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# BOURGEON

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FIFTY

ARTISTS

WRITE

ABOUT

THEIR

WORK

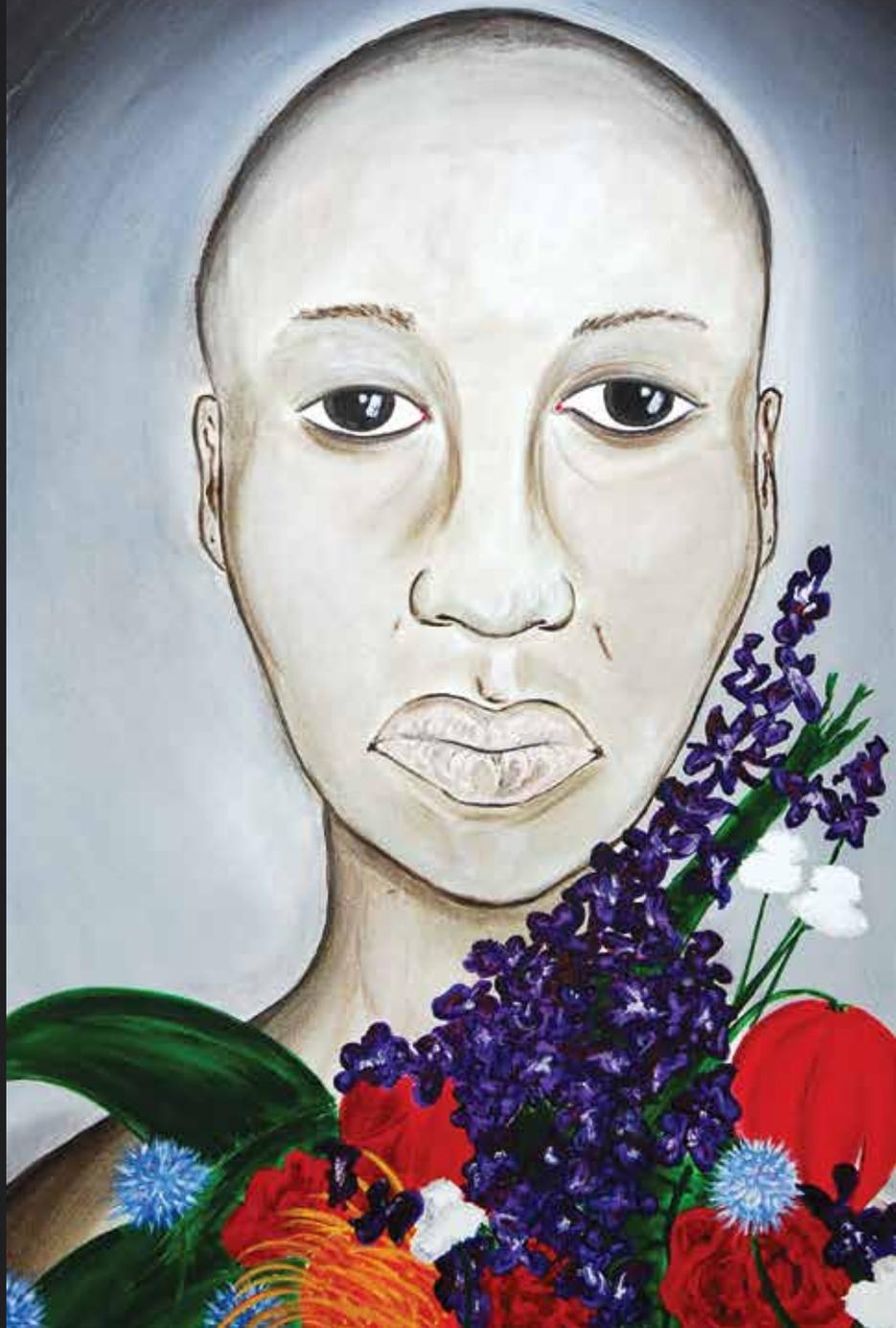
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*"This is a useful  
book. It's an arts  
manual of ideas."*

- E. Ethelbert Miller

Robert Bettmann,  
General Editor

with a preface  
by Leonard Jacobs



## A View from Outside

by Joan Belmar

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I have lived in many cultures, but have never felt completely at home in any one. Born in Chile, I moved to Ibiza, Spain at 24, and to the U.S. at 28. In each culture, I have experienced the feelings of an outsider. I have come to understand that “all is not what it seems.” My need to communicate this point of view is what drives my art.

In my recent work, I have created 3-inch thick worlds under glass. At the base of this world is plywood or masonite, on which I have drawn tools, toys, animals, or body parts that can just be detected by looking closely. The surface layer is acetate, on which I often make a geometric pattern or drawing to represent the external, structured, societal world in which everything would seem to have an objective measure and to exist within familiar rules. In between these 3 inches, I use Mylar and acetate to create layers that both expose and obscure the worlds within. Sometimes I use closely separated vertical strips of Mylar that



1968 Typhoon (About Change) by Joan Belmar 31" x 40" approx.  
Acrylic, Mylar, Ink, Gouache, Wood and Vinyl on Masonite  
2010

are dyed with diluted acrylic. This heightens the effect I'm looking for, because as the viewer moves from left to right in front of the piece, new things that exist below are revealed and others become partially obscured. Also, the color intensity of the piece varies as you shift from looking at the piece head-on to looking at it from the side. The result I hope for is an organic and mysterious world that is in constant movement, as you shift your viewing position. One image that I have recently used is that of an old bicycle, because it touches upon both our interior and exterior worlds, and it also represents movement and change.

I am fascinated with color and transparency and the compression of worlds that coexist due entirely to the imposition of a technical structure. I think that I create this work as the result of my journey. I think of myself as a collage of experiences and even though many times I do not feel as though I fit in a place, I have access to these experiences.

I do not like to title my works with names that are too descriptive. I think names sometimes narrow the viewer's focus. I want each viewer to bring their life's perspectives to the viewing experience, with the hope that each viewer will discover something different.

I love taking advantage of technological changes and contemporary materials. I remember using thin layers of acrylic and oil to create abstract paintings back in 1996 in Spain – a combination of media that was frowned upon at the time – and I have continued to experiment with materials and imagery. I have used all kinds of material (fabrics, papers, plastics, glass, etc.) but when I discovered the transparent qualities of acetate and Mylar and the effect of using them in combination, I began to make the dimensional pieces that characterize my current work. They are not exactly painting and not exactly sculpture, another ambiguity that I love.

There are two pieces that have been especially influential in my work: Anish Kapoor's blue egg and Tara Donovan's thousands of styrofoam cups. I appreciate the way that Kapoor exploits all the tactile and physical characteristics of materials. He also succeeds in taking the viewer to a different dimension that distorts the senses. As an example, he has placed people playing as children in front of his work; this is done as part of the work itself. Tara Donovan's work has similar qualities, but she uses disposable materials such as glasses, straws, and paper, often in large installations, creating optical illusions that are a challenge to understand. Donovan uses a simple plastic cup to create a world!

I imagine that each of these artists must have a great time in the studio

playing and making art from the play. As artists, we face a host of adversities outside our studios, but inside our studios we need to stay very close to our child inside.

Right now I am working on a series of paintings on paper and canvas. In these, the layering is more optical illusion than physical reality. These are a new direction for me. In the future, I would love to experiment with photography, using light and reflections as a way to create depth.

## Biography

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Joan Belmar was born in 1970 and grew up 2 hours south of Santiago, Chile. He left Chile for Ibiza, Spain, at the age of 24 where he began painting professionally, using the Catalan “Joan” for his first name, John. He came to Washington, DC, in 1999, and was granted permanent residency in the United States based on extraordinary artistic merit in 2003. Belmar’s work is in the permanent collections of the DCCA Art Bank, the District of Columbia’s Wilson Building, and the Airport Art Collection, Ibiza Spain. In DC, he has shown in WPA\C venues, the American University Museum, the Chilean Embassy and the Corcoran Art Auction Gala. He has also shown in Chicago, New York, Athens, Barcelona, London, Ibiza, Biella, Lisbon, Sevilla, Santander, Bologna, Malaga, Rome, Buenos Aires, Santiago and Seoul. He was a Mayor’s Arts Award Finalist in 2007 as an Outstanding Emerging Artist in Washington, DC. The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities awarded him an Artist Fellowship grant in 2009.

## Suitcase

by Anne Dykers

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In the end, you have no suitcase.

The ticket is one-way only, very expensive, *caro*, precious.

You arrive on the side of a hill which has dared to assert its contours  
into the life of endless blue sky  
and you sit next to the little shed with its rusted tools,  
find the rabbit carcass drying in a gorge of light.

You've left home with instructions to love  
your body, your ankles crumbling beneath you.

Your suitcase, navy blue, like all the others  
is carefully zippered around the loves of your heart,  
your neck of arteries and veins folded neatly over your pants and  
scarves  
the ones with the silver thread flowers  
and the ones with the outlines of petroglyphs  
the freckled bowl you bought somewhere  
and nestled into the fabric with your spotted hands.

In the end, you will dream of packing your suitcase.  
You will ask someone you love to get it down from the attic  
even though you have no attic  
and you did not know that you could feel so much love  
for a stained undershirt and a chipped necklace

or your own blood warming in the dark.

## Biography

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Anne Dykers is a poet, therapist, and book artist based in Silver Spring, MD. Her poems have appeared in *Green Mountains Review* and *Ashen Meal*.

## Making “Charlie Chan and the Mystery of Love”

by Dana Tai Soon Burgess

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Every time I start a new dance, I look for a completely different entry point. Sometimes it’s musical, other times it’s story driven, sometimes about historical events, etc. I am a huge dream journal person; I have been a lucid dreamer since childhood and I keep a dream journal by the side of my bed. When it is time to start a new work, I suddenly dream lucidly and see scenes from the new dance. It’s as if my subconscious gets filled up, and then moves all the ideas to the forefront of my conscious mind. The recurring images that I have for this new piece have been relating to how I grew up, and fundamental mid-life questions of love, identity, and home.



An image from “Charlie Chan”, choreographer Dana Tai Soon Burgess, dancers Connie Fink, Katie Chupasko, and Tati Valle-Riestra, 2011  
Photo by Mary Noble Ours

As a child I grew up in Santa Fe, NM. I attended bilingual Spanish public school by day and a martial arts dojo at night that was located in a Project Tibet Center. My upbringing was in some ways in a crossroads of cultures, languages, and landscapes.

The new work is autobiographical, and includes images that run through my mind daily. The new dance is also an abstract story; it explores the transitions I have gone through emotionally and psychologically to find a sense of belonging in modern day, multi-faceted America, in my 40s. After several weeks of rehearsal I now have my choreographic structure in place, and am filling in with text and music. I'm seeing that the main character plays in a fantasy world to communicate and externalize internal conflicts.

Autobiographically: As a child, I had an imaginary friend. I became friends with "Charlie" when I was 3, and maybe still am! As a youngster, I saw the movie character "Charlie Chan" on TV and I think I based my internal life on that of the movie detective. I know that the APIA (Asian Pacific Islander American) community goes back and forth on whether he is an obsequious caricature, or an early-empowered APIA, actually based on a real life Honolulu detective. But for me, Charlie was a detective who could solve all the problems of life. He would put all the topsy-turvy disparate images of life together, and make sense of them – a Korean-American speaking Spanish. My life got so confusing that the overwhelming mysteries called for a detective to decode them all!

In the new dance, Charlie Chan is the imaginary friend to the protagonist. Chan has a great outsider perspective that allows the main character to give up romanticized ideals of love, and to problem solve/contemplate his own life. I am calling my new work Charlie Chan and the Mystery of Love because it is a coming of age story where fantasies live and die around the concept of actualizing love.

## Biography

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Dana Tai Soon Burgess is the founding artistic director of Dana Tai Soon Burgess & Co. He was raised in Santa Fe, New Mexico by parents who are both visual artists. Vital to his aesthetic are his training in the Michio Ito technique (the first Asian American choreographer) as well as culturally specific dance forms and martial arts. Burgess has received critical acclaim for his unique portrayals of Asian American and New American themes. His company has performed extensively both in the United States and Internationally. In 2004 he received the Mayor's Award for Excellence in an Artistic Discipline. He is a two-time Senior Fulbrighter. Burgess is the Chair of the Theatre and Dance Department at George Washington University.

# The Distance from Here to There

by Gowri Koneswaran

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She is afraid to cross the street alone here  
So she grazes his elbow with her right hand.  
Twenty-nine years old and her father is her  
Security on this eight-minute walk  
From the hotel to his sister's house, from  
One side of the busiest street in this country  
To the other.

She lets him think he blends in,  
Allows him the privilege of believing  
His departure thirty years ago  
Doesn't make this country any less his;  
That leaving his home to give his children  
One that wouldn't rank them by ethnic group  
Is not the definition of choice.

She has learned her place here.  
As a teenager she thought  
She could camouflage herself in  
A salwar kameez,  
Plait in her hair,  
Pottu on her forehead, and  
Made-in-India-but-sold-in-Sri-Lanka  
Slippers on her feet. But she

Wears her passport in the way she  
Looks men in the eye,  
Pays too much attention to the trishaws and  
Passengers almost falling out of buses.

She asks to stop at the bookstore so she can  
Practice her Tamil.  
*Enna vilai?*

He lets her get away with knowing how to ask  
*What price?*

While needing him to translate  
The answer into English.

## Biography

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Gowri Koneswaran is a poet, singer, and lawyer based in Washington, DC. She has been a featured poet at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Campus Progress's Protest Through Poetry, Sulu DC, and Busboys & Poets. Gowri released her first chapbook, *Still Beating*, in 2010.

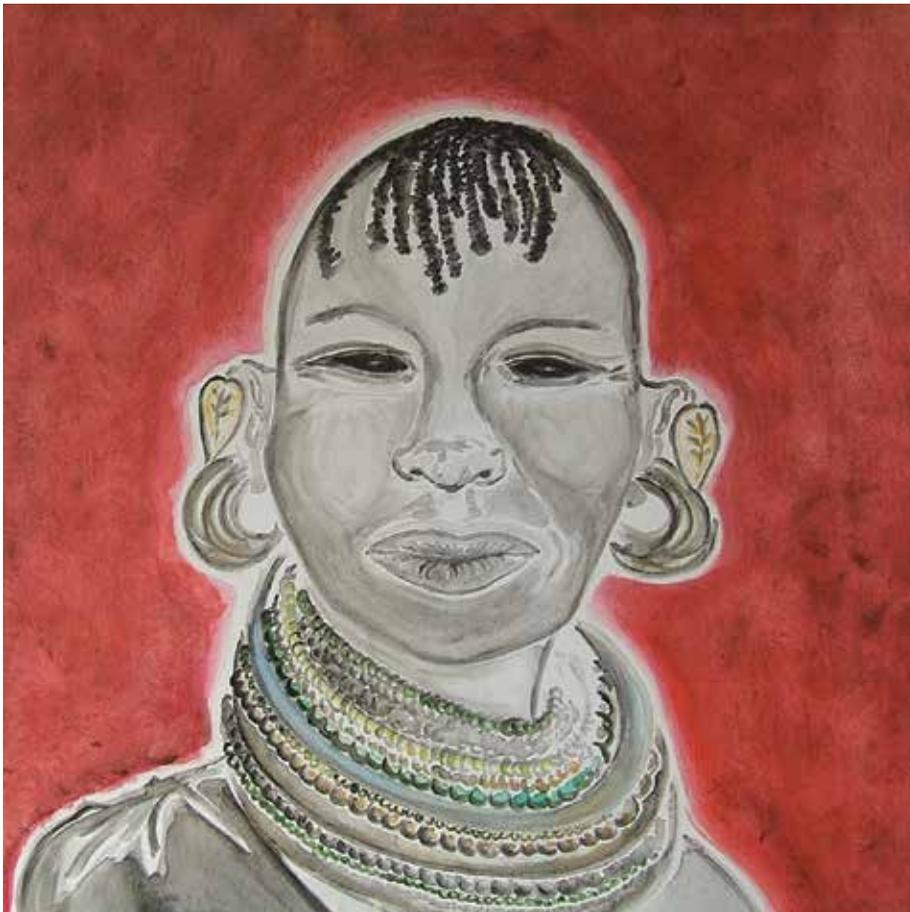
## On Being Self Taught

by Prudence Bonds

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I have a mental cache of conversations exchanged between strangers-turned-friends regarding my artwork. The second or third question folks usually ask is, “Which school did you go to?” When I reply that I’m self-taught, a puzzled expression slowly takes over their face; then they mention their artistic niece, or the neighbor’s kid that just graduated from MICA, Howard, or Parsons.

Self-taught artists are usually defined by what we lack: a formal education from a well-known art institute resulting in a Bachelor of Fine Arts or Master of Fine Arts degree. The extent of my arts “education”



“Turkana” by Prudence Bonds  
Acrylic on Canvas  
2007

consists of a Smithsonian mask-making workshop, a summertime drawing class, and an eight-week photography & film development course at Corcoran during my early teens. Since I discovered my passion for paint and canvas nine years ago, there are a few things I've learned about the differences between artists who are self-taught and those who are formally trained.

Finding your technique without direct influence from a professor or mentor is different. I never thought to reference instruction books, though I probably should have. I was clueless regarding sketching before painting, whether darker colors go on first, or what functions certain brushes provided. Sketching before painting reminds me of the saying "Measure twice, cut once," which I apply to every other aspect of life, but I almost never sketch. Through mixing acrylics with water or cooking oil, I found a way to use less paint while learning, and eventually incorporated that technique into my regular painting regimen. Reusing and layering "dirty" water is how most of my work is achieved. I fell in love with how olive oil made colors richer and watered-down acrylics extended the drying time and created the illusion of watercolor. Though I learned everything the hard way, learning by trial and error has always been most comfortable for me. I believe that there is no right way or wrong way – just my way. I now listen more keenly to intuition.

After getting comfortable enough to consider publicizing my artwork, I discovered another daunting aspect of being a self-developed artist: networking. I struggled with questions that degreed artists already know the answer to. Which of the gazillion art orgs out there should I join? Do I need a website since some artists don't have one? How do I get into shows and build my résumé? Thank goodness for Utrecht Art Supply's bulletin board and Google.... I started reaching out to folks who left business cards or flyers on community bulletin boards, which led to acceptance into my first group exhibit. Interacting with other artists and art-lovers forced me to self-critique my paintings. If someone asked questions about my intentions or color choices, I had to find an answer and stand firmly beside it. This practice turned out to be a tremendous confidence builder.

That warm, fuzzy feeling of meeting new peers sparked a desire to submit to other shows, but I was soon rejected more times than not. Maybe I just didn't know which shows were the best fit for my work. At times, I sensed a stigma attached to being self-taught. Like a trusted brand, a degree legitimizes an artist's work in the eyes of prospective buyers, dealers, galleries, grant givers, proposal readers, arts publications, the

list goes on. And call it paranoia, but when I submit work for juried shows beyond the DC-Baltimore area, I feel I get rejected because I lack proper training. It seems galleries are less likely to take a chance on someone like me. The living self-taught painters that galleries tend to admire – so-called outsider or folk artists – work in abstracts, are expressionists, or convey an obvious socio-political viewpoint through their work. My work doesn't really fit into these categories. However, rejection serves as a jolt of I-Can-Show-You motivation.

The notion of being a self-taught artist might be a question of semantics. Many of the degreed artists I've met have shared how art school stifled their creativity, and how they eventually had to discover their own process. Though the frustrations of being self-taught can be overwhelming, the journey of understanding myself through creation, and the friends I've made, are deeply rewarding, and exciting.

## Biography

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Born in Florida and raised in Washington, DC, since infancy, Prudence inherited the “creative gene” and started to draw at age four. Throughout childhood and adolescence, Prudence expressed several methods of creativity including writing, mask making, and photography & film development. She began painting consistently in 2001, and her work regularly depicts people living throughout the African Diaspora and uses color, texture, and introspection. Since acceptable images of human concepts such as love and beauty are perpetuated through art, literature, music, and the media, her pieces echo the attempt made by people of color to redefine and re-present those concepts in their terms.