



LETTING IN THE LIGHT

A CONVERSATION
WITH Lisa Dolby Chadwick

“This has been an incredible love circle—love going out and love coming in—a really tender and open time. In part, I think it’s because it was so simple; it was, ‘Here’s an offering...’”

Dolby Chadwick is one of the five or six art galleries that come to mind first when I think of art galleries in San Francisco. I don’t remember when I met Lisa Dolby Chadwick. It was several years ago. I do remember getting a warm note from her in 2009, when I published an intimate interview with sculptor Stephen De Staebler. A few years later my wife, artist Rue Harrison, and I were invited to Chadwick’s home to meet painter Ann Gale the evening her exhibit opened at Dolby Chadwick. Most recently, Lisa and Ann Weber arranged a panel discussion at the gallery. It featured Ann Weber, Jeremiah Jenkins and Diane Ding, all of whom were featured in works & conversations #35. I moderated, and it was something special. (The transcript can be found on our website where it’s still going strong three years later.) But even though these connections with Lisa have always been a delight, it wasn’t until very recently that the thought of interviewing her materialized.

For maybe three weeks, I’d been getting “Stay Inspired” email messages from the gallery. Each of these paired a poem with a work of art from one of the gallery artists. Often the poems were not only very good, they were sublime. Three or four times I’d been so moved I sent back a note of appreciation in response. It wasn’t like me to respond to group mailings of this kind. The fifth or sixth time, something entirely unexpected dawned on me—that not only

does Lisa have a deep feeling for visual art, but for poetry as well. I was mobilized immediately by mere thought of it. My goodness! What else might I learn if we were to sit down and have a real conversation?

In short, it’s how I found myself looking for a parking place one morning high up on Russian Hill in a maze of tiny streets, a small adventure in itself. Having parked, as I walked, face mask in place, I wondered where our conversation would go.

After greetings and some maneuvering, we were soon seated across a table from each other appropriately maintaining the Covid-19 protocols—and each with a fresh cappuccino in front of us. —Richard Whittaker

works: To begin, I’d really like to hear something about your love of literature and poetry.

Lisa Chadwick: Poetry came into my life during my 20s. I was dating an artist who read a lot of poetry. I ended up marrying him. So this would be in the early 1990s. We moved to San Francisco and lived in the Tenderloin, on Market Street between 6th and 7th, in a loft. This was before lofts were happening. I loved it.

I started working in an art gallery when I was 25. But really, Gregg introduced a lot of poetry to me. I didn’t grow up in a literary family, nor do I have a particularly impressive education. My own focus was mainly on art—making art, loving art—and eventually that grew into... Well, it didn’t seem very practical to have the life of an artist. I didn’t think that was an option for me even though I very much identified with being an artist myself.

works: Would you tell me a little bit about your art?

Lisa: I thought my interest in making art began in Middle School, but after I was out of college I found a little interview that was stored in my mom’s closet. It was from my kindergarten teacher who must have done these with her kids. It read, “What’s your name?” “Lisa.” “How old are you?” “Five.” “What do you want to be when you grow up?” “An artist.” “Why?” “Because I just think I’m good at it.” [laughs] So I was stunned to find that, because I thought it started later.

I grew up in the public school system down in San Jose. I was luckily in a district that had great art programs. Every day in high school I painted for an hour with Miss Parsagan. We also had fifteen darkrooms in my high school, so I lived in the

darkroom. I loved to paint, and then photography kind of became my thing.

works: Photography, early on then?

Lisa: Oh yeah. I had keys to the darkroom. I was in there all the time. No other kids had keys. I had a lot of interests; I did sports, but my identity was around making art.

Then when I went to college I stayed at home and was putting myself through school. I worked for a photographer for many years. I assisted at a photo studio all through high school and college and also shot photos for a local publication that one of my neighbors founded. I got a lot of assignments around photography. Personally I loved taking and printing black and white portraits using natural light. And I also had all the other jobs—waitressing and selling shoes to put myself through school.

I liked my work, but I didn't think that making art was practical, so I studied advertising. I thought, well, advertising is kind of creative. I can get a job doing that, so why not? I mean, it was the biggest mistake of my life to be in the business school, because I wasn't with my people. I should have been in the humanities. People always say, "Oh, well, but you have a business. That's so smart." So I really wasn't that into school. I was still in the darkroom. I just didn't have guidance and my parents were having their own struggles. I finished school, but it was kind of secondary.

works: So with photography sort of being the main thing, did you keep painting?

Lisa: Yes. Probably all the way to when I was thirty I was painting every day. But it wasn't a serious process. I didn't go to art school. I didn't have a degree in art history. My favorite class at school was a Russian literature class, funny enough. That's where I had my first, "ooooh!"

I grew up with a father who was a football coach. He was really an artist, too. He taught industrial design at Oregon State and ended up coaching.

Right after I got out of school, I worked in advertising for nine months right on Maiden Lane [in SFI] at a place called Goldberg, Moser, O'Neill. It was right around the corner from where my gallery is now. It was a very creative house. Do you remember the ad for Apple introducing the MacIntosh? You know, with

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the woman running down the aisle with a hammer. The firm of Chiat/Day did that ad, but the creatives who made it started Goldberg, Moser, O'Neill. So I was surrounded by these super-creative people who were making cutting-edge ads.

works: And you liked that, I take it.

Lisa: I thought I would. But you know, the conversations all day long were always about ads. I was surrounded by guys making a hundred grand a year back then and going home to an artist who had never sold a painting, and who became my husband.

So we're living on Market Street. I think I was making 18 grand a year. We were struggling [laughs]. But I feel so lucky because I was coming home every day to someone I considered a real artist. I was surrounded by super-creative, smart people and everything was about ads. But I wanted the conversation to be about something else.

I was naturally pretty entrepreneurial, and I was soooo excited to be living in San Francisco—*living downtown, working downtown*. I felt like I could kiss every corner! Everywhere I was, *I was there*, you know? But I decided, this is not the ladder I want to be on. I don't care enough about it.

I decided I was going to take a welding class. I was really jealous of all the street vendors. We used to have street vendors back then, and I thought, "What a great job! They make stuff! They sit outside! They talk to people!" And I was just about to get married. Then we left on our honeymoon.

When we got back, I ran into my dear friend Doug



SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL ART FAIR, 2000 FROM LEFT: LAURA GRIGSBY, LISA DOLBY CHADWICK, PAULINE METZLER

“I built the collection at Adobe, NEC, Informix and Apple. So at a very young age I got some really big jobs, which was also miraculous.”

Nestor who was one of the executives at Goldberg, Moser, O'Neill. Because I'd quit, he asked me, “What are you going to do?” I told him, “Oh, I'm going to take a welding class and make stuff and sell it on the street.”

He said, “My girlfriend works at this art gallery and I was thinking how perfect that would be for you.”

I thought, “No, I have my plan.” But that night, I couldn't sleep. I was thinking about what he said, and all of a sudden I thought, “He's right! It was really that

moment that seeded this idea. I thought, “If I'm excited about something I can be a very good salesperson—and I *love* art. That makes sense.” This was in 1991. I was 24.

So I called up the Andrea Schwartz Gallery. I wanted to get right into sales, but instead I was hanging shows. I was writing the press releases and doing the taxes. I was learning how to run a business! [laughs]

I was super into it. It was primarily an art consulting company. After a couple of years I got to sell art, and I started to do corporate consulting. I built the collection at Adobe, NEC, Informix and Apple. So at a very young age I got some really big jobs, which was also miraculous.

I was so excited. From day one it was a cause to support artists, and I was married to an artist. While doing corporate art consulting, we sold a lot of works on paper, and I thought, “Oh, *I can do that* [laughs]. So I started making and selling my own art. I still come across my work once in a while. I was at Kaiser the other day and saw a couple of my pieces [laughs].

works: How sweet.

Lisa: It's funny. I'm just starting to paint again after all these years, and it's hard not to judge myself because I'm looking at such good art every day. And also, it's a big job. I think you need a lot of space to make art. I don't start to feel creative until I've had a week off. Otherwise, I'm more in task mode.

works: For sure. That's a very interesting story about how you got started with the gallery. Do you have any sense whether it's typical for art gallery owners to have been making art?

Lisa: I don't know. I don't know that many gallery owners who have done that. Having been married to an artist and making art myself, I think that's made me a very good art dealer. I've always been able to see this from an artist's perspective.

works: I imagine it would be a great help for an artist to be dealing with someone who has that direct relationship with making art.

Lisa: I do think that lens has given me great internal leverage for the importance and meaning of making something from nothing. When I was working for Andrea Schwartz, and when I started Dolby Chadwick, I was always coming from a place of supporting artists because it's so hard to be an artist in America. It's just so hard.

works: How would you express what that thing you're supporting actually is? What is it that the artist seeks, and that you know yourself?

Lisa: I think it's absolutely related to how transformative art can be—and poetry, as well. [pause] It's like a baseline, or like a doorway into everything that's important. It's like that Leonard Cohen line about letting the light come in—the cracks need to be there. It's the illuminating aspect to take us outside of ourselves. I have a quote from Ken Wilbur that has meant a lot to me. I feel like it captures why I do this.

works: Go ahead.

Lisa: "Great art suspends the reverted eye, the lamented past, the anticipated future; we enter with

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it into the timeless present; we are with God today, perfect in our manner and mode, open to the riches and glories of a realm that time forgot, but that great art reminds us of—not by its content, but by what it does in us; it suspends the desire to be elsewhere and thus it undoes the agitated grasping in the heart of the suffering self and releases us, maybe for a second, maybe for a minute, maybe for all eternity, releases us from the coil of ourselves."

works: [silence] Wow. That's wonderful.

Lisa: Having this interview is a little... [with emotion] I feel things so deeply inside, but I don't feel like I have the right language. That's why I'm lucky to be surrounded by so many poets and artists who have been so generous with me because I can see it.

works: It seems immensely valuable that you see it. Your eyes teared up, and mine did, too, with that quote because that depth is so essential to our lives. And it's hard to find this in our world of commodities. It takes me back to your intuitive recognition that the world of advertising was not for you. Even though you were in

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this incredible agency with these guys who were just knocking it out of park, right?

Lisa: Yes. And I think it's because, at the root of it, it's what I've always said—when I'm starting to work with a new artist, or I'm hiring somebody—I say we're not here moving product; we are affecting lives; we are supporting artists. That is the cause. We're also opening up lines and doors for other people to understand what it's like to support artists and to live with art. It's experience driven.

works: Good for me for coming to interview you! [laughter!] I wanted to go back to your Russian literature experience. What happened there?

Lisa: Oh gosh. When I was in school, I had four jobs and was carrying 18 units. I really wasn't a good student, but I could cram and get good grades. I think the only class I ever really liked was this Russian literature class, one semester. We read—Bulgakov stands out. *The Master and Margarita*, have you read that? [no] Of course we read Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*. It was my introduction to great literature, and I loved the teacher. There wasn't a huge aha-moment, but looking back I remember thinking I was in the wrong department and my people were there.

works: So let's go back to poetry. Was there any one poem that stood out for you?

Lisa: I know a lot of poems by heart.

works: Would you recite one?

Lisa: [pauses a moment] The first poem I memorized was "Gift" by Milosz, translated by Bob Haas. He wrote this when he was living in the Berkeley Hills:

*A day so happy.
Fog lifted early. I worked in the garden.
Hummingbirds were stopping over honeysuckle flowers.
There was no thing on earth I wanted to possess.
I knew no one worth my envying him.
Whatever evil I had suffered, I forgot.
To think that once I was the same man did not
embarrass me.
In my body I felt no pain.
When straightening up, I saw the blue sea and sails.*

I like the feeling of contentment in that, and also the compassion for who we might have been at one point.

works: It reminds me of my conversation with Ann Weber. One of her sculptures is called *Enough/Not Enough*. I used that for the theme of the issue she's in [*works & conversations* #37]. What is enough? This is a moment of life that is enough. It's what we all search for, and it's so elusive.

Lisa: Yes. To be released from "the coil of ourselves." Funny enough, when I first applied for that job with Andrea Schwartz, I was really nervous and I really wanted it. I sat outside and read poetry to try to calm myself before the interview.

I started my own gallery five years later with our two-year-old, Cassiel, and the \$10,000 that I'd saved. We were still living in the Tenderloin, and I was supporting my artist husband [laughs].

works: That's really something. What did you call it when you started?

Lisa: Dolby Chadwick Gallery. It was 1997. I'd turned 30 and had saved ten thousand.

works: My god, how could you start anything for ten thousand in San Francisco?

Lisa: I know. I know.

works: You had a space?

Lisa: No! [laughs] I didn't have enough money. But I had this art consulting experience and knew I wanted to support artists. So I started with the business name Dolby Chadwick Gallery because I figured it would point toward what I wanted it to become. But I was really doing art consulting. And a dear friend and brilliant designer, Kem Theilig (she ultimately designed my subsequent two galleries and current home), told me about a friend of hers, Dan Huntsman, who had an architecture firm at 465 California in the Merchants' Exchange Building. She said, "He rents out cubicles to people."

So I went over there and met him. Talk about someone with a generous heart! He said, "Lisa, you can pick any of these cubicles." And since it was an architecture firm, they were bigger than usual, and there was a sea of them.

He said, "You can use our walls; you can bring in all the art you can fit in here and you can use our conference room. You can use our copy machine and our fax. All you need to do is set up your own phone line and our receptionist will answer 'Dolby Chadwick Gallery.'" I think it was \$300 a month. He said, "You're going to be so successful, you won't be here long."

So when you're starting a business, you're on the phone all the time making cold calls. And in this big space, it was dead silent. You know, everyone was working on CAD; they're all architects with heads down. But I'm starting my business, so I'm on the phone all day long [laughs]. I'm sure I drove them crazy, but to this day, I'm still friends with many of those people. I ended up being there nine months.

My first big job on my own—this is a funny story—I was calling the people in New York who bought the art for Saks Fifth Ave. They were opening the Saks Men's Store in San Francisco, and I got this woman, Poppy Burns, on the phone. We hit it off, and she said, "We're going to be in San Francisco and we want to see work by local artists. We'll come by your gallery."

I didn't tell them I didn't really have a gallery. So they came to the address and it's an architecture firm, right? [laughing] I had set up all these works on paper in the conference room. They felt like I was showing them art in a back alley. I was soooo excited. I mean, it's a beautiful office, but they were expecting to walk into a gallery. We ended up working together for years. I have so many Lucille Ball moments.

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works: I love that story! I could see how that could be very charming—like, I've really gotten into the hidden scene here.

Lisa: Yeah. They were New Yorkers—the head of design for all the Saks stores and then Poppy Burns, who was in charge of buying all the art. She gave me shit about that for years [laughs]. I mean, eventually I did get a gallery, but that was my first big client. I'm always doing stuff where people are going, "Whaaat??" [laughs]

works: Where did the Dolby part come from?

Lisa: Dolby is my maiden name. So I was lying in bed trying to figure out a name for my gallery to come, and I really loved my maiden name. I finally thought Dolby Chadwick. It has a nice ring, and it also makes me sound bigger than I am with just me, [laughs] and

“They were New Yorkers—the head of design for all the Saks stores, and then Poppy Burns, who was in charge of buying all the art. She gave me shit about that for years [laughs]. I mean, eventually, I did get a gallery, but she was my first big client.”

Dolby is a rare name. The family is here, so people are always asking, “Are you Ray and Dagmar’s daughter?”

works: Do you have any connection with them?

Lisa: When I did really start the gallery, I got a call from Dolby Sound—from their attorneys saying, “You can’t use our name.” I told them it was my actual name and I never had any problems after that. And funny enough, something crazy just happened. It came out of the “Stay Inspired” series that we’re doing.

Eight or nine years ago I was out and I heard somebody call out “Dagmar,” so I went up to her and said, “Are you Dagmar Dolby? I’m Lisa Dolby Chadwick and I have Dolby Chadwick Gallery.”

She said, “Oh yeah. I know your gallery.” The next day she came by the gallery, but I was out with clients, and we never really connected. But just recently, I got an email from her thanking me for the “Stay Inspired” series and saying how much it’s meant to her getting that daily pairing of art and poetry. So I told her I wanted to send her a copy of the book, *Lightning Strikes*. I knew she was sheltering in place in Sonoma. But she was going to be in San Francisco and said, “Why don’t you come by the house. I haven’t been there for a couple of months.”

I said, “Great. I’ll leave it at your doorstep.”

She said, “No. I’ve been alone, and nobody has

been there, so why don’t you come in and have tea?”

So I went about month ago on a Saturday morning. We sat and talked for about three hours. It was a really intimate, beautiful exchange and this wouldn’t have happened without the shelter-in-place situation. So there are all these beautiful moments.

works: I saw your email this morning saying people have been responding to your art and poetry series from all over the world. And when did you start this?

Lisa: In March, on the first week of shelter in place. We’ve been sending out “Stay Inspired” five days a week, Tuesday through Saturday.

works: Okay. How did this begin?

Lisa: It all happened so fast, being forced to close the gallery. None of us saw it coming, right? Every day the rules were changing, so every day I kept drafting a new message to our clients, and not sending it. So on Friday, March 13th, before we were forced to close the following Monday, we had a client presentation. One of my staff members and I were holding up this giant, ten-foot-wide painting, a diptych, for this great client and I said, “Oh, let’s do a little dance!” So we did this little synchronized dance. You could see our feet moving underneath the painting. Unbeknownst to me, the client caught the video on her phone. I thought it was so funny and just loved this spontaneous little video.

That same Friday, half the galleries in SF had announced they were closing until March 31, and all the messages were leading with Covid-19. So by the time shelter in place was announced, I thought, “I’m not sending out another one of those Covid-19 messages!” I wanted to send out something playful, and then I remembered the little video of us dancing behind that painting. So I paired it with Naomi Shihab Nye’s poem, “So Much Happiness.”

That was the beginning of sending a poem and a painting. The subject line on that first one said, “A big painting, a little jig and a poem a day.” [laughs]

The responses I got from everyone, including Gary Garrels of SFMOMA, were like, “Wow. I really needed that!” So I thought, that was fun. And, literally, from there we started doing the “Stay Inspired” mailings five days a week. I began with all of my favorite poems. It kept me going, too, because (cont. p. 36)

From Chadwick's "Stay Inspired" pairings (a poem and a painting) sent to her email list...

Edition 10 - March 31

Devorah Major

we are this place

we are this place
the clay and salt of it
the river and sand of it

fingers rise from desert dunes
faces emerge from cresting waves
bodies unfold like tropical blossoms
flush with the odors of honey and decay

we are the forests we fell
the mountains we devour
the lands we poison

our bodies are
the seed and ash of this place

we are not merely the caretakers of this place
we are this place, this place of gold and silt

and what will we do with this gift and debt
where in prayer is the space for truth

where amidst these interminable wars
is the table of compassion set

even in our worm selves as we turn and spit
fertilizing the future with our waste

we are so much more than we imagine

we are spirit resilient
rock unforgiving
wind eternal

let us move now
from the storms of hate and fear
and cleanse this place that is us

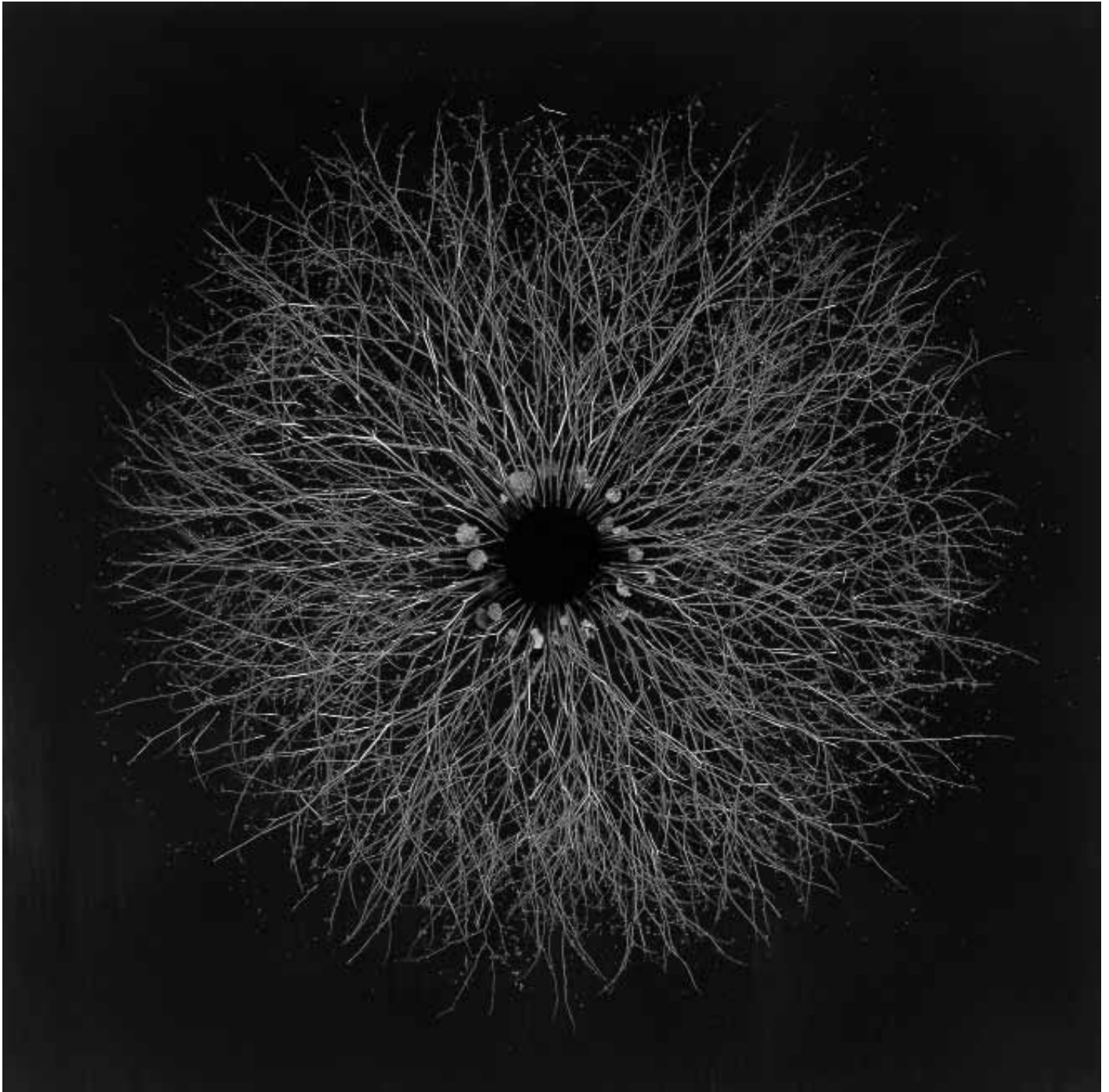
sacrifice nothing but our arrogance
and the need to destroy and subvert
the glories of the universe that are us

we are more than we have imagined
more than we have invented and discovered
inside our pulsing dreams

sing with me of a better day
when we learn this planet as ourselves
full of the freshness of a newborn's eyes

we are this place
shaping its tomorrows

we need to dream it well



MAYME KRATZ, *INSIDE OUR PULSING DREAMS*, 2019, RESIN AND WEEDS ON PANEL, 60" X 60"

I had something positive to send out into the world.

I was going into the gallery every day and my staff was working from home. So it was really an intense time. Nobody knew what was going on. To be told that I had to close my doors.... I thought, how am I not only going to cover our overhead but support all these artists?

So we started sending out these daily inspirations.

The responses that came back, really personal ones from people I don't know, and from all over the world—Paris, Capetown, Denmark... I've collected a lot of them with messages like, "You have no idea how much I needed this today. My father died two days ago from Covid." "I'm alone in Paris. The streets are empty. I look forward to this every day. It's helping me get through this time."

Again, these from people I don't know. Of course, I was getting responses from people I do know, too. We have about 15,000 people on our email list, and every day there were at least 30 personal stories or messages like, "You don't know me, but this poem is really helping me get through such a hard time. My husband had a heart attack a few days ago."— lots of intense stuff.

So this has been an incredible love circle [laughs]—love going out and love coming in, a really tender and open time. In part, I think it's because it was so simple; it was, "Here's an offering..."

Luckily, the poets have been very generous. Coming up with five poems a week and permissions was challenging. We'd try to get a few days ahead. I'd find the poem and Sierra Nguyen, who has only been working with me just a few months, has a great lens into the pairings. It was wonderful to have such a great partner in that. It's not an easy thing to pair a piece of art with a poem and to have it resonate in a certain way. She kept me going when I was weary. "Lisa I need something for tomorrow! Do you have any poems?" [laughs] So I'd spend my weekends just scouring poetry books and trying to find things that felt right.

I'm just so happy if these helped anybody. Sometimes I would get that day's poem, and I'd forgotten about it because we'd set it up the week before, and it was exactly what I needed that day! We've all been up and down so much. It's been so interesting going into the gallery and being there alone, almost like the early days of my business. It's been, in a strange way, an incredible gift.

You know, every three and a half weeks, we change our exhibits. The artist has worked for a year and a half. There's a certain aspect where a lot gets taken for granted and, after almost twenty-five years of exhibitions, in the last few years I was feeling sort of burned out, you know, just feeling like a machine.

Everybody is getting busier. It's even been hard getting people to come to the artist's dinners. With the traffic and the heightened intensity in the last few years in the Bay Area, the air has sort of been sucked out of that creative space. Everybody is over-scheduled. But I think there's been an incredible opening with the vulnerability and tenderness that everybody has been feeling through this.

So going from feeling really burned out from working 80 hours a week, being there by myself with my team supporting me from home, and feeling so energized and so excited, that's just been... I remember that first FaceTime call; clients were looking at Edwige Fouvry paintings. Then, at the end of the conversation, they said, "Oh, we'll take those two paintings."

I don't know if they could tell, but I was crying. Then I called Edwige in Belgium. It was probably 11 pm her time; we're FaceTiming and she was in the darkroom. I think she'd just turned the light on to answer the phone, and I said, "Edwige, I just sold two of your paintings!" There was silence on the other end. She was crying.

I've gotten so many letters from artists. To be able to sign checks—"Look! Here's funding so you can continue." It's coming out of total burnout back to that super strong feeling for the cause of supporting artists. At the beginning of the sheltering in place, I thought it was only going to last a few weeks. But when it kept going, I thought, "Okay, I want to try to send a check to every one of our artists; that became sort of a fun thing I could aim for. Now I think we're almost there."

The unexpected thing that's happened with the pairings is that it's created a great opening and lens for people to be reading poetry again. I've heard from a lot of people, "I used to read poetry all the time. Thank you so much!" Also, when a poem is paired with a piece of art, it creates a pathway that might not otherwise be there if you're just looking at an image. That's been very powerful and has created a lot of business for us. It didn't come from a marketing place, but ultimately our artists benefitted from being framed with such brilliant poetry.

works: Those have been really special. I've been struck by your selection. You know, I've sent you a few notes of appreciation because I've been so moved and I'm pretty hard nosed about poetry. I was on fire with poetry when I got out of college. I was writing poetry.

Lisa: I didn't know you were a poet.

works: I haven't written any poetry in years. Did you know that you live close to Ina Coolbrith Park?

Lisa: Yes! She was California's first poet laureate.

works: Right. When I was first moving up to San Francisco, I won first prize in the Ina Coolbrith Circle's annual poetry contest. It was 1965, I think.

Lisa: You did!? [laughs and claps]

works: [laughs] I did. A friend showed me a notice in the *San Francisco Chronicle* about the contest. It's funny because just seeing that name, *Ina Coolbrith*, I immediately had a vision of a group of poetry lovers, maybe up in years, and a poem I'd just written popped into my head. I had a feeling it was just right, so I sent it in, and it won.

Lisa: I would love to read that poem! It's funny, I actually have literary agents contacting me for their poets. Because I had this interest in poetry, somehow word got out and Ed Smallfield, who started Apogee Press in 1997, was looking for a space to do a reading. He launched his first book at our gallery and started using it for monthly poetry readings. That went on for two years. Then in the early 2000s, Saint Mary's College contacted me. They needed a space to hold their annual fundraiser. So that went on for 17 years in the gallery. It's how I met Bob Haas and Brenda Hillman. A lot of great poets read there, like Michael Ondaatje. Then I hosted events for Litquake. I knew Jane Ganahl. So there's been a long history of literary events.

The Lightning Strikes project started out as an idea where I was going to have 15 of our artists in a group show, which I don't do a lot of. Do you know that poem by Raymond Carver called "The Painter and the Fish"? [no] The poem is about an artist working away in his studio and his wife calls and tells him "time is running out." Basically she's telling him he might as

well give up, that he's a failure.

So he walks out of his studio door and he's done. He's walking along and observing all these things. It starts to rain. He keeps walking and seeing moments he could paint. Lightning starts breaking across the sky. He finally reaches a jetty and now it's raining hard. He's at a point of despair when he sees a fish jump out of the water and fall back. Then it jumps again, higher this time, shaking itself and standing on its tail. It's a sign. Here's how the poem ends [she reads]

*By the time he'd reached home
he'd quit smoking and vowed never
to talk on the telephone again.
He put on his smock and picked up
his brush. He was ready to begin
again, but he didn't know if one
canvas could hold it all. Never
mind. He'd carry it over
onto another canvas if he had to.
It was all or nothing. Lightning, water,
fish, cigarettes, cards, machinery,
the human heart, that old port.
Even the woman's lips against
the receiver, even that.
The curl of her lip.*

So I was talking with Matt Gonzales, one of our artists and a dear friend, and I asked him what he thought of my idea of having this show where I'd invite 15 artists to create something about inspiration using this poem as the starting place.

He said, "Well Lisa, that's a very good idea, but you know so many poets and love poetry. Why don't you invite 15 poets to each give you a poem and then pair these with 15 artists?" So it was really his idea.

I had all these poems and poets in my mind that I would love to use, but I had no idea how hard it was going to be to get permissions. I was hoping to have poets like Billy Collins, Mary Oliver, David Whyte and Gary Snyder.

Some of the asks were easy with people I knew, like Bob Haas. But so many people said "no" to me over and over again. It was really hard. Matt [Gonzales] is friends with Ferlinghetti, and we just called him up. So it just grew and ended up being 16 artists and 16 poets. I was so focused on it that for a year my staff was "Where the hell are you?" [laughs] But then we had that first reading and raised money for St. Mary's. Then the second time we did it, it was a

much easier ask. *Lightning Strikes* won the bronze for the best independently published poetry book in the nation.

works: That's impressive. You have to feel great about that.

Lisa: I do, and we all do. It brings up something I've been thinking about a lot lately. It came out of reading an article from the *New York Times*, "Something Happens When You Fall," by Hisham Matar. His friend works at the National Gallery, and she's able to still go in there. So they're having this conversation about "if the art is hanging on the walls in all these galleries and nobody is there to see it, or if the poem has been written and nobody is reading it, then...?"

The main point, which I loved, is that somehow the viewer or the reader completes the painting or the poem through their experience. I noticed this when one week I was particularly desperate to find the next day's poem. I started to forage through the *Lightning Strikes* book that we'd published in December and, in context of what we're going through now with the pandemic, I noticed that almost every poem had a different meaning for me—an amplified meaning or a different meaning. So I love how our experience is part of the poem, or the painting. In both cases they need us humans to be completed. ♦

To learn more, visit
www.dolbychadwickgallery.com/

From Chadwick's "Stay Inspired" pairings (a poem and a painting) sent to her email list...

Edition 81 - July 22

HAFIZ

With That Moon Language

Admit something:

Everyone you see, you say to them, "Love me."

Of course you do not do this out loud; otherwise,
someone would call the cops.

Still, though, think about this, this great pull in us
to connect.

Why not become the one who lives with a full moon
in each eye that is always saying,
with that sweet moon language,
what every other eye in this world is dying to hear?

Translated by Daniel Ladinsky

DAVID KELSO, *INFLUENCE*, EDITION OF 30, 1983, COLOR, HARD AND SOFT
GROUND WITH AQUATINT, ENGRAVING AND BURNISHING, 30" X 22"

