

(reprinted from February 15, 2017 blog post by Anna)

## Apparitions – new art & poetry book



Four years ago, ghosts began appearing in John's poems. Tromping through a Houston house of jazz. Inhabiting a deserted New Mexico homestead. In the person of a promiscuous eighty-year-old Bowery tenement super. The Fantods.

Inanimate objects were taking on life in my paintings. Bones. Gloves. Chairs. Sharp things.

We decided to embark on a loosely defined, multiple art form project, *Apparitions at an Exhibition*, to explore the phenomena. We are pleased to announce the publication of our second art book, *Apparitions*, which is the culmination of this project.

### **The project**

This is a story about a book.

And also so much more, because to get to this final form, we used many disciplines.

*Apparitions at an Exhibition* was essentially a long laboratory period. It allowed ample time for editing, crafting, and evaluating, interspersed with public salon showings of art, music and verse. We tested and presented in words, paint, video, and performance. We learned from everyone: actors, musicians, singers, audiences, and collectors.



Above: Performers who worked with us along the way: John LeFan, John Flanagan, Diana Brown, Susan Sullivan, Bob Taxis, Sam Sullivan, Mimi Heft, and Phil Deal

## The beginning

John and I knew we wanted to bring our work together for a project. He had recognized the specters haunting his poems, and handed me a binder of work-in-progress tentatively titled "Still Life | After Life". "Any thoughts?" he asked.

I had been working with phantasms myself in animated still lifes. The final straitjacket painting, *Coming Undone, Phantasm of the Knot* was in its early stages. My domestic dramas were populated by household objects evoking human qualities. And of course the bones. The bones representing, in their painted form, a life different from their first.

I entertained the possibility of starting a new body of work around the poems. I soon realized that would have been artificial. I was already deep into the work I was doing. I became more interested in how we might interweave our work as an installation and musical theater piece that included relevant paintings. Bad idea, at least the paintings part, but it took awhile to figure that out.

## Trying out material

We started massaging material. In 2014 we were ready to produce three YouTube videos, two songs (*Cowboy Cabin*, *Grand River of Life*) and a poem (*The Naturalist*). Bringing these pieces to performance dictated plenty of crafting and editing of John's words. The camera and video editing work I did informed my paintings and sets.

Our first salon performance was called *Early Apparitions*. It put some new songs in front of an audience. I created a simple set and an exhibit of small work. A fairly traditional salon presentation, though it gave me a chance to start watching the interaction of audience in this context a little closer than I had before.

## Apparitions No. 2

Our second salon, *Apparitions No. 2* presented in 2015, was a much bigger undertaking, done in the form we had initially conceived the final production to take.

It was fantastic.

As a vehicle for bringing John's poems and songs to life, it worked fabulously.

The show swirled around the audience, even extending into a ghostly sax making its way down the echoing halls of Project Artaud.

My big take-away from this salon was that incorporation of the paintings needed work. It wasn't quite communicating in the way I had hoped.

## Salons of 2016

We had material. And lessons under our belt. Then the big decision came on how to culminate the project.

Is it right to mount a live show that will disrupt our space for months and run for five weeks? This was a tough call. We were energized. Actors were committing. We had saved. But would we be able to draw enough audience?

One more test run was in order. We ran a series of salon performances in the fall of 2016 to test the current climate on audience draw.

And also used these shows to keep testing the visual art/performance concept. The shows were spectacular.\* The audiences were small. Friends in other theater companies corroborated the finding.

\*(Many thanks to Pete Madsen, Celeste Kopel, Diana Brown & friends, and the Bernal Jazz Quintet)

## The book

Then the "aha" moment.

We realized what we really had is a book on our hands.

Our first book, *Tickle gurgle Tock*, had been a collaboration with letterpress printer John Sullivan of Logos Graphics. Our goal then was to produce a beautiful handmade object, showcasing John's poetry. My art was incorporated, in black and white, primarily as illustration.

This time around, we both insisted that the art and writing hold equal weight. In book form this made perfect sense.

### *Production Notes, Apparitions No.2* (from director, John LeFan)

*"There is another dimension." Rod Serling's opening words to "The Twilight Zone" made a believer out of me. "A dimension beyond sight and sound" was a reaffirmation to my eleven year old mind that people like Alice really did go through the looking glass. Later, "more things between heaven and earth" were woven into the fabric of most of my favorite stories.*

*Here are portraits of people and places where the concrete is fluid. Some of these people have become what Vonnegut called, "unstuck in time". Some have built whole worlds in their heads.*

*If you, the audience, have your sense of reality tilted a bit, we've done our job.*



*Apparitions*, poems & songs  
by John LeFan,  
art by Anna Dal Pino,  
8 1/2 inches square, 56 pages.

When all the written material was compiled, John turned it over to me and I spread it all out, looking with fresh eyes. It seemed naturally to fall into five sections. Ghost Stories, Hunter|Prey, Perspective, People and Place. As soon as we sorted it this way, the book sprang to life. Amazingly, there was a painting in my *Bones* collection that seemed made for each section. I focused on the bones and the piece fell into place.

This morning we picked up the proof from the printer. We think it's a knock-out. Can't wait to show it to you too.

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