

Double Self-Portrait



James
Lindsay

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Also by James Lindsay

Ekphrasis! Ekphrasis!

Our Inland Sea

Double Self-Portrait

James Lindsay



Buckrider Books

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For Eli

There is no turning back to be someone I might have been. Now there will only ever be multiples of me.

– Mary Jo Bang, “Self-Portrait in the Bathroom Mirror”

All “portraits” are also self-portraits.

– Lynne Tillman, *Men and Apparitions*

Contents

Contents

Tinnitus, 9

Failed Questions, 13

- Survivors, 15
- Harmony, 17
- The Revelry of Others, 19
- The Narcissism of Sleep, 21
- Oooooos* and *Wooooos*, 22
- Two Kinds of Ice, 23
- Failed Interview Questions, 25
- Lying to Children about Santa, 28
- Lying as Wishful Thinking, 29
- A Home Can't Be Abandoned if It Was Never Lived In, 31
- Between Wars, 33
- Travel and Leisure, 35

Repro Ditto, 37

Decorative Knots, 43

- Amniotic Oceanic, 45
- The Self-Interviewing River, 49
- Decorative Knots, 50
- Hissing of Summer Lawns, 51
- Summerland, 52
- The Gap, 53
- White Christmas Tree, 54

Quotes, 55

Ekphrasis! Ekphrasis!, 59

- Double Self-Portrait, 61
- How Does It Feel, 62
- The Playthrough, 63
- The Playthrough, 64

Sunrise with Sea Monsters, 65
And Then We Saw the Daughter of the Minotaur, 66
An Oral History of Homesick Music, 67
An Oral History of Dad-Rap, 68
Werewolf and Birdman, 69
Cranberry Bog, 70
Sex Club, 71
Gender of Connectors and Fasteners, 73
Matana Roberts plays *No Title* by Eva Hesse at the Whitney, 75
Loren Connors plays *Four Darks in Red* by Mark Rothko at the Whitney, 76

Honne and Tatemaë, 77

The Disagreement Between Dawn and Dusk, 81

Young Money, 83
Stupid Machine, 85
Mine Light, 87
Home Office, 89
The Sandbox, 91
The Labour of Patience, 93
Staff Party, 94
In Praise of Grey Spaces, 95
Counter-Earth, 97
Kiss Me, Man-child, 98
Supplements, 99
Dog Park, 100

Double Self-Portrait, 103

Acknowledgements, 109

Notes, 111

Tinnitus

Tinnitus

In Italy volumes have been composed on how light
fulfills a room, volumes so deafening ringing replaces

silence for days after. Or not ringing as much as
a buzzing hum – an elastic holding wax paper

over the loo tube. O kazoo, no one truly loves you.
Too much oomph to your oompah, too many

disclaimers before the performance. Share precious
memories more, that's what the earthlings do

when being honest with their emotions, when
screaming at the sound guy who came to lay out cable

and leave early. All the same problems plague these people,
these people of the contaminated memory.

These people of a terra nova nowhere close
to the mainland values too loud for the old and un-

earplugged, who can't expect to be in the same light-
filled room without acquiring an ache, arthritis

of the ears. Earlier in this poem I wrote, "light fulfills
a room." Allow me to elaborate: light fulfills

a room like love promises to fulfill a lonely kazoo's
longing; like breath fulfills the lungs of a woodwind

by adding an individual's air that runs the circuit,
or like assumption fulfills memory by contaminating

what fulfills the blank spaces – eyes demanding worth
in missing letters, erasures, censored text, bars

blacking out names. It was the ever-poetic cicadas
that swapped the *e* for an *a* and moved the mouth harp

from Jew to jaw, keeping the electric twang but dropping
any accusation of Nazism that may come their way

when awakening to a new world after seventeen years
underground with only nymphs to form opinions with.

Crickets as critics of sunsets: the first to correctly
detect the effect of air pollution, the dye of the sky

that was assumed to be natural. Natural like the beginning
of this poem felt. But so much has happened since beginning.

And the light. I forgot about the light. Did I illustrate how
it “fulfills a room”? How rooms defer completion without

this essence? Perhaps I should have quoted from the “volumes.”
And the rhyming was inconsistent. And though I cannot remember

how or why, I took the concept for this poem from “Italy,”
the title poem of Donald Britton’s only collection, in which

he writes, “I’m still confused about why I mentioned Italy
At the beginning of this poem, especially since

It’s all a terrible lie.”

Failed Questions

Failed Questions

Survivors

It would be lying to say that this cold reading will age well, or that this musician knows how to play his zither, but the performance sounds convincing

so don't stop the trot and canter for an affluent few while their donations spiral into the wishing well, draining away like the last of the rainwater almond

farmers prayed for. The droughts caused by breeding out arsenic from the most widespread milk substitute, scoffing at the modern crop. Topiary cities reverse-

engineered from English gardens to public housing would have been of better use than defending golf courses from encroaching deserts. Two conclusions

are clear: either Los Angeles will return to powder or be dragged under the ocean. Time to run through the survival scenarios again. Time to start dressing

as peasants again. It's suspect to trust any type of identification that isn't self-applied, so forgive the snickering, it's just hard to take this seriously after

anxious nights pouring over ornate impossibilities for a physically alive architecture – floral umbilicals tethering the Earth to organic space stations; shoots

producing their own oxygen; self-repairing elevators for the survivors to ascend – and it would still be lying to declare it a solution. Best-case scenario is the shitty

wizard conjures drizzle and the director remembers his name. All are imposters and no one knows anyone anymore in these days of botched botany. These days

of meticulously constructed personas, questionnaires for gathering information on vegetation some feel deep, spiritual empathy with. Or at least what is considered

spiritual when the messiahs are self-proclaimed and the survivors, decoding some scraps they were able to save, seeking meaning in endings, are strangers to each other.

Harmony

Nine times out of ten the most alien organism
humans can imagine is still humanoid
in appearance, still wants to talk and the thing

about taking back what was said is that
it's an impossible contract two parties
agree to understanding it all depends on their

mutual will to perform forgetful. Near perfect
but born wounded, lacking technical know-how.
Runts without a grammar needed to know why

these semi-images collage hodgepodge. Exists
as affirmation. Good dog, you've done your best.
Tonight you shall sleep in the big bed. But once

more you must recite the story, and this time
without the prompts provided by the interrogator,
who is impatiently waiting to go home to his

small family. A cousin to take care of, a cat
to let in. Not everyone has someone who waits
for them. A collision reconstruction unit drops

absorbent dust to seep up leftover liquid
from the car that crashed into the bridge
that bridges the dip in the road that flooded

in the winter storm. An agreement between
adults who fail to remember December's push,
push, push – to what? The right to not be alone.

A contract between car and bridge, dust and liquid.
Memory and reality: a moulding done in crumbling
Play-Doh; a stunned ring from a dumbbell left on

the far side of a Lazy Susan no one uses because
it was never intended to be lived in as an asylum,
only a place to put our mutually unthinkable things.

The Revelry of Others

The revelry of others showed up as
bags under my eyes.

– Ange Mlinko, “Dentro de la Tormenta”

Driven by Brandon through Buffalo and the Poconos
to snowy Greenpoint to meet Vito and Lise and look

for old eccentric records at some skeletal weirdo’s,
I find myself enduring proximity like a dull twinge

not worthy of ibuprofen. At the military café, a shirtless
man on TV is euphoric on football. After lunch I’m aghast

in ineffable, unfuckwithable, newfangled new-found lands
I indulged in a way that is by definition of interest to me:

unease. Homesickness, I lit you on fire just to smack it out
and unnecessarily beat myself up in the process. But once

I succumbed, numbing myself by gifted food and drink,
I embarked on noticing all the small moving parts often

overlooked, all the atmospheric outspokenness around.
I didn’t know it could snow in another city, but I learned.

Suddenly ski masks seemed sensible instead of lecherous,
some seasonal local norm. Travelling in twos interrupted

my reading. Travelling (not far) intensified night on the air
mattress and itched my nerves the next evening at dinner

with so many unfamiliar voices challenging each other for
airspace. Vito and Lise, how do they do it? Hosting, talking –

talking, hosting. I will forget to send them a Christmas card
and build a gilded guilt of it. The worst the introvert heard

was an invite's *bing-binging*, the doorbell's *ding-donging*
as I sigh against the windowpane, readying for the storm.



James Lindsay is the author of *Our Inland Sea* and the chapbook *Ekphrasis! Ekphrasis!*. He is the co-founder of Pleasence Records and works in book publishing

Double Self-Portrait explores doubling and reproduction in art, memory, culture, nostalgia and fatherhood. Divided by four longer, more autobiographical poems, *Double Self-Portrait* is a deeply layered collection, one that at times speaks directly to the reader and at other times is meta-textual. Bees, cicadas, music and photography flash through these poems, bounded as they are by the resistance to and embracing of responsibility. This is a collection where the poems work individually and together, subtly building toward a single theme that slowly coalesces during the reading to create a collection that resonates in your mind long after the book is closed.

Praise for *Double Self-Portrait*

“Not an example of a high brought low, or the low vaulted, *Double Self-Portrait* instead feels like a densely swaying poem-tower that Mr. Lindsay has built spiral staircases inside of to spin us back down to stable ground. *Double Self-Portrait* is an exciting collection of poems, strong and certain with a deeply felt beat of humanity that ‘succeeds in signifying an idea of the internal / with all its mysterious wet bits.’ Or, maybe I could just say it’s ‘more mauve than cherry.’”

– Ben Estes, author of *Illustrated Games of Patience*

“Here, the poet declares it is time to reconsider what is heroic, what is left after wading through the detritus of the modern world and the self is left bare. In *Double Self-Portrait* unsettled lives are depicted with the fierce self-questioning of a philosopher in the well-negotiated timbre of a comedian tuned to the wreckage of this hour in the world. Lindsay’s searching lines offer a counter-reading of the self that does not mean to make you see everything. Here is a repose for the things that should last in the self but do not.”

– Canisia Lubrin, author of *The Dyzgraphxst* and *Voodoo Hypothesis*

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