the signal house *edition*

#8

tawny frogmouth, 2020
pastel and pencil on paper

dan spielman

january 2021 | the signal house edition

"Birds have always been my companions. They are written into the story of my life. As subject matter, they were an instinctual choice. The process of drawing them has revealed to me a new direction, a new practice – and has been joyfully instructive about the interplay between observation and discovery."

dan spielman - featured artist

issue eight | january 2021

founding editors	melissa chambers henry martin kit brookman
poetry editor	erica gillingham
featured artist	dan spielman
contributors	eloïse mignon felicia mccarthy geoff sobelle xana chambers jo flynn
issue designed by	rory foster

contents

welcome

Forty-five minutes north-east of Cambridge is a landscape I've come to love very much indeed…

In the town there were two mutes, and they were always together…

It was a rather nice morning…

Let me begin again…

Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon…

The Gregorian calendar, and those who employ it, use January as a time to look back on the year that was, and forward to the year that might be. The gesture is symbolic, though arbitrary. January is no better or worse a month for beginnings than any other time of the year.

There are an infinite number of beginnings to establish in life, almost as many as there are opening sentences in books; consider our above collage from 1923 to 2019 as an inspiration.

One's power and choice to begin anew is something one always has. We are a species that consciously and obsessively thinks of beginnings and endings, and, to help prove the point, our idioms—at least in English—capture this narrative bent: we talk of turning over a new leaf or closing a chapter in our life. We also talk of someone being a closed

book, dotting our i's and crossing our t's, and not judging a book (that is, our colleague or blind date) by its cover. Our vernacular is so peppered with these expressions that one might suggest we are, in fact, the authors and narrators of our own stories.

In all, this sounds a grander and more powerful role than our now equally common, indentured position as tweeters, posters, senders, submitters, and consumers. When you put the two words side by side—author and tweeter—the demotion is clear. It is much better to be the author of our destiny than its tweeter.

We are also the community that comes together to listen, read, talk and reflect on stories, be they fact or fiction. At The Signal House Edition, we are fortunate to be the publishers of this work and in this issue we are thrilled to present nine new contributors.

Whatever 2021 holds for you, we hope that your new beginnings continue beyond January, well into the new year. We look forward to welcoming you here as contributors, readers, and supporters, sharing some of the 2021 story together.

The Editors

The first sentences of books, cited in order, H is for Hawk by Helen McDonald (2014), The Heart is a Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers (1940), Mr. Clumsy by Roger Hargreaves (1978), On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong (2019), and Cane by Jean Toomer (1923).

galway, ireland

PERSPECTIVE

felicia mccarthy

Galway city still has its magic. This is the town of artists and new ideas. The place where creative projects are tested and celebrated. We are a gathering city.

We like to meet and talk and drink and tell stories, then go home and write or paint or make music late into the night. If we wake early, we might run through the empty morning roads, or walk the prom to town and back, watching the sea, waiting for the light to

come, the swans to land, the cormorants and herons to perform their signal duties. This is a county of writers and artists of all kinds.

Recently, artists meet in forests like Coole Park and Barna Woods, but in the icy cold of winter not much more than walking and sipping hot toddies for warmth occurs. Outdoor dining happens haphazardly and suddenly when the rains stop and the winds—for once—cease. This provides a small dose of comradery and friendship, the chat and chatter so necessary for writers, though it lacks the usual *come here, wait'll I tell ya* of whispered gossip and the backslapping fast-talk of the pubs. Despite this, these outside happenings lead to a feasting on images like the fog rising from the wet leaves on the forest floor; or the diaphanous curtains of rain drifting north across the bay from County Clare.

In the time of Covid, the artists in Galway are writing, painting, drafting, plotting or even just fermenting to distillation, ideas that in any other year than this, may not have found the dark fertility of a womb to develop within. There are good things to be found in the sometimes maddening quiet of separation.

This afternoon, I met with another poet in the woods of Coole Park. Dressed for all weathers, we take off past the ruins of Lady Gregory's house, and pass the famous copper beech "Autograph Tree". I hear the thwap of the hurler's stick to puck in the muddied green, and turn to watch. W.B. Yeats might have bridled seeing their jackets flung over the stones carved with his words, or he might have laughed. Definitely he would have written about it.

We move along into the woods, talking as quickly as we walk: how is the writing coming, what are you reading, who's the latest inspiration, the best lines? We strut until she stops suddenly, looking upward along the tall trees that look like spines of a fan opening into the wide white sky. My gaze drops to the trees sloping towards the river, a fuzz of blue-green pine branches distorts the sharp tree lines, the grey metal river a painting by Monet. It is enough.

Lattes and mince pies in the open courtyard of the park are enjoyed, as we exchange the

heart-strengthening minutia of our lives. We part and make our way back to separate hearths, where each falls back onto our own resources, renewed. I warm the soup, light the candles, and begin again to write.

Photo credit: *Woods of Steam, Coole Park, 2020* by Margaux Pierrel, by kind permission of the artist.

POETRY

felicia mccarthy

winter solice, salthill

Night falls down in a rush
as clouds stack up in stripes,
a Hudson Bay blanket in grey.

I walk the prom content to reach
Blackrock, though the light is failing.
As I kick the wall and turn, clouds shift

reveal a triangle of gold. It is as if the wind
turned down the blanket of night by turning
back a corner of the sky. It is an invitation to stop.

I pause to watch the sun set its bright head
down upon the dark pillow of the year's end.
It had already begun its dream of Spring.

(image credit: *what else can I say I'm still waiting for this moment to be gone,* acrylic ink and paint on canvas, 160cm X 115cm, 2018 by Paul Hallahan, by kind permission of the artist)

artist representiation : berlin opticians gallery

the
signal house
edition

support us

We are an artist-run, independent and unfunded publication. Our issues represent hundreds of hours of research, creation and refinement by our contributors and editors.

We rely on the support of our readers who share the belief that artistic pursuit and the exchange of ideas need a house in which to thrive.

All donations go towards the production of our issues. Donors of £100 or more will be listed as a friend of The Signal House Edition on our About page (unless requested otherwise).

donate now

submissions

We accept submissions in non-fiction, fiction, essays, visual art, and audio. Follow us on social media and subscribe to our newsletter to hear of submission deadlines for other categories, such as poetry.

We encourage submissions from individuals from backgrounds and identities underrepresented in art and writing, particularly with regard to race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability. We welcome works translated from other languages into English where both writer and translator hold rights. Contributors retain copyright of their work. Please note, we are currently unable to pay contributors.

We read all the work sent to us and aim to respond within two months if we feel there is a place for it in the journal. As we are a small team, we do not respond to each individual submission.

submit work

the signal house *shop*

art for sale | works on paper | print editions

Hangover Day on Costinela's Balcony in Bucharest,
Vicktor Hübner, 2014

The Signal House Shop sells original works on paper by our contributors, which are

- Exclusive
- Limited Edition
- Signed and Numbered
- Certified by the Publisher or Artist

shop now

Your purchase will direcly support each artist and help ensure the survival of *The Signal House Edition*.

the card that didn't exist

ESSAY

eloïse mignon

Several years ago in Marseille, a city I visited often in my twenties, a cousin of a cousin gave me a tarot reading. Valérie's building stood on a seam of rock close to Notre Dame de la Garde, a white basilica on a limestone outcrop. It was nighttime. The basilica's gilt Madonna bathed in a cone of light. Below us, the city drew in the dark sea through the rectangle of the Vieux Port, where we'd met earlier at a bar. Valérie, a primary-school teacher, was new to Marseille. She'd arrived at the bar, which was soviet-themed, with a death metal hoodie pulled over her work dress; and told me, as we drank Pastis, that she'd lately been frequenting an esoteric cult who believed that the twenty-two Major Arcana of the Marseille Tarot were based upon a series of predictions made by Mary Magdalen, who, according to popular legend, had come to Marseille after the crucifixion. I'd never heard this. My uncle (unrelated to Valérie), whom I came to Marseille to visit the most, made reference to tarot not as a divinatory tool steeped in Christian mysticism but as a card game: *le tarot*. But he was a communist atheist, so what did he know? I knew very little about tarot myself; with no awareness then that there existed many different decks, of which the Marseille pattern is among the oldest, with secretive provenance and meaning.

After an uphill walk, during which we paused against a security grille still warm from the day to smoke hash, Valérie guided me to lay a simple spread of cards on the floor of her apartment. When I flipped the one meant to symbolize my future it was almost entirely black. It was "Le Néant" — Nothingness. She hesitated, then tried to spin it positively, saying that it constituted a screen upon which infinite desires could be projected. But at every breakup or jobless rut in the years since it's come to mind. Then someone I loved died, and after surprising myself by speaking about the card in grief counselling I searched for it online. I couldn't find it. There is no *Néant* in the deck of the Marseille Tarot.

Last month I emailed Valérie. When she didn't write back, I searched for her cult. I googled tarot marseille marie madeleine in English and French. I used my university library platform, and found what looked like a readable book about the Marseille Tarot by the filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky. I searched old emails and

found the name of the group she'd mentioned: Parousia. From entries on their blog I pieced together their story of the tarot's origins. According to Parousia, upon Jesus' crucifixion, which took place at the dawn of the Age of Pisces, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalen and John the Divine wept shamelessly together at Golgotha. After the resurrection, which Magdalen witnessed, the three converged upon a conviction to spread the message of Christ. Each carried this out in their own fashion: the virgin with sporadic appearances on earth, St. John by dictating the Book of Revelation from Patmos, and Magdalen, known in medieval times as the apostle of apostles, by evangelizing southern Gaul.

Magdalen's journey to Marseille is a tale of providence. At Palestine, amid the first wave of Christian persecutions, Magdalen, along with her sister Martha and brother Lazarus, Joseph of Arimathea, who carried the chalice, Maximin, one of the seventy-two disciples, and a servant girl named Marcella was forced into a dinghy with neither rudder, sail, nor oars, and cast adrift in the Mediterranean. Miraculously, the boat washed ashore at Marseille, then called Massalia, a trading port colonized by Phocaea in 600 BC. The city's inhabitants worshipped Artemis of Ephesus, but Magdalen and her cohort preached the resurrection and converted many before travelling inland. Magdalen's last thirty years were spent in solitude on the outskirts of Saint-Maximin la Sainte Baume, a Provençale village, where she sat in a cave and wept at man's lack of deference toward God.

Parousia, the cult, goes on to link Magdalen to the Marseille Tarot via the Roman anchorite John Cassian, who came to Provence after travels in Palestine and Egypt. Cassian is known for founding Marseille's Abbaye Saint-Victor in 415, and in so doing, for introducing the practice of Eastern monasticism to the West. According to Parousia, Cassian was fascinated with Magdalen and committed himself to carving a flight of steps to her mountain cave as a pathway for the faithful. Hearing of twenty-two prophetic homilies that Magdalen spoke while in Marseille, Cassian—who'd learnt of a mysterious card game while meditating in the desert—set about representing these pictorially, eventuating in the Tarot of Marseille's twenty-two

Major Arcana.

Intrigued to know more about tarot, I watched some YouTube videos linked to Parousia's blog. I started to realize that the energetic man giving the presentations, a self-described physicist from Marseille, was probably the sole content writer. Illustrated by simple pictograms, his lectures, mostly on esotericism, concocted complex imbrications of Neoplatonism, numerology, Pythagorean decimals, Hesiod's Ages of Man, the Book of Revelation, religious caste systems, helicoidal time-space models, and astrology; animated by favorable views of the Gauls, Celtic chivalry and social hierarchies; belief in the lost city of Atlantis; and fierce critiques of banking and finance (associated with the number 666), democracy, journalism, the "Sino-American empire", capitalism, the European Renaissance, protestants, antifa, the *gilets jaunes*, leftists of all stripes, and Marxists. Footage from a conference he attended in London showed panels of men in black tails, chandeliers visible in the reflection of tarnished mirrors. The other speakers were Alain de Benoist, a figure of the French "New Right" that emerged in reaction to May '68, and Aleksandr Dugin, an advisor to Putin known for his "Eurasian" ideology. I remembered Valérie, laughing bizarrely at the bar in Marseille, flippantly assuring me that the cult was not *facho*. It looked like it was, in fact, facho. My Marseille mystery was over. That's what you get, I told myself, when you begin from an irrational point; when you chase a tarot card that doesn't even exist. The mystic promise of it—the idea that there could be more than what there appears to be—turns up nothing but a collection of fascists.

But was the stuff about Mary Magdalen and the Tarot true?

Parousia's Magdalen-in-Marseille story recovers Magdalen as she was known in the Middle Ages—as a venerated Saint. More precisely, it conforms to a narrative popularized during the eleventh century, which historian Katharine Ludwig Jansen names the "*vita apostolica-eremitica*" for its splicing of two post-conversion accounts of Magdalen's life: active/apostolic and contemplative/hermitic respectively. Jansen, who explores late medieval devotion to Mary Magdalen, describes her popularity in Provence at the time as so

rife that the up-and-coming Angevin dynasty intentionally adhered itself to her: in 1279, Saint Mary Magdalen's relics were "discovered" in a sarcophagus found at the church at Saint-Maximin; an exhumation presided over by Charles, Prince of Salerno, future King of Naples. Charles' quest to find Magdalen's remains was motivated by his insight that to ally an already-beloved local saint to his parvenu house, the Angevins, would reinforce their claim to rule.

Magdalen's position in the church has fluctuated over the years. A series of assaults on her legacy, beginning with a theological tract by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples in 1517, led to the piecemeal downgrade of her status. Jansen points out that once the humanist practice of textual criticism developed in the early modern period—a technique that bolstered Protestant determination to unseat the cult of the saints—the cobbled-together legends that had composed Mary Magdalen into an apostolic figure no longer held up. Last century, in 1969, the Roman calendar was reformed, after which it was decided that Magdalen would be demoted to "disciple" only. In 2016, however, with an eye to appeasing female congregants in the proto #MeToo era, Pope Francis re-elevated Magdalen's July 22 Saint's day to a Feast, on par with festivities accorded each apostle.

Jansen's scholarly book on Magdalen doesn't mention the Marseille Tarot. The filmmaker Jodorowsky's book on tarot doesn't mention Mary Magdalen. On a blog called *Perfettoletizia*, Italian for "perfect joy", I read this: "There is a very harmful supposition, which should be discounted, that [tarot] originated in ancient Egypt and was taken up by Mary Magdalene and her Gnostic followers, to be subsequently introduced into Europe by St John Cassian". Reading further, I came to see that the origins of the Marseille Tarot constitute an aporia from which proliferates a mesh of inconsistent narratives. The name itself allows multiple etymologies: "The word *Tarot* would be Egyptian (*tar*: way; *ro, rog*: royal); Indo-Tartar (*tan-tara*: zodiac); Hebrew (*torah*: law); Latin (*rota*: wheel; *orat*: speak); Sanskrit (*tat*: the whole; *tar-o*: fixed star); Chinese (*Tao*: the indefinable principle); and so forth," Jodorowsky says. Yoav Ben-Dov, who published the first study of tarot in Hebrew, suggests a link between

tarot and sixteenth-century Italian for "fool", *taroccho*, for its double significance: the folly of fortunetelling or gambling, and the "The Fool" as the only unnumbered Arcanum. *Perfettoletizia* (the "harmful supposition" blog) embraces wilder ideas: tarot could derive from the Greek *taricho* or Latin *tarichus*, meaning "to salt meat", and suggest the preservation of knowledge from the non-initiated; *taroccare* in modern Italian is to bewilder or counterfeit; *tarare* is to decorate cards; in Latin *altecari* is to quarrel (as occurs during card games); *tariq* is an Arab word for path or way; *taraqqi* is advancement in Arabic, progress in Hindi.

Among orthodox sources there is general agreement that the Marseille Tarot was likely to have been created in the fifteenth century—not the fifth as Parousia has it—and its prototype was likely to have descended to Marseille from Milan or Ferrara. Michael Dummett's entry for "Tarot" in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* states that there is nothing prior to 1781—when the Freemason Antoine Court de Gébelin advanced the first theory of tarot's esoteric character—that records tarot cards being used for anything other than game-playing. However, historians have no definitive answer as to *why* the twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana became merged with the cards in four suits—equivalents of which existed in ancient China and India, and among Malmuk Muslims. But these latter decks don't contain an equivalent of the Major Arcana, which appears to be singular to Europe, with imagery suggestive of the late medieval or early Renaissance period—its significance a mystery. Seditious characteristics of certain cards, like The Popess (a female pope, sometimes translated as the High Priestess); and The Wheel of Fortune, which seems to depict a precarious monarch, incite notions that the tarot was created as a secret repository of heretical knowledge.

From Amazon's trove of self-published books on tarot I bought a kindle version of *The Hidden Magdalene in The Tarot de Marseille* (2019) by Raylene Abbott, who decodes the "Magdalene Heresy" veiled in the cards' symbols. Abbott claims her capacity to decipher the cards owes to biology: "my ancestral lineage traces back to the Merovingian bloodline of Mary Magdalene and Jesus Christ …

These memories are buried in my DNA". "May the truth set us free," she writes on her dedication page; citing as an influence Margaret Starbird, an American author whose ideas inspired *The Da Vinci Code*. Another author, Robert Swirnyn, proposes that the Marseille Tarot conceals the heretical teachings of the Cathars of Languedoc, a sect of Christian Gnostics persecuted in the Albigensian Crusades of the thirteenth century at the urging of Pope Innocent III. Swirnyn, who openly admits to being influenced by Dan Brown as well as the non-fiction bestseller *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, describes the excitement of his process: "Surely, I thought, these associations couldn't be completely coincidental. The anticipation of finding additional clues made me feel like an amateur detective on a historical case."

In effect, it may be symptomatic of an engagement with tarot—whose enigmatic Arcana invite interpretation—that one is driven to shape meaningful patterns from perplexing material. Tarot's little coloured allegories constitute a set of symbols open enough to be associated with multiple narratives and counter-narratives that swarm together as Christian history. While Ben-Dov suggests that it's more than likely tarot evolved as a game; or should be thought of as a "collective artwork evolving in marginal and half-legitimate popular circles, rather than as a sublime teaching kept in a secret temple of wisdom and spirituality," the fact that the cards have been periodically denounced by the Church lends cred to theories of their subversive power. A 1337 decree from Marseille's Abbaye Saint-Victor that forbade monks from playing tarot is cited by Parousia in support of their Magdalen and St. Cassian theory. In the early fifteenth century St. Bernadino of Siena preached against cards and dice, setting alight several large piles. Recently—in a 2018 homily—Pope Francis criticized tarot as obscurantist idolatry, preventing constituents from total devotion to God. There is a warning in *Deuteronomy*: "There must never be anyone among you … who practices divination, who is soothsayer, augur, or sorcerer, who uses charms, consults ghosts or spirits, or calls up the dead. For the man who does these things is detestable to Yahweh your God".

Rather than seeing in the cards a capacity to predict the future,

Jodorowsky, a Chilean-born Paris-based filmmaker who is also a psychotherapist and "tarologist," suggests fidelity to an idea akin to Jung's theory of "synchronicity": essentially a belief in meaningful coincidences; a principle that accounts for spurious correlations or linkages manifesting at traverse to a rational causal chain. How a person would be drawn to select and turn over certain cards in a spread of tarot, and how the archetypal signs exposed would mingle with the subjective flow of their unconscious—or in triangulation with that of their tarot reader's—in a manner meaningful to the client is explainable by synchronicity; the workings of an system existing beyond observable causality.

In the introduction of his book *The Way of Tarot: the Spiritual Teacher in the Cards* (2009 [2004]) Jodorowsky relates that in 1993 he received a postcard from a man identifying himself as Philippe Camoin, direct descendent of the Marseille printing-house that had reproduced the Tarot since 1760. Devastated at his father's death in a road accident, Camoin had isolated himself for ten years in the town of Forcalquier with only a television and one hundred satellite channels for company. One night, having become accustomed to asking the television questions and receiving "answers" from whatever channel he randomly flicked to, Camoin asked the TV "What should I do to continue the family tradition interrupted by the death of my father?", changed channels, and saw Jodorowsky being interviewed. He repeated the question, flicked to another channel, and saw Jodorowsky's face again. The third time it happened he decided to get in touch.

Upon meeting Camoin, who was still grieving his father, Jodorowsky "decided to undertake a therapeutic initiative using psychomagic," and suggested that the two of them restore the original Marseille Tarot; Jodorowsky being persuaded that the deck upon which Camoin's family had based their reproductions was likely to have been corrupted by printing-press limitations as most eighteenth-century decks were.

When I googled Camoin I found that he, if not Jodorowsky, invests

in the Mary Magdalen theory. On his blog I read the following: "Warning: Philippe Camoin's book, 'Le Tarot de Sainte Marie-Madeleine', will shortly be released. Other documents and books written on the theme of tarot as the legacy of Mary Magdalen that you can find commercially or online and that want to appropriate this theory are the work of ignorant people who have plagiarized Philippe Camoin. This theory comes from Phillipe Camoin and not from them. Do not waste your time and money with these rotten plagiarisms filled with errors and wait only a few more weeks." (My translation).

Was he talking about Parousia? Did he know them? Both were Marseillais. It's hard to tell when the post was written, but it doesn't look like recently. The book remains unreleased.

My tarot reading with Valérie was in 2012. On subsequent trips to Marseille I noticed how the city was being gentrified. My uncle moored a small sailboat on the archipelago of Frioul, accessible by ferry from the Vieux Port. As we chugged out to sea he would point out signs of Euroméditerranée, the mayor's massive project for reforming waterfront land. Rue de la Republique, a Hausmann-era avenue, sold to Lehmann Brothers. A portside hospital transformed to luxury apartments. Estates of public housing demolished, precarious residents relocated to outskirts.

In 2013, Marseille would be named European Capital of Culture and unveil a new museum, a cube enclosed in concrete latticework extending to the sea. A year after that a dockside hangar would reopen as Les Terraces du Port, four stories of chain stores topped with awninged cafés overlooking France's largest commercial port, La Joliette. In 2016, Netflix dramatized the mutating city with a series, *Marseille*, whose cast of characters molded to the reduction typical of contemporary media—corrupt functionaries, the extreme right, and a naïve female journalist. Sometimes these changes, which dismantled human clutter for the clean bouncing spaces of mono-liberalism, would evoke for me the predicted nothingness of the card. The city whose hot messiness I'd exalted in was being sanitized for the few.

In my uncle's home there is a painting that presents a map of the Mediterranean basin turned "sideways", so that instead of the sea appearing to divide northern and southern landmasses it expands through the middle like a pale-blue galaxy, pulling together the coastal cities of Europe, Africa, Turkey, and the Middle East. *Mare Nostrum* is written across the Gulf of Syria. So simply and so rationally, the painting overturns traditional hierarchies, offering us a chance to think afresh. A tarot card is like a map. It can be looked at another way. The card that activated my repressed fatalism—*Le Néant*, the card that didn't exist—could be a chance to overthrow what I think I think, and begin again.

References

Hassett, Maurice. *"John Cassian." The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 3. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 28 Oct. 2020 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03404a.htm>.

Jansen, Katherine Ludwig. *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

Ben-Dov, Yoav. *The Marseille Tarot Revealed: A Complete Guide to Symbolism, Meanings and Methods.* Woodbury: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2017.

Abbot, Raylene. *The Hidden Magdalene in The Tarot de Marseille*. Self-published. Available through Ingram Press, 2019.

Swiryn, Robert. *The Secret of the Tarot: How the Story of the Cathars was Concealed in the Tarot of Marseilles*. Kapaa, Hawaïï: Pau Hana Publishing, 2010.

Deut. 18:10-12, in *The Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition*. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966, p.207.

* Valérie's name was changed for this story.

(Image credit: a spread from Le Tarot de Marsailles, Jean Noblet, Paris c.1650 (Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration). This spread was drawn in London by the owner of these cards after reading this essay. From left top - 5 of coins, 6 of swords, the pope, 4 of cups, queen of coins, 7 of wands, the stars, the fool, 9 of coins, 8 of swords, 10 of swords, King of swords.

(Image credit: Consummated Landscape, 2010, oil on wood,
100 x 130 cm , by Enzo Tomasello, by kind permission of the artist.)

janis joplin

AUDIO
xana chambers
click here to listen

ginger harvested in spring will be tender

POETRY
jo flynn

knobbly and elephantine
like a pustule.
Your fingers petrified
to a knot, hand
striped with tidelines of the
soil that has carried you this far.
Your journey is not over.
You're heading to a held place

for earth dreams. Bark ready
to burst forth again,
and again. We will celebrate by
sending shoots to the
surface, to see how much
we have grown.

(photo credit: kale chesney).

geoff sobelle

interviewed by melissa chambers

Geoff Sobelle is a New York-based theatre artist. He is a long time member of Philadelphia's Pig Iron Theater Company, a twice Edinburgh Fringe First recipient and one third of The Elephant Room, *a show about magicians that premiered in the US in 2011, and now tours globally. The tour of his Bessie Award winning show* HOME, *a large-scale production originally commissioned by The Brooklyn Academy of Music was cut short earlier last year as the pandemic took hold in America, as was* Dust From the Stars, *a sequel of sorts to The Elephant Room, which was instead presented on Zoom in December.*

*Theatre-maker, and The Signal House Edition founding editor, Melissa Chambers talked to Geoff (on Zoom) this month about magicians, the diabolical effects of magic in theatre, and what became of theatre in the strangest of years. **

Melissa Chambers: So Geoff, you made a show about magicians, and stage magic often features in your theatre work. What's your earliest memory of a magic trick?

Geoff Sobelle: I got into magic because I had hero worship for my cousins. They showed me something with cards, I remember the iridescent backing on them which is very iconic of magic tricks, especially in the 70s and 80s. I was maybe four, so 1975. We were in my grandparents living room and I was like, what the… I don't remember what the trick was, but I remember the iridescent back of the card.

My mom's friend, Penny Lieberman bought me my first magic trick, a little black plastic card box. It was big enough for a single playing card. The guy at the store put the card in, the nine of diamonds or whatever, closed it, then he snapped his fingers, and when he opened it, it was the king of hearts. I was amazed. I couldn't… I was like… that's insane.

Penny bought it for me. And the shop guy goes, Here, you'll need these. And he gave me two playing cards. And I go, I'll only need the one. I was so convinced by the trick. I was like, what would I do with two cards?

MC: How about your first magic gig?

GS: I remember my first real gig was my little cousin Aaron's birthday party. It had a big finish, which was the 'Dove Pan,' it's a classic act. It's a little silver pan, you put all of these ingredients in it and you always end with a squirt of lighter fluid and throw a match in, there's a burst of flames and you cover it for a moment. When you open it up, it's filled with cookies.

I really went for it with the lighter fluid, I think I almost burnt my face off, it was a huge burst of flames, but it worked. Also my pan was a little fucked

up, there's a secret compartment and a lid and… what I mean is… well I can't reveal all the secrets.

MC: I'm asking a magician about magic tricks. This could be a short interview.

GS: It's true. I think as a kid though, I was that fairly common story of a young magician, I was largely self-taught. I'd seen David Copperfield and Penn and Teller, and I think I saw Doug Henning. You read these books which are a bit like a cookbook. There's a synopsis in the beginning that's called 'the effect' and it tells you what the effect is going to be, and then it tells you the methodology. Magicians are very exact about crediting too, so when they use somebody's move or handling like, I don't know, like the 'Caps subtlety' or something, they'll credit Fred Caps.

MC: Like chess masters.

GS: Yeah. I'm not really a magician though, I feel sheepish to say that I'm a magician, because there are these real artists, magicians that are out there who devote their lives to this. I will say that magicians, for the most part, I think they believe themselves to be in, and they are in a very small, esoteric club. There's not many of them. I remember this from growing up, they always call it a fraternity. It's super male dominated too. It's guilty of every, you know, patriarchal cliché in the world (we could go down that road). But also it's an extremely small club.

What I spend a lot of my time doing is thinking of how magic applies to theater. How you can apply certain psychologies or methodologies for a theatrical moment, and I have found that the theater is an incredibly diabolical place to deploy a magic trick because you're not expecting it, if you go to see a magic show, you expect to see a magic trick. And so you're watching it with a certain expectation. Whereas if you go to see a piece of theater, you're not expecting magic. So the whole suspension of disbelief thing is different. It's a different set of psychological conditions.

MC: Do you think that most people are kind of programmed as audience members from seeing magic shows as kids? This might be a horrible assumption to make but I'd say most people as kids will have been taken

to a magic show or seen it at a circus, or from street performers, right? I didn't see a theatre show until I was 14 or so… my early memories of being in an audience are mostly magic.

GS: Maybe. I mean, that's an interesting question of what you see for the first time on stage. And it's going to depend, of course on who you are and where you come from and what your demographic is and how you grew up, of course. But, you know, it's so interesting, in this country, I would say that the thing probably people see on stage first is something in church. You know, I bet in the United States, I would imagine people see singers in church, or people presenting something in church… I'm just following this little tributary of my imagination now… cause I've never really thought about this before. But it's kind of interesting if you think of where performance really does come from, way back when. It comes from a spiritual, you know, religious ritualistic place. And was all about rules for living. Like how to get your chickens pregnant or whatever.

MC: OK, so if you wouldn't describe yourself as a magician, what would you say you are?

GS: That actually really depends who I'm talking to. I usually say a theater artist.

And I prefer that because I'm not an actor, that's not really what I do. If I say I'm a creator, I feel like that's a strange thing to tell somebody if they're not involved in theater. But it's funny, if I say I'm a theater artist, generally people think that means I'm a scenic painter. That's what I get oftentimes if I'm talking to somebody totally off the street. Well, what do you do for a living? I'm a theater artist, and then I usually have to describe the theater projects too because they're not really plays. I like to steal something from Pig Iron Theater Company who I worked with for a long time. They always say they make theater for non theater-goers, which I always really loved. So I tell them, well, they're not really plays. They're like performances. And then I'll maybe describe my show *HOME* and I'll say, for instance, in the last show I made you start with an empty stage and one performer. And by the time you've finished, there's a two story house on stage and 50 people, so it combines magic and dance and performance and crazy stuff with audiences… and by this time, ei-

ther we're having a conversation or that person has driven away and I'm like: … thank you, officer!

MC: Let's talk about that theatre show *HOME*. Before the pandemic hit and you could do anything, you were doing *HOME*, the biggest thing I've ever seen you do, you've toured it to different parts of the world, I saw you in the Edinburgh International Festival. Can you describe what *HOME* is?

GS: Sure. OK, yeah. *HOME* thematically: it's a performance that offers an audience a space to meditate on the difference between these words: 'house' and 'home'. That's what we jumped off when we made it. There's a house in it, but it's a house like you've never really seen. It's a huge dollhouse almost, or a child's idea of a house.

MC: And the show does start with some pretty good stage magic, right?

GS: Yeah, well, the house sort of appears out of nowhere. Then, and there's 7 of us in the show who play all the roles, we build the rest of the house on stage in the first quarter of the show, in a kind of time lapse so that the structure is almost the main character.

Before you know it, it's painted and there's a host of people working on the house who we call 'the contractors'. We were interested in these as those people that you never see necessarily. The people that build your house. But it's not their home. It's your home. For them, it's just a house.

And then those people are gone. And then there comes a host of new people who live in that house and / or that apartment or that wigwam or whatever the structure might be to you.

There's no words in this performance, it's more of a dance. And the choreography is made from everyday movement. So you're watching people doing the dishes and making their bed and sort of engaging in acts of domesticity. And largely alone, like you're mostly seeing solitary people going about their lives. Sharing the same shell like hermit crabs. The thing that is really at the center of *HOME* is that it collapses time. You see these generations of people living in the same space over time. But

you're not ever sure if they're in the same time.

The idea is that the home that you live in, most likely someone lived in before you and more than likely someone will live in after you. And just as you live with the traces of those people who came before you, their good and bad decisions that you either live with or alter like floors and paint color and ceilings and light fixtures. You are leaving traces for people who come after you and they also will live with or change the decisions you made. And so in a weird way, you share that space. You have these kind of ghostly roommates.

MC: Do you know what the Stone Tapes are? Have you ever heard that theory before? It's this esoteric metaphysics idea that human energy is recorded in walls. Recorded like on a tape. And there are people who can claim to be able to read the stone tapes. It's an energetic theory about people in place over time.

GS: I haven't! I'd like to read about that. I mean, I'm not surprised though. I think people, even the most cynical, skeptical people will tell you that

there's an energy happening in a house or a structure, you know, whether or not you believe in a haunted building or not, it's hard to completely disassociate yourself from the hand that makes the thing or the body that spends (or spent) a lot of time in a place. You'd have to be a fairly insensitive person to just walk in a structure and not feel anything.

The idea behind the performances is they're meant to be a space to meditate on little details about that time spent. Like the moment you came home with a sick cat or the moment you were sick, and you sat in that chair and looked out the window. They're really ordinary moments, not big dramatic things. My sister, Steph Sobelle, who's the dramaturg on the piece, says that HOME is a container for living. We thought about that a lot. We thought of the house itself like a body where the attic is a kind of mind or beamer space of memory. And it's a repository for collection. And it's where you store things, but you don't necessarily use them. And the bathroom is literally like the guts that have the plumbing and the intestines of the house. And the heart is always the kitchen for people. Way back when the fire, the hearth was always at the center of people's domiciles because that's part of why you have a structure to live in, is to be warm and to be with one another. And so when people gather in a kitchen at a party now and we all laugh at that phenomenon, it makes a lot of sense. It's a primal thing.

So HOME, the show, points at all that, It leaves you there to walk around in your mind and your memories and your life, really. It's not a didactic show, it's meant to sort of set the table and then you go to the bar afterwards and talk about these things. And in a way, that's the show. Or that might be the show. But there is a third act to the whole performance.

MC: Yeah tell us about that. It's a pretty good trick.

GS: So what starts to happen is that the doorbell starts to ring and people come over. First, it's the host of a party. A housewarming party, and they're a member of the audience. They are an unprepared, non performer, and from the moment they're up there, we (the performers) are giving them moment-to-moment instruction. Then more and more people from the audience start showing up, they just keep on coming, and then the characterization of the party changes. It becomes a baby shower, a

birthday party, then a graduation party, a wedding. All the ways that you would use your space to celebrate moments that you do mark time with. In a way, the first part is about privacy, ordinary moments alone. Then the ending is about public space, the house as the space of celebration. For me it has a kind of feeling that's very not of this moment too. It feels like the 60s. Like Jaques Tati. Decadent and exponential, like it just gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

MC: The effect though is a house full of people who all look like they live there. I remember this really vividly. Eventually, the performers in the show got lost among these audience members; there was like 45 people or something. And they're all doing complicated things, laying tables, getting props, doing the dishes like they owned the place. And as a theatre-maker I'm sitting in the audience madly trying to figure out how you're doing it.

Am I right in thinking that the cornerstone of a good trick is mostly engineering where people are going to look and pull the strings while they're not looking?

GS: Yeah sure, yeah. But I think I think I would maybe make a slight adjustment to that. There's a really amazing magician who I've come to know named Asi Wind, he's phenomenal. I saw him give a talk recently and he used this word that I think is incredible, which is 'conditions'. So for a magician, if you're a card magician, or a close-up magic magician, there are certain conditions, like you might leave a card box on the table and you just sort of like throw it to the side. Well, the audience knows that it's there but doesn't think about it much, doesn't pay attention to it, or in magic lingo, they're not 'burning' it. If you could make their card appear in that card box, that would be pretty astounding because it's something that they're aware of, but they're not focused on. It's a part of their periphery. And for you as the magician, you have a slight advantage because since they're not burning it, you're more likely to succeed in secretly doing something with that little card box.

I think about that with the theater a lot and especially with HOME, because it's about behavior just like that. You're really spending about an hour watching people, the performers, behave in a house, and of course it is realistic, but we're doing it to tango music and it's like dance also. So we slowly introduce theatrical language that you kind of learn. And then when you see the audience members, part of what's wild is that we are already imitating the way audiences will move in that space, that's a big thing about how we choreographed, so that by the time you're seeing an audience member move in that space, they move like we do because actually we move like they do.

And so with the audience on stage in HOME you will see people who suddenly either lose an instruction we've given them or they get a little lost. They just go to the kitchen, even though it's not a real kitchen. Nothing works, they go to the kitchen because that's where you go.

In the magic trick of HOME, I would say that those are all conditions, that this theater show's magic, whatever the hell it is, the effect is really exposing human nature. The thing I find interesting is that these things can be put on stage and on display. There are certain innate mechanics of how we are, how we live our lives. That's more interesting to me, for instance, than a narrative story. I personally find that deeply enthralling. And it gives us some strange clue as to what we are.

MC: This month I saw you performing on Zoom. Dust From the Stars is a sequel / not sequel to *The Elephant Room*, a collaboration with Trey Lyford, Steve Cuiffo and director Paul Lazaar that first debuted back in 2011 and turned into a bit of a downtown phenomenon with a lot of designers and stage managers and others contributing to its culture over tours since. What is *The Elephant Room*?

GS: Originally the whole idea of this strange thing called *The Elephant Room* was how do you do magic on stage? That was really the question, because there is a big problem in just performing magic. We've been talking up until this point about how you might do magic in a theater context, like in performance, but if you've noticed there's no quote 'magician' in HOME, there is no 'magician character'. There's nobody who possesses magical powers or professes to, and yet magical things keep happening. So it's not really thought of as magic. It's more like… surprises. Whereas the very amazing Teller (of Penn and Teller) would define a 'magic show' as this. He, and I'm paraphrasing, he says you have to have a magician because the magician needs to orchestrate what Teller defines as a kind of wrestling match between what you (the audience) see, and what you know to be true. You, the audience, need to engage in that struggle. You have to lose that struggle and you have to enjoy losing that struggle. That is his definition of a good magic trick. And the magician is key because there has to be a person who is taking you on that journey. And so as opposed to a magician that lies to you, which is I think often the cliché, Teller's brilliance is that it's the magician that's actually telling you the truth. And even then you won't see because we have these blind spots, the magician can take advantage of those blind spots.

But that is partly also why it's so different when you go with a 'magic show' because of this role of the magician versus a theater show where there is no magician, but magic happens. Teller would call that just special effects. By his definition 'magic' can only happen if there's somebody there to orchestrate it.

So with *The Elephant Room* we were like, oh, that's super interesting, but who is that person? And who has the audacity to command that sort of power? What is that? And so we created these magician characters.

MC: I saw *The Elephant Room* in Manhattan the year it came out. My memory is that there's these three guys who are together in what looks like a lounge room, magic tricks ensue. There are phone calls, there's people from the audience. There's disappearances, and for some reason, ultimately, an elephant. But the characters are the point.

GS: Yeah, the characters were cobbled together out of a huge variety of things, ultimately they're these three misfit guys, and there's no reason these men should be hanging out together, but for their mutual love of magic. And that, again, that is like magicians. If you go to a magic club, you're like... how are all these people together?

MC: At the beginning of this year, in the midst of a tour of HOME, you were also supposed to premier the new *Elephant Room: Dust from the Stars* commissioned by the Center Theatre Group (CPG) in LA. Then suddenly you were doing neither with no notice. What happened when you

decided to do *Dust from The Stars* on Zoom instead.

GS: OK, it's funny because already, this Elephant Room sequel was just not meant to be. We had gotten a commission in 2012 that didn't need to be The Elephant Room again, we wanted to make a show about outer space. So we created a show we just called The Space Show or Space. We've been working on this show now for eight years, but something would keep happening to put it in the back seat. Getting the stars to align to do this thing was so fucking hard. And also, we wanted to make a show that had a minimum footprint, that didn't have a bunch of designers, and was mostly just the three of us with the director Paul Lazaar. What that meant though was that after each workshop CPG would say, you guys came in under budget, do you want to do another workshop?

So we kept working at St Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn (who were part of it), cause of, you know: employment, just making space shows. And at one point, Susan Feldman at St Anne's was like, oh, I thought you were doing the Elephant Room guys, but in space. And we were like: that is an absurd idea. That's a misunderstanding… No, we're not doing that. That's crazy. But then our producer said, again, you're under budget do you want to do another workshop, and we thought, well, maybe we should try Susan's crazy idea. The space show was, by the way, very sci-fi and kind of, self-important, it was very serious, and then we thought, what happens if these three weird magician guys are doing that space show instead? And then this whole weird thing happened.

So, finally we were going to debut it and then Louise, my daughter, was born. So the show went on ice. And then we're like, OK, but we'll do it in 2020… And then the pandemic struck. It just was never meant to be.

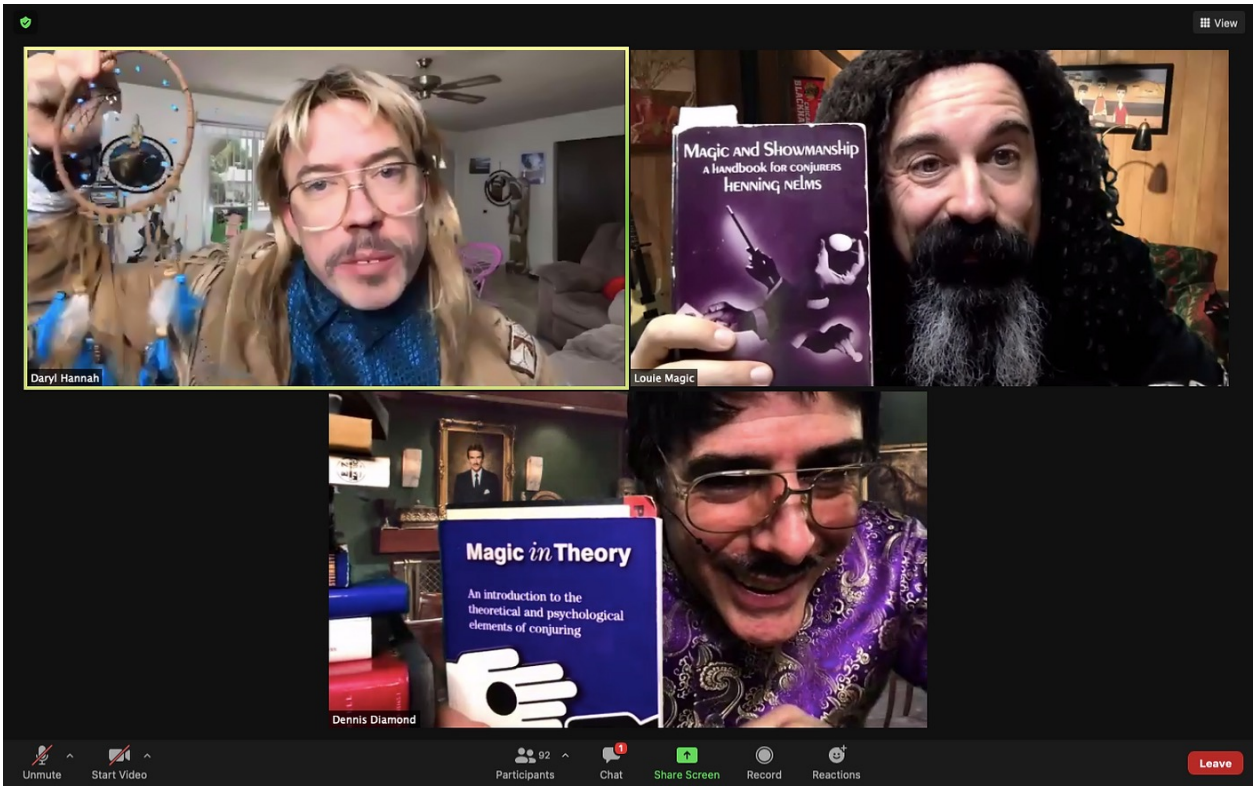
But then we thought, well we could do it on Zoom. And we really went back and forth and were like, no, that's not going to work, nothing good happens on Zoom. But here was the sticking point, Centre Theater Group said, we're desperate, what are we going to do? We're just doing staged readings. We have money for you, so can you try?

And so in a way, it was employment. We realised we could have a job in this moment where everything'd dried up. HOME was canceled,

everything's canceled. So we're like, fuck it. Let's try something. Both the Philly Fringe and Center Theater Group funded us and actually, other than paying for our time, which was a lot, it was all spent making and trying a lot of different things. You didn't have a set designer, the constraints of production for Zoom are very different, obviously. There's no footprint. There's no truck rental, there's no storage, there's none of that. But we did need equipment, green screens for instance, and then we spent a long time figuring out what we could do.

A big question of the workshop for Zoom though was just: who'll really give a fuck? Like aren't we just watching TV? At the end of the day, why are we doing this? You can go on Netflix and see 'The Martian', isn't that more interesting than anything we're going to do?

And so we decided that the actual difference is that with us, you're on a Zoom call. That's what it needs to be. The interesting thing is the interactivity. And even if people are annoyed with Zoom, there's something incredible about it cause it's the only thing in the world where you can see everybody all at once and they're seeing you. And so if you take the medium for what it is, there is something interesting there.



So we set it up as an actual Zoom meeting, an annual magicians meeting that you have joined, and the space show becomes more like a work in progress that we are going to show you. We're showing you in the midst of this meeting our space themed magic act.

MC: It was a huge call when I watched it. Joined it? I don't even know what you'd call it. There were about 100 people there when I saw it I think. In a similar way to HOME too you made us all into a character, magicians turning up to a meeting, which got me away from the fact that I was sitting at the same desk that I use to check my bank statements. It really worked. Where were you all while you were performing it, were you in the same place?

GS: Oh, no. The whole thing was made remotely. I haven't seen those guys since forever. I'm in upstate New York. Steve's on the Lower East Side. And Trey's in Philly. Paul's in Brooklyn, our stage management was in New Jersey and LA. So, no, we never were in the same space. Julian Crouch, who designed a bunch of stuff for it, though, and all the spaceships, he lives twenty minutes from me. So we were in the same space with some frequency.

MC: What did it feel like performing on Zoom, describe that feeling?

GS: It's a weird feeling. I don't know how to describe it. I definitely felt like I was performing. I could feel the audience. The first is when things went wrong, which they, of course, do. And they absolutely did like technically, but they always do at a theater show and you've got to roll with it, you know, like the same panic. But that feeling of adrenaline, of course, still happened. I mean, a cool thing for magic though is that you're also dealing with a camera. So, you know, the world's your oyster with finding and disappearing objects and things like that. There's some things that are easier, and some things that are harder because there's certain things that are harder to believe. And actually in the end there's not that much magic in the show.

MC: There's is one pretty good card trick.

GS: Oh the John Cusack trick? The E.S.P. trick? We've spent a lot of time

on that. We actually spent a lot of time cutting away other magic to give that its strength, because in a way the thing that helps a magic trick on this medium, it's a little laborious, but you have to, again, accentuate the conditions. And so when you really feel that the chances of somebody saying a thing and then that thing coming out in reality and that you have to believe it's reality and not some green screen effect or something, all of that has to be in play.

MC: You're from LA originally. But in my mind, you're a native New Yorker artist, you've been making work there for a long time. Just before the pandemic hit you and your partner Sophie Bortolussi who's also a performer moved with your daughter to upstate New York to a converted church.

GS: Yeah, we came up here to the church which had kind of fallen into our lap, I mean, so to speak, we had to move hell on earth to figure out how to do it, financially and whatnot, but we bought this space into our lives to make work, because it's a big space. That's the whole point of this move. We had not anticipated being here full time, but we were on tour and we had someone in our apartment in Brooklyn. So we actually didn't have another place to go when the HOME tours all shut down. So we stayed here. By the time the Brooklyn subletter left we were like, it's awesome here and we don't really want to be in New York City. I think a lot of people did something similar, who could, you know, who had the means or had the good fortune or whatever. We don't think about how fortunate the timing of all this has been. But, meanwhile, I have definitely been watching as everything's dried up. I roll with a fairly resourceful group of artists, I don't really know any straight actors. But for the folk I know it was a really dry spring and summer. But then actually things were being made. Film and TV have gone back on, sort of. I think that there's conditions though that show just how terrible those industries are, actually, that actors really are not respected and their health and well-being is not necessarily taken care of, like there's sort of a bare minimum. But again, I'm not the expert, there are other interviews to be had on that.

But for theatres also, there's a serious one-two punch because as all of this social justice stuff has come to the fore at the same time here, we've seen how white American theater is. This has all happened over the summer, I think a lot of theatres are having a great reckoning. And if they

weren't already dealing with the fact that they have no audience, they're certainly being held accountable for holding up a white patriarchal culture. And worse because many have been claiming to be this throne of democratic principle, and open mindedness. So I think a lot of theaters are like, OK, this is a good moment for us to… figure our shit out.

I'm also dealing with academia. Bard College where I work is seriously grappling and really having their feet held to the fire by some incredibly ambitious, honest students, students that are really like, no, we're not… we're sticking with this. We want to see the world change and: awesome. That's a phenomenal thing. So I think there's a major moment of upheaval and nobody knows what's going to happen. But I have to believe, I can't imagine that things are going to go back to business as usual. It's not possible, vaccine or no. The audience, when they do come back in, you're going to be dealing with a kind of trauma of having been on your own for so long and not feeling comfortable with a group of people. And now you're going to ask people to sit in a crowded theater.

I hope that performances as we wade back in, well, I hope that we actually wade back, and not just hit the ground running, but I don't know. You know, that's me talking. I'm sure there's others that really actually run things that feel differently.

**this interview is based on a live conversation and has been edited for publication.*

Image credits (top to bottom) Geoff Sobelle, photo by Jauhien Sasnou; HOME, photos by Xavi Montojo, *The Elephant Room*, photo by Scott Suchman L-R Geoff Sobelle, Steve Cuiffo, Trey Lyford. zoom shot *Dust From the Stars*, L-R Trey, Geoff, Steve.

contributors

PERSPECTIVE and POETRY | ***FELICIA 'FLISH' McCARTHY*** *is a poet who lives in the West of Ireland. Her poems and essays are in print and online in Ireland, the UK, USA and Mexico. She is the Poetry Editor of North American Time at The Blue Nib. As a feminist, her country, like Virginia Woolf's, is the whole world (Three Guineas). Her first collection, The Gypsy Shaman's Daughter will be published by Salmon Poetry in Spring 2021*

facebook | twitter

ESSAY | ***ELOÏSE MIGNON*** *currently lives in Melbourne, where she is a casual teacher and PhD candidate in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. She has published scholarly writing in Performance Research and nonfiction in the journals Meanjin and Antithesis, the latter for which she was academic editor in 2020. She has worked as an actor across television, film and theatre in Australia and also in France, and as such has performed in many beautiful theatres across Europe and Asia.*

AUDIO | ***XANA CHAMBERS*** *is a singer / songwriter, composer and sound designer from Brisbane, Australia. In 2017 she earned a MA Composition from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. Xana's latest body of recorded works "The Circling of the Birds" was released in 2017 and weaves a path through electronic music, art music and minimalism.*

website

contributors

POETRY I ***JO FLYNN***
After winning the Roy Fisher Prize for poetry endorsed by the Poet Laureate, Jo's debut pamphlet Swallowing Sand was published and she's since appeared at the National Poetry Library in London as well as performing internationally. Jo just hopes to make sense of the world with words. And dogs

website | twitter | instagram

INTERVIEW I ***GEOFF SOBELLE*** *is an American theatre artist dedicated to the "sublime ridiculous." He is the co-artistic director of rainpan 43, a renegade absurdist outfit devoted to creating original actor-driven performance works that look for humanity where you least expect it, and find grace where no one is looking. He has been a company member of Philadelphia's Pig Iron Theatre Company since 2001. He teaches workshops in the USA and abroad and is a faculty member of the Pig Iron School, PA and Bard College. He lives in upstate New York.*

website

CONTRIBUTING ARTIST I ***KALE CHESNEY***
is a queer photographer and designer living in Portland, OR. A visual storyteller, they received a BA from University of Santa Cruz in Printmaking and Photography. They grew up in the country, collect cameras, and avoid cilantro at all cost.

website | instagram | twitter

contributors

CONTRIBUTING ARTIST I ***MARGAUX PIERREL***
is originally from the Forest of Tronçais in France. In 2017 she relocated to Ireland to pursue a career in ecology and environmental education. Working for organisations for the protection of natural sites, including the Burren National Park (Co. Clare) and the Coole Park Nature Reserve, Pierrel has conducted ecological studies on species including the lesser horseshoe bat, and the hen harrier raptor.

facebook | instagram

CONTRIBUTING ARTIST I ***PAUL HALLAHAN***
paul's work is primarily based in painting and expands into many areas, including a focus on how humans relate to, and interact with, the world around them. Hallahan has exhibited widely. In 2019 he took part in a touring two-person exhibition that started in the dlr Lexicon Gallery (Dublin) and toured to Cork, Waterford, and Belfast. In 2020 he had a solo exhibition in the Roscommon Arts Centre titled Running, returning, running, and a two-person exhibition at The Complex (Dublin) titled Everybody Knows. Hallahan is represented by Berlin Opticians Gallery, lives in Co. Donegal, and won the Golden Fleece Award in 2018.

website | instagram

CONTRIBUTING ARTIST I ***ENZO TOMASELLO*** *is a philosopher and artist who lives and works in Acireale, Italy. Active in contemporary Sicilian painting and a graduate in philosophy, Enzo is inspired by the work of Theodor. W. Adorno, the Frankfurt School, and Walter Benjamin. Enzo sees his art as the result of a fruitful literary contamination of poems, songs and theatrical plays and he dedicates himself to the exploration of the relationship between humans, the environment and architecture.*

website | instagram

COVER ART | ***DAN SPIELMAN*** *our first featured artist of 2021, is a performer, woodworker and artist, currently living and working on Wurundjeri country in Melbourne, Australia. Over the past 25 years, his diverse practices have always informed one another and created space for each other. Dan's bird drawings were made over an 8 week period during lockdown in Melbourne.* website | instagram

You can view Dan's performance credits, wood joinery work, and pastel drawings at Dan Spielman Studio.

subscribe at signalhouseedition.org

buy work on paper at the signal house shop

follow on instagram @signalhouseedition

and twitter @signaledition