

## Beyond Time

### *Beyond Time*

Robert Gibbons (with photography by Syrie Kovitz)

DeadDrunkDublin (online)

38 pages

<http://www.deadrunkdublin.com/>

Reviewed by Bent Sørensen

Robert Gibbons is one of the finest prose poets in the US today. As Charles Simic suggests in his definition of prose poetry (“a burst of language following a collision with a piece of furniture...”), it explodes out of a linguistic collision in the mind of the writer. These poems possess so much energy within their folded boundaries that text alone is unable to contain them for long.

In his latest suite of poems, Gibbons seeks to move ‘beyond time,’ as the title of the collection suggests. The 38 pieces in this online chapbook use a mere 4,600 words to evoke multiple spaces and places and cover a vast historical sweep. The spaces described in the poems are always tangible and concrete; poetic space is ‘real’ even on occasions where it is clear that Gibbons is imagining his settings and locales. Congruously, the page space that the online publisher, *DeadDrunkDublin*, has given him shimmers around the few lines each screen contains, while luminous black and white photographs by American Syrie Kovitz occupy the left half of each page, sometimes commenting on the poems, sometimes contrasting with them. *DeadDrunkDublin* has provided a fitting home for this sequence (his work has previously appeared online in both *Exquisite Corpse* and *The Drunken Boat*), being a site that harbours several fine poetry, prose and multimedia texts in aesthetically well-designed and challenging layouts.

Gibbons points to a constant struggle for transcendence – beyond ourselves and time-bound existence – that we all engage in whether willy-nilly or by design. He is a seeker by nature, but one who lets serendipity do its subtle work and is unafraid to embrace and celebrate the results. Gibbons’ practice is one of discovery, of “documenting experience,” or as he suggests, of living twice, once in the experience and once again “as intense, or more so” in “the second life of writing.”

Gibbons’ thoughts on time run a gamut that takes the reader from seeing it possess a “grand anonymity” (“Anonymity of Time”) to achieving a certain cohesion in the long coda of “Beyond Time,” “Oracular Time,” and finally “I Saw Time.” What begins expressed through absence of name is at the end embodied and humanised: time that “danced in Flux with a body made of ethereal energy” – a friend, a familiar, a presence. Over the course of the sequence (“riding the same elliptical curve, as if sent from an unknown Time”), towards the final gaze at time “hover[ing] in the East, kindly, without intent,” the reader’s sense of gravity and linearity is happily challenged.

Gibbons’ poems also suggest the tactile quality of language. Words caress or may be caressed as bodies are. According to the poet, words may be all we have and all we are, but they are never enough: “I’d film words like Godard, if I could, chant like Coltrane, if need be paint a sign like Kline,” Gibbons states. The poems bear this out in their flow of sounds and images referred to, described, alluded to, suggested, and subsequently created anew. Other great improvisers appear through the lines and emotions of the poems: Keith Jarrett on

piano, Frank O'Hara on museum stationary, Jackson Pollock dripping blood and paint on canvas. The burst of language in the prose is violent, flowing with great energy and speeding into the reader's mind: "Speed of language counts. Prose speeds." Gibbons is committed to spontaneity, to the improvisation that knows not where it is going to end "until last tap at keyboard."

As I said earlier, Robert Gibbons is one of the finest practitioners of prose poetry in the US, if not the world, today and *Beyond Time* proves it. His words flow with speed and grace across white pages or screen spaces, larger inside than their boundaries would suggest possible.

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