

**Jeremy Benson, Poet-in-Residence,
*Viola Frey: Center Stage***

Jeremy Benson was Poet Laureate of Napa County for the 2017-2019 term; whether as a participant, patron, or planner, Jeremy endeavors to cultivate a rich community of writers, readers, and artists. His poems have appeared in Spittoon, Dead Flowers, and Mirage Period(ical). He is the co-founder of the Broken Nose Collective, an annual exchange of hand-made chapbooks. Until recently he lived in Napa with his dog Wendell. Jeremy now lives in Arcata with his family.

As Poet-in-Residence for *Viola Frey: Center Stage*, Benson crafted twelve original short poems inspired by works in the exhibition. Visitors were invited to take-a-poem and leave-a-poem in exchange.



di Rosa





Holding Space

for *Untitled (Hand Holding Vessels)*, 1965-68

A vessel for your puddling tears.
One, to transport our care across valleys and months
(the care fermenting and oxidizing—a pickled relation),
one for the dog's hair, and all the pebbles
he tracks in, held between his toes.
Double, triple, quadruple Aquarian palm,
bearing the water. And one vessel, empty, open, full
with sighs, gasps, the clear air we thirst.



Monster Head Don't Die Yet

for Phobia: Monster Head Don't Die Yet, 1979

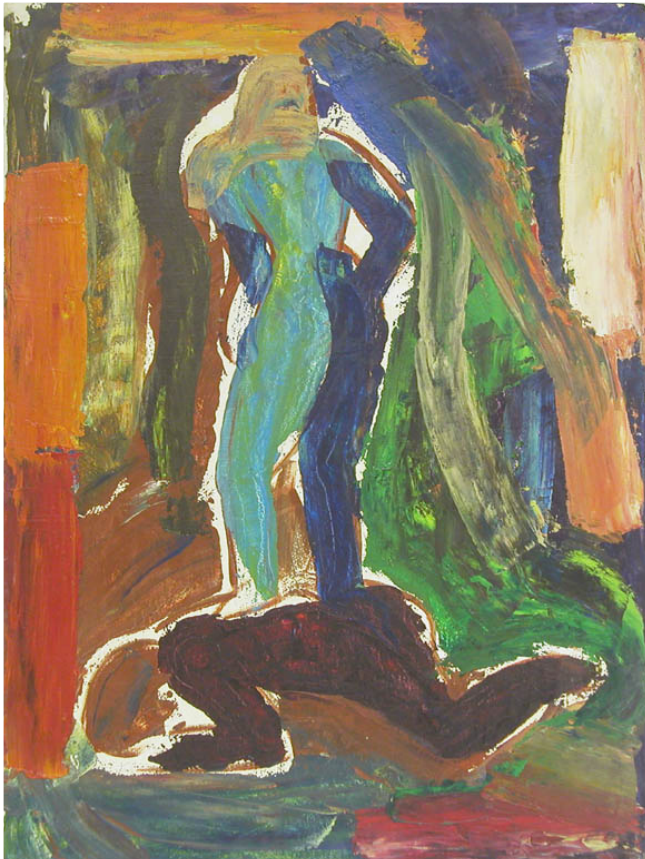
When I heard you under the bed I was afraid
and I know I should have tossed you lonely socks and
angry thoughts, should have told you bed-time stories,
but I leapt across the lava floor, ducked under covers,
never turned you friend—never asked if
you were afraid of me, or if I could get you something to eat.
And now I need you, Monster Head, I could use your help and grit,
your creep and wile. Don't die yet, Monster Head,
what do you need? Are you fairy, refueled with applause,
or shadow—I'll grab the needle and thread.



Poser

for *Pink Man and Venus*, 1975

As if he just told a joke, and of course the cock thinks it's funny and crows with laughter. And the spaniel, I mean, it wasn't that clever, you know, but man's best friend and all. And the Venus, in the position she's in, isn't about to tell him to shut up, that she'd heard that one before, even though she should, even though she comes from a long line of women who were worshipped for being women. She doesn't want to turn up in a loess!—so she smiles, and he's so blind to the truth that he takes her smile to mean that she loves him, so he pulls her closer, as if physical touch implied psychic intimacy. The truth is they're all just pretending for his sake. Don't tell him, say, that he's missing a foot. Don't tell him he was born in a department store window. He's pink: as in raw, sensitive, fresh. Don't tell him the truth, it's a set-up, and he's not as flexible as he thinks.



Untitled

for *Untitled (Blue Nude Standing On Crouching Figure)*,
1978-80

I thought this was love, lying
prostrate selflessly. A new kind,
to say I am not like the others. In those
early days we talked about equity and feminism
and justice, and I wanted to believe we could
build something together; thought, if I bowed on hands
and knees you could reach higher on my back.
So quick to lie, so quick to forget I could have reached
and in that way we could have built something
with our four hands, both standing,
tall and stout, something to sustain
our joy, our connection, the promise of equity.
But you were blue, and my head grew heavy,
and everything toppled around us.



Landscape

for *Father's Farm*, 1975-76

High afternoon, late summer,
heat grows from the ground
where sunlight hits through the trees,
a million camera obscuras shuttering
in the drift. Already not the same
landscape as yesterday, nor last week,
maybe from afar, the way you recognize
your brother by his shape and gait as he
walks up the drive, but close, you see the
wrinkles and splinters of seasons passing,
weathered as a ladder left in the orchard,
paint peeling, hinges tweaked. Same,
hasn't changed a bit. But for the details, fine.

Fine, we'll carry it with us, up until the details blur,
and we forget what it looked like in the spring.



he can't even commit which door to leave through
for *Studio View: One Man Splitting*, 1982-83

like a quick-change artist, all the doors in constant use. comings and goings, goings and comings, the click of shut and squeak of open, a broken record, revolving door of emotional dearth, of faceless engagement, afraid to be known, to himself, to the artist—making like a banana, splitting like an ax and taking again with his leave, silent, still.



have I told you this before applesauce friend diameter
for *Old Age Spiral*, 1983

You can't distinguish
the drunk from the dieing.
It's five o'clock somewhere
and last call somewhere else.

We're all on our way out the door.



Pose

for *Untitled (Bather Plaque)*, 1975

She tells me she's been sitting as a nude
model, for a local art class, some-
thing, she feels, she needed to do,
for herself, for her body—
a body I have loved, I have ogled,
even worshipped,
and
I know what she means—beauty
in the eye of the beholder—each spot, each
blemish honored by fingers and lips—yet the beheld
beheaded for doubt, for imperfection.

What would an artist do with my grotesques,
what would a lover, what will I?
Trust the paintbrush, the pen-and-ink,
trust the partner's gaze, their gasps and holdings.

Disrobe and let them draw.



Meeting with the Goddess

for *Untitled (Wall Hanging of Female Figure)*, 1965

sheet of clay draped over the goddess,
like the morning after,
like a savior, cast
immaculate, hanging, with arms
offering comfort or blessing,
or she shrugs, gives up what we take,
or releases, finally, what we asked her to hold.
Mother, mother, stay here or return to us.



Mindfulness

for *Studio View: Man in Doorway*, 1983

Demand that I use my words:
Here they are, all of them.
This is the answer, when you ask me.
This is the pause before I respond.
When I am silent, seemingly empty
and staring, out the door, when you think
I have nothing, this is what there is,
what I have, behind my eyes, and zipping
through every neuron, gray matter lit
with every color, every memory, every icon.
The pillars holding my breath begin to crack
and tumble, and all the loud characters of my soul
speak at once, of the presence of your departure.



A Walk in the Park

for *The Decline and Fall of Western Civilization*, 1992

Here we are at the end of it:
graffiti on the surface of the earth.
What baggage is left, leave,
what work remains, release:
Cut the rest into pieces.
Take only what we can paint
on our bodies, and the stories
we can tell on our lips.



Antifa

for *Untitled (Blue Buddha, Bird with Torch, Small Plate)*,
1988

Why do you ohm the blues, and why sing
flames? Blink once, blink twice, find a
mouse in your bouquet. Attach a face-plate
to your round, play as child, relish
rolling, and coiling, painting with broad strokes
and miniscule hashes. The plate for consumption,
and the blues for the broken world. The torch—to burn
it down? Or to light our way again. Or both, neither.
Chaos until a pattern shakes out:
Blue Buddha, torch bird, small plate,
blue Buddha, torch bird, small plate.

Viola Frey works pictured:

Untitled (Hand Holding Vessels), 1965-68

Phobia: Monster Head Don't Die Yet, 1979

Pink Man and Venus, 1975

Untitled (Blue Nude Standing On Crouching Figure), 1978-80

Father's Farm, 1975-76

Old Age Spiral, 1983

Untitled (Bather Plaque), 1975

Studio View: One Man Splitting, 1982-83

Untitled (Wall Hanging of Female Figure), 1965

Studio View: Man in Doorway, 1983

The Decline and Fall of Western Civilization, 1992

Untitled (Blue Buddha, Bird with Torch, Small Plate), 1988

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