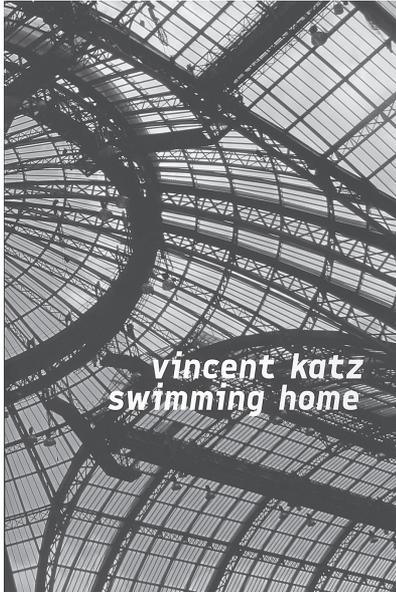


SWIMMING HOME

Vincent Katz

Nightboat Books (\$16.95)



Vincent Katz's poetry in *Swimming Home* has an urban, and urbane, surface, though it's marked by a nuanced interiority. That is, the surface play of these poems seems to take in all the world with an easy and indiscriminating welcome, "compliant / sentences / moving endlessly / through space." The world of thought that lies beneath this busy surface moves on a different current: searching, meditative, and yet still affirmative. The hallmark of this collection is, in fact, the generosity of its embrace: "Sun red ball; sliver moon. / Endless traffic; sky haze. / Skyscraper; low-lying house. / Garden; enormous." It is rare to read a contemporary poetry that opens itself to experience with relatively little ambivalence and so much pleasure.

This does not mean that these poems are facile or simplistic. Rather, Katz's poetry helps us to understand that the grammar and vocabulary of the affirmative can (and must) be more complex than we typically permit or understand it to be. That's why the surface textures of Katz's poems are so important: they dapple the inner stream of his poems with perceptive attentions that show he knows the perplexities of the world and yet has found a way to navigate them without being overtaken by despair. But Katz's poetry does include critique and lament. He's keenly aware of the "frail balance / on blighted globe." He sadly acknowledges, "All countries are carved / Out of human flesh none / Is logical or reasonable." Katz's solution to such chaos is not to propose a new order, but to re-envision chaos as productive: "good we were able to forget those / attempters of life-structuring, our lives in particular, which brook no structure."

As the title of the collection would indicate, Katz portrays life as a flowing medium, transparent with light. The poems create continuing movement through accretion of observations and phrases: short, immediate, ongoing. Despite the details he includes, Katz seems also to suggest that the great fluid realm of experience threatens at times to become amorphous. Assenting to this, the poet replaces the linearity of narrative with the epiphanies, large and small, of the present moment. In an arresting image of a surfer riding a wave, Katz depicts the "tremendous pressure" of the wave into whose "solid flesh" the surfer sticks his fingers. The physicality of this scene is compelling, but Katz rightly notes that even the breaking of the wave, which seems to lead to a conclusion, is "also not final," and leads to new image and transition. History is but one conception of our temporality; Katz's insistent attention to the immediate is active and vivid, "where it [is] obviously more important to float in the present, kick."

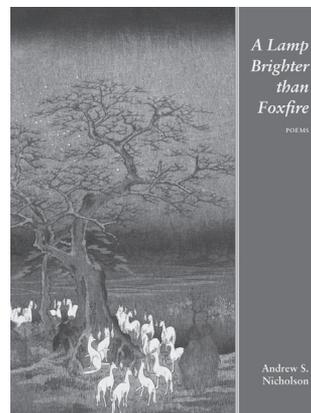
What if disorientation is a kind of joy? Equilibrium and balance are relevant to the desires constituted in these poems, but balance totters graciously beside imbalance. The indirections of poetry are, after all, what make it so compelling and revelatory to readers. Certainly, to read Vincent Katz's poems is somewhat like planning a "sequence of activities / It is almost impossible to stay on course, buffeting of waves, / Circling, the constant losing of things is part of the dive." The pull of air that brings us back to the surface, gasping, disoriented, is also a mode of exuberant discovery.

—Elizabeth Robinson

The Mountain West Poetry Series

A Lamp Brighter than Foxfire

by Andrew S. Nicholson



Opening the space between the ordinary and the visionary, the poems in *A Lamp Brighter than Foxfire* uncover an intimate relationship with the world around them, from Las Vegas to Italy to the American Midwest. From a lime glowing in an orchard to a miraculous childhood attempt at levitation, Andrew S. Nicholson's poems ground themselves in the commonplace and leap for the luminous. Central to this collection are poems that retell stories of Jacob from the Old Testament, relocated behind casinos, glimpsed in miniature on kitchen floors, and heard speaking in a moment of decay. Through these retellings, Nicholson examines the creation of self, family relationships, and a generative sense of the divine.

"A Lamp Brighter than Foxfire is news that will stay news."

—Claudia Keelan



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