean the same thing in their cultures – they are habitations of deity, good luck amulets, fertility gods, markers indicating formlessness, signifiers that anchor the chain of signification. But this just begins the discussion, because the tension between masculine-feminine pervades all situations in my queer community, including collapsing these binaries of course. When I drape a phallus in a fascinator, a veil worn by women at rituals like weddings and funerals, I enter this conversation.

Robert Glück

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Robert Glück has exhibited his ceramics infrequently, most recently in a one-person show at Josey in Norwich, February to April, 2023. He is the author of two story collections, *Elements* and *Denny Smith*, and three novels, *Jack the Modernist*, *Margery Kempe*, and *About Ed*, which will be published by NYRB in 2023. His collected essays, *Communal Nude*, was published by Semiotex(e) in 2016. His books of poetry include *Reader*, *La Fontaine* with Bruce Boone, *In Commemoration of the Visit with Kathleen Fraser*, and *I, Boombox*, published by Roof Books in 2023. In the late 70's, Glück and Bruce Boone founded New Narrative, a literary movement of self-reflexive storytelling that combines essay, lyric, and autobiography in one work. Glück served as director of The Poetry Center at San Francisco State University. He was codirector of Small Press Traffic Literary Center and associate editor at Lapis Press. He lives "high on a hill" in San Francisco.



1. Enola Gay
  - \* Photo Jack Davis (1983)
  - \* FAG (Faggot Affinity Group)
  - \* TEN REASON TO GO TO WORK TODAY
  - \* Dress-for-Suck-cess-Honey Fasc-ion Zhou - 1982
  - \* Photo
2. International Museum of Erotic Art - A reading of erotic poetry (1974)
  - \* Poster et photo
3. Small Press Traffic
  - \* Workshop flyer 1977
  - \* A Benefit Reading for Small Press Traffic
4. Soup/Left Write
  - \* A Reception for Soup flyer 1981
  - \* Left Write programm 1981
5. Rocking Lingam - Stoneware with underglaze - 2023
6. William S. Burroughs - blurb pour Jack The Modernist - 1985
7. Jack The Modernist - extraits
8. Jack The Modernist - Sea Horse Book / Gay Presses of New York - 1985
9. Genie Bottle - Stoneware with underglaze and glaze - 2019
10. Jack The Modernist - High Risk Books - 1995
11. Lingam Ghosts and Universes Stoneware with underglaze - 2023
12. Make-It-Stop Rattle (Bob) - 2023
13. Make-It-Stop Rattle (Xavi) - 2023
14. Make-It-Stop Rattle (Bob) - 2023
15. Make-It-Stop Rattle (Xavi) - 2023
16. Make-It-Stop Rattle (Xavi) - 2023
17. Make-It-Stop Rattle (Janet) - 2023
18. from About Ed - poster
19. from a notebook - poster
20. Enola Gay agitprop 1984
21. Margery Kempe - High Risk Books- 1994
22. Gift from a student
23. Ghosts and Universes Rattle - 2022
24. Margery Kempe - Manuscript
25. Margery Kempe - extract
26. Ghosts and Universes Rattle - 2023
27. Lingam for Martin Wong - 2023
28. Mosquito Plate 1 - 2023
29. Mosquito Plate 2 - 2023
30. He Cried - Dennis Cooper - Black Star Series - 1984
31. He Cried - Dennis Cooper - Annotated manuscript
32. Lives of the Poets - Steve Abbott - Black Star Series - 1987
33. My Walk With Bob - Bruce Boone - Black Star Series - 1979
34. My Walk With Bob - Bruce Boone - Ithuriel's Spear - 2006
35. La Fontaine - Bruce Boone, Robert Glück - Black Star Series - 1981
36. Family Poems - Black Star Series - 1979
37. Lingam - 2023
38. Lingam Fascinator - 2023
39. Lingam for Agnes Martin - 2022
40. Denny Smith - Clear Cut Press - 2003
41. Elements of a Coffee Service - Four Seasons - 1982
42. Lingam - 2022
43. Notebook
44. San Diego's Weekly Reader n°22, Juin 1994
45. Gay Sunshine Journal - Gay Fiction Anthology - 1981 - annotated on the cover «Love / Hate» by Robert Glück

46. Men on Men: Best New Gay Fiction, Volume 1 - Plume - edited by George Stambolian - 1986
47. Genie Bottle (Xavi) - 2020
48. Gay Sunshine n°32 - 1977
49. Make-It-Stop Rattle (Bob) - 2023
50. Lingam for Nabeshima - 2023
51. Ed's Tomb - Nest Magazine n°4 - 1999
52. Butt Magazine n°11 - 2004
53. About Ed - New York Review Books - 2023
54. Andy - Panjadrums Press - 1973
55. Metaphysics - Hoddypoll Press - 1977
56. Marsha Poems - Hoddypoll Press - 1973
57. Genie Bottle - 2019
58. Readings in the 90's : Chinese Writers In Exile (1990), Queer Beats Symposium, Just Buffalo Literary Center with Kathy Acker (1995)
59. Gay Midlife - Bay Area Reporter - 1997
60. Genie Bottle (Emily) - 2023
61. Genie Bottle (Roger) - 2023
62. Genie Bottle (Roger) - 2023
63. Genie Bottle (Emily) - 2023
64. Bottom's Up - Catalogue - Lab Gallery San Francisco, June 1998
65. Flyer - launch of Reader at Small Press Traffic, San Francisco, 1989
66. Reader- Robert Glück - Lapis Press - 1989
67. Robert Glück's mom Noodle Kugel recipe in Food for Life:...And Other Dish edited by Lawrence Schimel - 1996
68. Communal Nude: Collected Essays - Semiotext(e) - 2016
69. Robert Glück by Chris Komater - 1996
70. Notebook - extracts
71. Pain - Robert Glück / Reading my Catastrophe - Camille Roy - Asterion Projects - 2019
72. In Commemoration of the Visit - Robert Glück, Kathleen Fraser - Further Other Book Works - 2015
73. Elders Series #2 - Robert Glück, Sarah Schulman - 2008
74. from a notebook - poster
75. Dark Passage - Chris Komater - 1998
76. Vase - 2020
77. Vase - 2019
78. Vase - 2023
79. Vase - 2021
80. Vase - 2021
81. Vase - 2021
82. Vase - 2023
83. Vase - 2021
84. Berkeley - Student handbook - 1968/1969 - Robert Glück in the ceramic workshop
85. Four on Emptiness - 1997

## **Videos**

### **A.**

Robert Glück reading for The Poetry Center & American Poetry Archives, San Francisco State University -April 1975 - 31min30

Alienagnosis - Dean Smith & Robert Glück - 2008 12min07

Robert Glück reading at Poetry Project, New York - March 2023 - 33min30

In This Country - Jocelyn Saidenberg & Robert Glück - 2023 - 8min23.

### **B.**

Ceramics from the 70's - digitized slide show

 Rattles - sound piece - performed by Bob Glück, Ben Brett and Jonathan P. Watts and recorded live by Josey in the gallery on 13 February 2023.

merci à l'équipe de Treize, Lou Ferrand, Emmanuel Guy, James Horton & Lena Monnier pour les traductions, Rafael Moreno, Josey Gallery, Miglè Dulskytė, Savannah Whaley, Chris Komater, Théo Robine-Langlois, Benjamin Thorel, Antonia Carrara, Xavi Permanyer