

RIGHT ANGLES

A chapbook of poetry inspired by the artwork of Yonia Fain from the Hofstra University Museum exhibition Yonia Fain: Remembrance April 19 - August 3, 2012 in Emily Lowe Gallery



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913-2013) *Squares*, n.d., oil on masonite, 48 x 44 in. Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist, HU2012.10

Angle: the space...between two intersecting lines or surfaces at or close to the point where they meet.

Oxford English Dictionary

On May 10, 2012 Connie Roberts, Hofstra University adjunct instructor of English, facilitated a poetry workshop in the midst of the exhibition *Yonia Fain: Remembrance* at the Emily Lowe Gallery of the Hofstra University Museum. This chapbook is the intersection of two planes—painting and poetry—on that day.

Chapbook title from Lyndsay McCabe's poem *Right Angles*.
Chapbook editing: Connie Roberts.
All artwork by Yonia Fain.

Acknowledgements from Connie Roberts:

Heartfelt thanks to Yonia Fain for his extraordinary art work. As you will see, workshop participants did their best to harness the power of his paintings.

Grateful acknowledgement is made by the editor to the following members of the Hofstra University Museum for their vision in putting together the *Yonia Fain: Remembrance* exhibition: Beth E. Levinthal, Executive Director and Karen T. Albert, Associate Director of Exhibitions and Collections.

A special thank you to Nancy Richner, Museum Education Director extraordinaire, for her tour of the Yonia Fain exhibition. Over the years, through their collaborations with the Hofstra English Department, Nancy and her colleague, Marjorie Pillar, Museum Education Outreach Coordinator, have helped make art more accessible to countless Hofstra students. Their generosity is much appreciated; it is always a joy to work with both of them.

Gratitude to Tiffany Jordan, Development and Membership Coordinator, who helped coordinate and promote the poetry workshop. Thanks also for her generosity in extending Emily Lowe Gallery hours to accommodate workshop participants.

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RIGHT ANGLES

by Lyndsay McCabe
After the work *Squares*

De Stijl in repose—
Scarlet, black, and white leaked
From the order,
From simple squares
To the open windows of an office.

It is sick, you know—
To leak, to passively merge,
To have this much gray.

I used to dream of climbing those black ladders,
Waving to friends in burgundy along the way—
The way you shook the ladder from below until
I woke up.

In the gray, slurred words blend
With cotton sheets,
But I am lucid all the while,
And it is your voice that is left
To waver like the unsteady cadence of
A toddler's plodding steps.

To live, you say, is to leave,
But I like to live concentrically,
To be wholly home
In an office at a desk,
In pen on paper
In a frame I understand—
If it weren't for that damn window
And the draft it lets in.



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913–2013) *Squares*, n.d., oil on masonite, 48 x 44 in.
Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist, HU2012.10

FALLEN

by Ciara Thompson
After the work *Untitled (Slain Bull)*

With a predator's pride
I've stormed every crooked place

Thunderous, ambitious
As brazen as Cain

I've charged into rest
Into silence I charge

Now punctured
Now still

Like prey
I've been humbled



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913-2013) *Untitled (Slain Bull)*, 1954-55, oil on canvas, 40 x 52 in.
Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist, HU2012.22

PRISONERS

by Brendan Barnes
After the work *Prisoners*

It is on the morning train to OŚWIĘCIM,
With your sleeping head on my shoulder,
I realize I do not want to go, never
Wanted to go. I try to fall asleep
So we miss the stop, but we sit too close
For me to get comfortable, and it's not like
They would let us miss our stop. I wish
We would have had sex in the morning
Before we left, but you took too long to shower
And got dressed too quickly. The train keeps rocking,
But you stay asleep because you want to go.
We have to go, you say, as if there were no choice.

They take me out of my body. You hang
My skin on a rack on the wall next to my coat,
Taking care so that it doesn't fall to the floor.
You lead me to a tub and ask me to lay in it
While they pour gallons of ice water over me.
You hold my wrists against the edge of the tub
As they do it. Soon I cannot move at all
And I slip into the freezing water.
I try to fall asleep, but you pull me up
And wrap me in a blanket. You guide me
To another room with a long white table.
We have to do this, you say, as if there were a choice.



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913-2013) *Prisoners*, n.d., oil on canvas, 26.25 x 50 in.
Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist, HU2012.14

You give me a stone cup with the word ATLANTIK
Carved into the side and tell me to drink it.
I lay on the table as you spread my skin
Over me. *They began at the feet*. They cut
Into the flesh on my side, letting the wound sit
For a few minutes before they fill it with dust.
I want you to come to me, but you sit
At the other end of the room. I wish I could feel
The smooth skin of your lower back, but I can't
Lift my hands or head. I try to call your name.
They take me from the table to a green room.
We have to stop, you say, as if there were no choice.

It is on the morning train to OŚWIĘCIM,
With your sleeping head no longer on my shoulder,
That I wake from the green room. We haven't missed
Our stop. You stand over me, whispering
That we will be getting off soon. I feel my side
For the wound, but you take my wrists to pull
Me up from my seat. The train stops.
Before the door opens, I let you know
I had a dream and don't feel well at all.
But you know they won't let us miss our stop,
And I know you won't let us miss it either.
We have to go, you said, as if it were a choice.

THE SCREAM

by Michelle Calderon
After the work *The Scream*



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913-2013) *The Scream*, 1962,
Oil on canvas, 53.75 x 48 in.
Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist, HU2012.15

Concealed deep within the intertwining tissues and veins,
The truth remains contained
In the boundaries of the glowing red.

Built up over time, feelings of hopelessness, anger—
The ailment of frustration—
The hands look to the heart for comfort.

But he can only combat the feelings for so long,
Before the inner demon takes over
And a whirlwind of negative energy erupts.

He screams as he pulls the
Heart apart. He feels no more—
Sanity is accomplished.

SILENCE

by Fran Donnelly

After the work *The Throne*

Serene

in your silk white fanon
with thin woven stripes.

Draped casually over
your worn throne,
without care or concern.

Here

where a blood-red silence
reigns, there's a hush
of despair
as a grim blue permeates
an airless chamber.

Here

in this holy city
cloaked with a higher authority,
your sins laid bare,
like bones
on a mantle of crystal-cold snow.



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913-2013)

The Throne, n.d., oil on masonite, 54.25 x 48 in.

Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist-
HU2012.21

COMING HOME

by Olivia Mammone
After the work *The Throne*

His cologne snags in the cotton
like a netted moth in winter;
makes her eyes redder still

while she cries into his chest,
staining his white workaday woes
in trailing notes of nightshade eye shadow,

and he holds her. If he asks
what is wrong
I cannot hear. Her only reply,

the rustle of hasty, shaking fingers
fumbling on buttons.

In another minute, they'll drape

themselves over one another,
whatever parts
Of him that are not already hers

clinging to the insides
of the shirt's wilted sleeves.

Ownership—

even of a single room smelling
of mildew and gas
(from a heater unreliable at best)—

is in the music of work clothes
hitting furniture
like the planting of a flag.



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913-2013) *The Throne*, n.d., oil on masonite, 54.25 x 48 in.
Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist, HU2012.21

THE VOW

by Eugenia Kelly-Viner

After the work *Studio with Two Portraits*

How to survive? Will to live emerges
Within my studio, my womb and chamber
Where rebirth begins.
Inside these walls, memories
Rise and pulsate, come alive.
Blue figures dance and the descent begins
Into tortured past and dark
Remembering.
My suffering and sentence.
Life must honor the dead—
They shall not perish again.

Cauldron of creation and vortex of color
Consume me once more.
Figures writhe and scream
Reborn anew in yellow-ochre,
Vermillion-blue, blood-red and
Flushed-pink flesh on the leaf-green
Field of life and canvas—our redemption.
No longer dead they breathe instead.



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913-2013) *The Throne*, n.d.,
oil on masonite, 54.25 x 48 in.
Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist,
HU2012.21

And I shall bear witness with brush and pigment,
Testimony to all who no longer live.
Frame and canvas claim them forever now
So none may look away.
Death must be confronted
And battle must be done
For new life to begin.

In rainbow hues I shall make sense of
Insanity
So that all may see
And understand—
This can never happen again.

HOLOCAUST

by Fran Donnelly
After the work *Holocaust*



Yonia Fain (American born in Russia, 1913-2013) *Holocaust*, n.d., oil on linen, 79.5 x 132.25 in., Hofstra University Museum Collections, Gift of the artist, HU2012.10

A frenzy of strokes
Visual memorial
Like the space of dreams

CONTRIBUTORS

Brendan Barnes is a second year law student at Hofstra Law School. He graduated summa cum laude from Hofstra University in 2011 with a B.A. in English Literature.

His senior thesis on piracy in Elizabethan drama won the 2011 Hofstra Library Undergraduate Research Award.

Michelle Calderon graduated from Hofstra in December 2012 with a B.S. in Biology and a minor in both Chemistry and Marketing. Her goal is to pursue a career in medicine as a physician; she is currently in the process of applying to medical schools. Her interests include playing volleyball, writing poetry and spending time with family and friends.

Fran Donnelly, a Hofstra University alumna, audits as many interesting and fulfilling classes as possible at Hofstra. Having majored in Art History, she finds writing ekphrastic poetry to be particularly enjoyable. In addition to taking classes, she spends a great deal of her time gardening, visiting museums, and taking care of her three beautiful grandchildren.

Eugenia Kelly-Viner has written poetry, essays, plays and screenplays. She has been published in *The People's Poet*, *Rhyme & Reason* (anthology by United Press, U.K.), *Neon Highway* literary journal and *New Plays and Playwrights*. While living in the U.K. for 10 years, she was a part of the *Neon Highway* performance poetry group, which performed around Liverpool. She has a B.A. in English Literature from Yale and an M.A. in Theatre from Roosevelt University.

Olivia Mammone is working toward an M.F.A. in poetry at Queens College.

Her poems have appeared in the literary journals *Wordgathering* and *Message in a Bottle*.

As an undergraduate at Hofstra, she received the 2009 Jeffrey Weinper Poetry Scholarship. In addition to writing poetry, she is working on two historical fiction novels. She is currently interning at American Book Publishing; in the fall, she will teach a general introductory course in creative writing at Queens College.

Lyndsay McCabe is a recent graduate of Hofstra University with a B.A. in Education and Creative Writing. She is the recipient of the 2010 Academy of American Poets Undergraduate Award; she hopes to spread her love of poetry and expression by becoming an English teacher.

Ciara Thompson will be a full-time matriculated student at Hofstra this fall in their M.F.A. in Creative Writing program, with a concentration in poetry. In exploring her African-American heritage in her work, she likes to push the boundaries, to interrogate and redefine African-American stereotypes. She is the proud mother of a bright, affectionate, vibrant eight-year-old boy, Immanuel. Her Protestant Christian faith is a precious asset to her artistry. She enjoys reading, dancing, singing, and traveling.