

## **Links: During**

From the start, I wanted *Links* to be a parallel endeavor, meaning that I wanted to work with both visual artists and musicians concurrently. Because I was keen on showcasing some of the overlap between the fields, I also wanted to cross-pollinate some concepts. Thus it was, for example, that certain qualities of Renga were applied to the visual work, and an Ekphrastic methodology to the musical interactions. In a certain respect, I also simply wanted to turn some tables. I wanted to borrow of music, particularly jazz and blues, its historically improvisational aesthetic, and impose it on the realm of visual art, and from visual art I wanted to borrow the idea of still-life, contemplation, observation, and representation; asking musicians to remain spontaneous, but to do so in response to a tangible and static entity that existed in clear view outside their creative inner selves.

From these and other related ideas, goals, and concerns emerged the final working methods of the project. *Links* would have two prongs: one visual, one aural. In each case, poetry would be the unifier. This was at least in part meant to be in keeping with the Stonecoast Third Semester Project requirements as I understood them; the over-arching purpose of the Creative Collaboration was to showcase how one's own genre could not only reach out to other fields, but prove its relevance there as well. So my goal was to show that poetry could not only interact with music and visual art, it could provoke work that wouldn't have existed without its influence. In addition, I wanted to showcase, even exploit, poetry's powers of receptivity, awareness, digestion and regeneration.

On the visual art side, as noted previously, I wanted to enact a Renga-like chain; the difference in this case would be my continued appearance as poet (as opposed to a new collaborator every segment). The collaborations were to proceed as follows: The first visual artist in the chain would submit a new work to me, I would then write a poem in response. That poem would then be passed on to the next visual artist, who would create

a new work, to which I would subsequently write another new poem, passing it upon completion to the next visual artist. This chain was to continue on until, after the eighth visual artist's work and responding poem were created, the final written work would be submitted back to the first visual artist in the chain, who would then complete the visual circle with their new work. I would then write the final poem. Each visual artist was to be given one week to create their work, I would allow myself three days for each poem. The end result: nine new works of visual art and nine new poems.

My idea for the musical portion of the project began simply enough; I would submit one of twelve different sets of Linked Haiku (works I had written while in residence at The Jack Kerouac House of Orlando, Florida), to one of twelve different musician participants. Each would be given fairly specific instructions to try and be as "receptive" to the Haiku as possible, and allow for at least the initial impetus for creating their response to be as spontaneous as possible. Early on I had thought to enforce this spontaneity by being physically present during the moment(s) of creation; I had intended to record the ideas as they occurred. But time, geography, and philosophy intruded. Not only did it seem logistically impossible to pull this off, it didn't seem right either. I felt that the musicians ought to be allowed to choose their own method of response, of responding, composing, and recording. So the plan changed. I would submit the work; they would later submit their recorded responses. I liked this, because as noted before, this was taking the Ekphrastic ideal and putting it to work in the service of a less than less-seen collaboration; musicians composing to poetry as if painting to a still-life.

I underwent one major deviation from this methodology along the way. At the suggestion of my mentor Dennis Nurkse, I read Kevin Young's anthology "Blues Poems," and in it I found a work by the poet A. Van Jordan that just literally broke my head wide open. Rather than playing on the similarity between Haiku and the classic Blues Stanza (each being three lines), he instead created three-line blues that followed the classic model

(line, repeat, resolve), but utilized Haiku for each line, meaning that his blues went Haiku, Repeated Haiku, Resolution Haiku. Amazing! My first instinct was to toss all my Linked Haiku, and write all new works in this model. Then, I decided I wanted to change Van Jordan's approach. The one thing he hadn't done was rhyme his tercets, something that more often than not is in fact done in the blues. So I had a go at writing my own versions, spun off his lead, but varying his form such that I would have Haiku, Repeated Haiku, Resolved & Rhymed Haiku. (Unlike much "literary" blues-on-paper, I neglected to vary my repeated tercets with any trite "oh, I said", or "lord, you know," or other such verbal mannerisms. The point of repetition is repetition, and I wanted the readers to feel each repeat, not be distracted by how I'd varied the stanzas on the page with pale and contrived imitations of blues-speak.)

In the end, I wrote six new Blues Haiku (which I now considered to be at least a partly invented form, albeit owing a strong debt to A. Van Jordan), and went for a split approach as far as what I submitted to the musician participants; six got Blues Haiku, seven got Linked Haiku (I had acquired on the way a thirteenth musician!). Once the musicians had received their works, and because this musical portion of *Links* was not an inter-related "chain" as was the visual art portion of the project, I had only to wait, and hope, and wait. Finished recordings would be due by May 13, twelve days before the show was to open.

The final conundrum was how to present all the work. From the start I wanted to show everything in one room, with the parallel collaborations co-existing. Despite there being no direct connection between the two prongs, at least in terms of how the collaborations had been structured, I felt very strongly that all the work was united, not just by my presence and my poetry, but by a shared methodology and spirit of creation. I settled on the following approach: The entire project would culminate in a gallery-style "show," in which attendees would be greeted by the visual art chain gracing the walls, the works

displayed in order of their creation (visual work, poem, visual work, poem, etc.), and thirteen "listening stations" on the floor (headphones and a music player playing the relevant composition) positioned alongside the displayed Haiku. I felt this made for a life-sized spatial re-enactment of the original concept of parallel creative interactions whose links would be highlighted by their unified presentation.

I should mention that I had an arguably moral/philosophical agenda to the project as well. On the one-sheet that I eventually designed as a PR piece to send out in advance of the show, I tried to encapsulate my sentiments in a press-friendly sound-bite:

*The project is a metaphor for the bonds that connect us as creative, feeling beings that inspire one another in ways we can hardly imagine. We are all inextricably linked, and this project strives to present the abundance and the beauty of these bonds.*