

# VANITAS



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# Vanitas 4: Translation

Edited by Vincent Katz

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## To A Stark-Eyed Slut

With your beastly little eyes  
You stare at me and say nothing and wait and then you hold onto me  
And again you stare at me and say nothing. Your flesh  
Slovenly and dull sleeps laggardly  
In primordial dreams. Whore...  
Who conjured you to life? Where do you come from?  
From harsh Mediterranean ports,  
From chanting fairs of Tuscany  
Or churned in burning sands  
Was your mother under the Southern Winds?  
The vastness impressed the marvel  
On your savage sphinxian face  
Life's swarming waft  
Tragically — as it does to a lioness —  
Dishevels your dark mane  
And you stare at your blond evil angel  
Who doesn't love you, whom you don't love, and who languishes  
After you and kisses you exhausted.

DINO CAMPANA (1885-1932)  
*(Translation from the Italian by Cody Franchetti)*

## Vanitas 4 : Translation

Translation — carrying across — is often conceived as a useful labor — and a compromise. It is only a compromise when the translator decides to make it one. Otherwise, the field is wide open, the translator taking the opportunity to find the best form at the moment into which to put the subject. As we are principally considering poetry here, we may add that this is basically what the poet does at all times and in all situations. We may even think of “carrying across” as “getting across,” as in “getting one’s point across.” This is what I would, here, call on translators of poetry to do: get your vision of the poet you are translating across.

In this issue, we have a range of approaches to carrying poetry, from a variety of times and places. There are translations that try to mimic closely the original’s details, homophonic translations, adaptations, an experiment with a speech-recognition program, riffs and fragments, poems “after,” “for the amusement of,” investigative excursion, translation of music into verse, turning the prosaic depression of recorded deceit into poetry, reversing a translator’s ideas to make a translation of a translation.

Turning : in addition to carrying, there is implicit in translation the idea of turning — into, away, towards — of the ultimate revolution, of leaving home, of deciding the old paths, however comfortable, no longer exist for one. The works in this issue — while wildly diverse and impossible to categorize — do represent a consistent effort of movement in their approach to literary work. It is hard to keep the connection to one’s own work; sometimes easier to the work of another. When the connection is lost, the vessel may stagnate, or worse, begin to sink.

There are works from Greek and Roman antiquity, Old English legend, high Modernism (literally high-falutin’ travels and physical flights), a pair of poet-to-poet poems from Brazil (the second inevitably an elegy), World War Two Poland, the altered and particular, non-Surrealist, reality of Henri Michaux, Chile, several Italies, Brazil again, Afghanistan via Italy, new visual exercises from France, rural Japan

: and new poems from artists intent on breaking forms and seeing what shows up as the possibility of a poem in a period after eight years of savage, relentless destruction.

Critical texts that are also sometimes experimental texts:

the shift from Argentine Spanish to Brazilian Portuguese, or from lyric to a harsher modernism, little-known songs for girls by Greece’s great poet of athletic struggle, the shift from Japanese to English in ever-elusive syllables: haiku seen through the family trade, an homage to kari edwards in a language whose beauty will remain opaque to most readers, experiments in identity, explications of dead and living poetics that leave poems’ meanings as opaque as that Ilokano chant-elegy.

Francesco Clemente’s work has long been about translation: the migration from outside to inside and back again, whether that is the human body, its openings and closings, or a process that happens across centuries, a personal compilation of ways of thinking about perception, and the navigation through life and death. He once said, “As inevitable as it is to die, it is also inevitable to be born.”

It is a special pleasure to be able to include work by Augusto de Campos, a founder of Concrete Poetry, translator and interpreter of poets from Basho and Blake to Dickinson, Mallarmé, Thomas and Cummings. His poetry has been a consistent example of the thing itself standing only for what it is, auto-representation, with a technical brilliance and insight that remain inspiring.

It has been a challenge to try to contain so much energy into something that fits in your hands, could slip into a briefcase, certainly lie on a coffee table. Yet, it’s the love these authors have for their authors that generates the enthusiasm for the next poem, to be written or read.

I would like to draw attention to the input of our contributing editors, Elaine Equi and Raphael Rubinstein, in helping shape this issue. Thanks too to Juan Gomez for technological expertise.

See you later,  
Vincent Katz