

John Giorno's Hint of Sound Poetry at the John D. Calandra Institute

Simona Zecchi (October 26, 2009)



The Italian American poet and performer artist, John Giorno, read a selection of 7 poems contained in his new book, "Subduing Demons in America- Selected poems 1962-2007"

Among the lectures hosted at the John D. Calandra Institute this 2009 semester, we attended to a



special one on October 6th.

The Dean of the Italian/American Institute, Anthony Julian Tamburri, claimed the importance of these literary events that strengthen the institute's purpose, i.e. to foster higher education and deepen the understanding of Italian/American culture and heritage.

The Italian-American poet, born 1936 in New York, founder of the "Giorno Poetry Systems" Institute and considered an innovator in poetry as well as in performance, did not read his poems, as a matter of fact. He sang them and performed them with the sound and musicality of his voice.

Giorno created poetry in various forms for more than forty years: from traditional lyric poems to epic visual poetry, as well as audio poems and musical performances around the world. He collaborated with some important writers, poets and artists such as William Burroughs, John Asberry, Ted Berrigan, and Patty Smith

Giorno's performance from his new collection, "Subduing Demons in America-Selected poems 1962-2007" (Marcus Boon editions, Berkley, CA 2008) captured the audience, among which we could find other relevant writers and intellectuals of the Italian-American counterculture scene, such as George de Stefano and Gil Fagiani.

As Giorno answered to one of our questions, the only poem of the collection that has some Italian references is "La Saggezza delle Streghe (Wisdom of the Witches)" – the Italian title is part of the poem too. Witches are present in his memories related to his land of origin back in Italy, the Region of Basilicata: "Hidden inside the fog and mists/were witches/each a secret to herself/.../They were happy to see us/.../Ugly and beautiful witches/increasing and magnanimous witches/.../are the outer displays of wisdom".

Other poems performed by Giorno were, "It's not what happens but how you handle it", "The Death of William Burroughs", "Just to say no to Family Values", "Thanks for Nothing" he wrote on his 70th birthday in 2006.

Perhaps in Giorno's provocative, innovative and technological poetry (that he pioneered years ago even before the beginning of the digital era) it is interesting to note how some of the wisdom coming from Italy... can counterbalance both the internal and external American demons that are present in John Giorno's art.

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