

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

This is Not a Drinking Story

Nikolai Garcia · Saturday, September 12th, 2020

On the Importance of a Print Literary Journal Born in South Central Los Angeles

A few days after a photograph of us graced the front cover of the California section of the *Los Angeles Times*, me and the Founding Editor of *Dryland*, Viva Padilla, decided to throw a little celebration at one of our favorite bars. It was near the end of 2019, and we invited long-time supporters of the journal, as well as recent contributors that we had recently met at our release-party a few months prior. It was a pretty wild affair—for a weeknight, but also intimate as we took over the back section of the bar. I kept buying credits on the jukebox all night, providing us a soundtrack of cumbias and oldies as our peers congratulated us over and over. We gave people copies of the paper with the article about *Dryland*, and they bought us drinks—many drinks. Needless to say, I got drunk—very drunk. I’ve been out drinking before, but not like that night!

I don’t write this to brag about intoxication, or in any way glorify excessive drinking. I merely want to make the point that we were celebrating that night—celebrating big time—because it was a well-deserved accomplishment. Think of it: two people, who were born-and-raised in South Central Los Angeles, were publishing a quality literary journal, (not a zine or a website—but an actual book with an ISBN), on a consistent basis, without any grants or financial backing from any major institution. It’s hard work and we were now being acknowledged by a wider audience.

Issue nine, which we had just published that summer—was our best issue yet. It featured a short story by Chicano art veteran Harry Gamboa Jr.; a memoir excerpt from award-winning Poet Vickie Vertiz; and lots of great work from poets with various publishing credits like Matthew Woodman and Edward Vidaurre; as well as emerging voices like Megan Dorame and Jenise Miller. To say our contributors list was diverse would be an understatement; and to say that we had to work extra hard for that diversity would be a bit of a stretch. We didn’t need to search far and wide for Black and People of Color writers and artists—they have always been there and just need a space to be heard and seen.



This is what I’m most proud of since joining *Dryland*; the fact that we have provided many voices a serious platform to highlight their work. In five years of existence, *Dryland* has featured over 300 people from underserved neighborhoods in Los Angeles and all over the world. And, just as these writers have always been ready to showcase their work, the community, in turn, was ready to embrace them. Consider that, although the journal is available at various bookstores and museums

around L.A. County, the locations that sell the most copies are small independent coffee shops in Black and Latinx neighborhoods like Compton and Boyle Heights. The lesson is this: When people see themselves in literature and art they go out of their ways to buy that art and support those creators.

I write this as we await the printer to send us our first batch of issue 10, which will feature an awesome wraparound cover by local rising artist Patrick Martinez. We received more than twice as many submissions than for our previous issue, (and we read all of them), so we decided to put out an issue twice as thick as the last one. (This pandemic has not slowed us down)! The bad news, however, is that due to social distancing guidelines, we won't be able to host a release party, which means we won't be able to meet with contributors in person. I am going to miss handing a contributor's copy to a first-time published writer and watch as they flip through the pages to find their work. I'm going to miss watching people share their work out loud to friends and family. But, I'm happy that Dryland exists and continues getting bigger and better. For now, I'll celebrate on my own and maybe just get drunk on the ideas of future possibilities.

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