Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Bondage

Chiwan Choi · Wednesday, May 7th, 2014

A few weeks back, I was interviewed by Darren Cifarelli for The Morningside Park Chronicles. I met Darren in March when I was the featured reader at the inaugural Ground Zero reading at LA Southwest College. I was invited by Teka-Lark Fleming, who I've known through mutual friends like Mike Sonksen and Jo Scott-Coe.

It was a fun reading at a place and neighborhood that I've never gone to for a reading. Teka and I talked about maybe bringing a book festival or something out that way in the future. She is the publisher of The Morningside Park Chronicle and I love the fact that she is an agitator of the status quo.

Darren sent me a great set of questions that covered everything from drinking to the art of poetry and to bigger issues in our community and even mental illness. Here is the exchange regarding a question about why all readings sound the same:

> **While I enjoy attending poetry readings on occasion, I've noticed that there seems to be a degree of conformity among performers, where much work tends to blend together similarly–in both style and content. Few writers are pushing the limits of the form or challenging established styles of performance. Do you agree? Has anyone in particular stuck you as innovative? How? And what new form can poetry and writing take that would challenge us and break what seem to be narrow boundaries?**
>
> This is an interesting question and pretty much all of us are looking at the wrong problem here. I guarantee you, it's not a matter of homogeneity in style or lack of innovation or artists not pushing boundaries. It's actually a bigger problem than that. The reason everybody sounds the same at the reading you just went to is because there is no diversity inside that venue. Arts communities, especially the literary community, is embarrassingly (and intentionally) segregated, by color, class, the usual bullshit trappings. That more than anything is creating events where everyone not only sounds the same, but looks the same. It's not artistic boundaries that need to be broken. It's the social construct. I spoke about this in Seattle during AWP this year, but writers/artists need to start addressing this. We're cowards. Seriously, I was at a Sunday morning reading at 826LA a couple of weeks ago. Probably about 150 people in attendance. Probably about 90–95% white folk. THAT is the problem (not the whiteness, per se, but the segregation).

Which leads to:

DIRTY LAUNDRY LIT: BONDAGE

The one and only Natashia Deón asked me (or I begged her, I forget) to get Writ Large Press involved in Dirty Laundry Lit as an unofficial co-sponsor (PEN USA is the main sponsor) a couple of installments ago. It was a very focused role. We wanted to work together to see if we could make Dirty Laundry Lit the most diverse of the literary events around the city and do our part in making that the norm.

But the diversity we were talking about was not so much who she featured up on stage, which of course matters a great deal too. What we were discussing was: how do we solve the problem of the segregated audience?

Well, it's been a tough nut to crack.

The events have been awesome. The readers have been as interesting, different, and diverse as you can find anywhere in the city. The energy has been off the charts.

The make up of the audience? Eh….so far failing. Is it the location? Is East Hollywood somewhere only white folk will go for an event? This can't be true, right? C'mon!

We're not giving up! If we can all work together on this, I feel like we can really create something special.

So let's treat Dirty Laundry Lit as…an experiment. As a damn fun and sexy literary and social experiment.

Come out on May 17th to The Virgil and hear Maggie Downs, Charles Yu (Charles Fucking Yu!!!), Asha Anchrum (youngest DLL reader ever!!!), Kathy West, Wayman Ming Jr. (a pastor!!!), Emile Barrios, and Jesper Andreasson. Writ Large Press will present PUBLISH!. All hosted by Jeff Eyres, who should host all readings everywhere. And DJ Cazel spinning.

$5 cover. Proceeds will be going to Center for Pacific Asian Family, who help victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

We'd love for all of you to join us as we try to bring people of this fucking beautiful city together in one damn place and enjoy literature and each other.

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