Title: Shape and Symbol: The Visual Poem
Number: S228
Date/Time: 3:20pm - 4:35pm on Saturday February 10, 2024
Location: Room 2105, Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level

Event Description:

The “visual” poem untethers language from the traditional line, the left margin, linearity, the page, and sometimes even from the word itself. What happens when the poem becomes shape or object, beyond stanzaic structure? What power does the physical image lend to a poem’s argument, or the histories that it describes? Panelists will examine the formal tools that make the visual possible in a poem, as well as what might be freed—poetically, linguistically, and politically—in this process.

Statement of Value:

This panel explores the possibilities of poems that incorporate fragment, photograph, drawing, non-English languages, and/or which use concrete poetics and unconventional typography to challenge the limits of traditional poetic structure. Panelists of diverse cultural backgrounds will cover the practical process of crafting visual poems and the political and historical stakes of working in these forms. What of the poem can be upended and liberated when text and symbol blur and/or expand meaning?

EVENT OUTLINE:

Event Schedule:

Panel total time: 75 min.
Introductions + Announcements: 5 min.
Paul Hlava Ceballos: 12-min. presentation
Anthony Cody: 12-min. presentation
Emily Lee Luan: 12-min. presentation
Keith Wilson: 12-min. presentation
Moderated Q&A: 15 min.
Audience Q&A: 7 min.
*any readings of panelists’ own work will remain under 5 minutes each

Announcements:
Welcome to “Shape and Symbol: The Visual Poem.” I’m Emily Lee Luan and I will be moderating and participating in this panel today.

A few reminders before we begin:
- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let me know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Opening Remarks:

If everyone could begin by closing their eyes for a moment. Now, imagine the shape of a sonnet.

No matter the plane on which we set the sonnet, most of us will conjure that pleasing rectangular shape, bleeding slightly outside of the symmetry of a square. I open with this exercise to make the simple point that we are always already writing visual poems or understanding poems as visual—as Keith Wilson puts it, “poems are visual artifacts as well as aural ones.”

What happens when we push the poem beyond its typical visual tools: the line, the left margin, the stanza, the page? What happens when the poem becomes shape, object, artifact, maybe even tangible, something we can hold?

I’ve brought together poets whose work has deepened my understanding of how white space and shape can heighten our encounters with language, and I’m very excited to be in conversation with them today.

Panelist Introductions:

Paul Hlava Ceballos is the author of banana [], a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and winner of the Donald Hall Prize for Poetry. His collaborative chaplet, banana/we pilot the blood, is with Quenton Baker and Christina Sharpe. He lives in Seattle and practices echocardiography.

Anthony Cody is the author of Borderland Apocrypha (Omnidawn, 2020) and The Rendering (Omnidawn, 2023). He has won a Whiting Award and American Book Award, as well as was a
finalist for the National Book Award. He is co-publisher of Noemi Press and teaches at Randolph College's Low Residency MFA.

**Emily Lee Luan** is the author of 回 / Return, a winner of the Nightboat Poetry Prize, and the PSA chapbook *I Watch the Boughs*. The recipient of a Pushcart Prize, she holds an MFA from Rutgers–Newark and is the 2023–24 Visiting Writer in the Syracuse University MFA program.

**Keith S. Wilson** is an Affrilachian Poet, Cave Canem fellow, graduate of the Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop, and recipient of three Bread Loaf scholarships. He holds an MFA in poetry from Chicago State University. Keith works as a writer and game designer in Chicago.

**Moderated Questions** (subject to change):

- How do you personally define the “visual poem”? What limits or boundaries do you set around this form?
- Who/what instigated your exploration into visual forms?
- How has writing the visual poem changed your relationship to language? Or to white space?
- Following the previous question, what is your relationship to legibility or meaning-making?
- What might we gain from joining multilingual and visual modes into a singular text?
- Who/what instigated your exploration into visual forms?

**Q&A:**

We’ll now turn our discussion over to audience questions. Please raise your hand if you’d like to ask a question, and I’ll repeat each question for the room.