

National Poetry Month Featured Poet: Joseph Mosconi

written by Entropy | April 17, 2014



We're continuing with our [National Poetry Month](#) interviews, and excited about today's featured poet, the most excellent Joseph Mosconi! Stay tuned for more featured poets all month long.

1) Do you think poetry is still important, relevant, and vibrant in today's culture?

I dislike these words, "relevant, vibrant, important." Their meanings are so different from one another and I'm not sure how they relate to poetry. I want to turn these words into foie gras and eat them. Usually this question comes in the form of asking whether or not poetry is useful or continues to have a social function. I think it's better to think of poetry as a form of relevance in the information science sense, as a means of retrieving material that may be of some use to some user, which can be more or less important. The lower the relevancy score the better the poetry.

2) What makes you want to write poetry?

Google. The City of Los Angeles. The past & the future. Long division. Greater than and lesser than.

3) Tell us about one poet who has greatly influenced you as a writer and thinker.

I thought about this question for a long time, and there are so many poets I could list that have had a more direct influence on my writing and thinking. But "influence" is a tricky word; there are negative influences and positive influences. When I was a freshman in college my dorm-mate lent me the Language poetry anthology *In The American Tree*. For some reason the first poem I read was "Property" by Carla Harryman. I still remember the first few lines of the prose poem:

"Come, you are a mad revolutionary," said her uncle with a smile.
He pointed at the wildflowers.

I loved this poem. But soon after I read this poem, as well as other poems by other poets in the same anthology, I stopped writing poetry for approximately 15 years.

4) Tell us about one lesser-known poet who you'd like more people to know about.

I have very little sense of who might be a lesser-known poet and who might be a well-known poet. To me, Robert Grenier is a famous poet, though I suspect many people may not be aware of his work. He's most often associated with minimalism (along with Aram Saroyan) and later the Language poets. His book *Sentences* (1978), consisting of 500 short poems printed on index cards contained in a folding cloth box, is endlessly fascinating. His use of design and alternative methods of publication (the fact that *Sentences* is not simply a perfect bound book)—as well as his use of color in later works—directly influences my own ideas about publication. Among younger poets, I need to mention Stephanie Rioux. Her chapbooks *Sticks* (Mindmade Books, 2009) and *My Beautiful Beds* (Parrot/Insert Blanc Press, 2011) are important publications in the proto- or post- or dirty- or whatever- conceptual writing that has been going on in Los Angeles over the past many years. Her work engages minimalism and linguistic invention in ways that I find intriguing.

5) How do you feel about poetry in the age of social media?

Strange question. Feelings are mutable and each one is a fact, as Yvonne Rainer would say, best conveyed by writing, print and reading (and by reading I include the reading of images). I guess I feel the same about it as I feel about poetry in the age of television or poetry in the age of radio or poetry in the age of newspapers or any other type of media including ancient oracularism. I feel immersed, excited, sick and weird.

6) Share with us one of your recent poems and tell us a little bit about its context.

This poem is very recent. So recent that it's not yet finished and I can only offer an excerpt. I've worked as a taxonomist and computational linguist at Google for over a decade where I create taxonomies, ontologies and classifiers. More recently I've been working on semantic and behavioral modeling initiatives. I'm interested in the imaginary space where negative sentiment interacts with assumed hierarchy; I'd like to create a poetry of taxonomic inefficiency. This poem is an excerpt from the index of a book-length poem called NESOI. The title is an acronym that stands for "not elsewhere specified or indicated" and is used in categorizing cargo for the Harmonized Tariff Schedule for the United States. It also refers to a class of elemental Greek goddesses that personify islands. The book contains a primary taxonomy of objects and ideas, but the index represents a sort of mental map of the taxonomy. It has a code-like structure, but it's totally meaningless—I mean it doesn't function, it's just a parody that helps me think through the structure of the taxonomy itself. For some reason I imagine it being read aloud by Mark E. Smith of the Fall.

from Index of NESOI



 **Joseph Mosconi** is a writer and taxonomist based in Los Angeles. He co-directs the Poetic Research Bureau and co-edits the art & lit mag *Area*

Sneaks. He is the author of *Fright Catalog* (Insert Blanc Press, 2013) and *Demon Miso/Fashion In Child* (Make Now Press, 2014). Writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Triple Canopy*, *Material*, *Abraham Lincoln* and other journals.