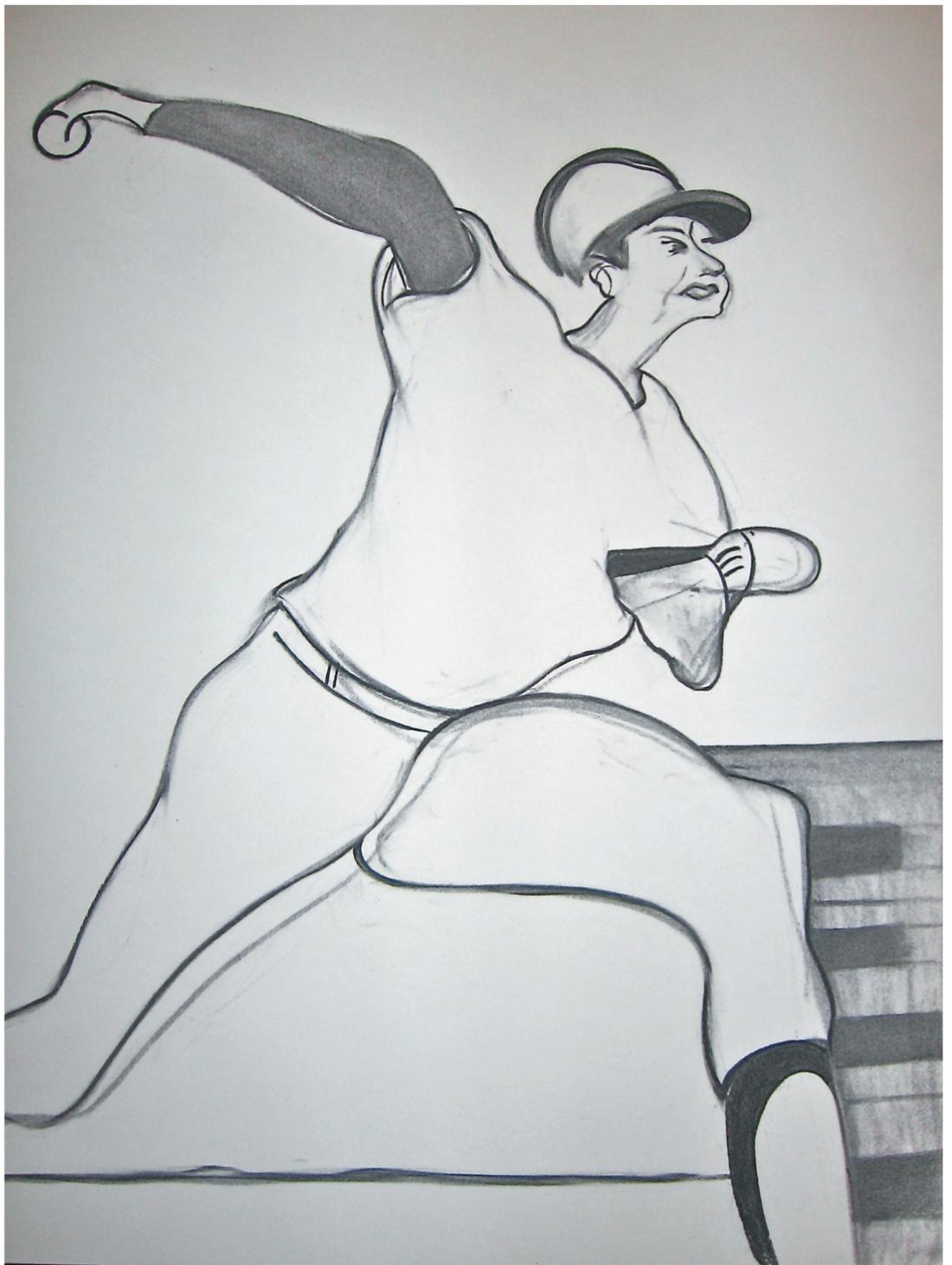


**BASIL**

**KING**

**09.22**

**2012**



"STUDY FOR THE PIANO PLAYER," CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 22" x 30" ©BASIL KING, 1983. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

## **Basil's Arc:**

***The Paintings and Poetics of Basil King***

**Speakers • Panels • Music**

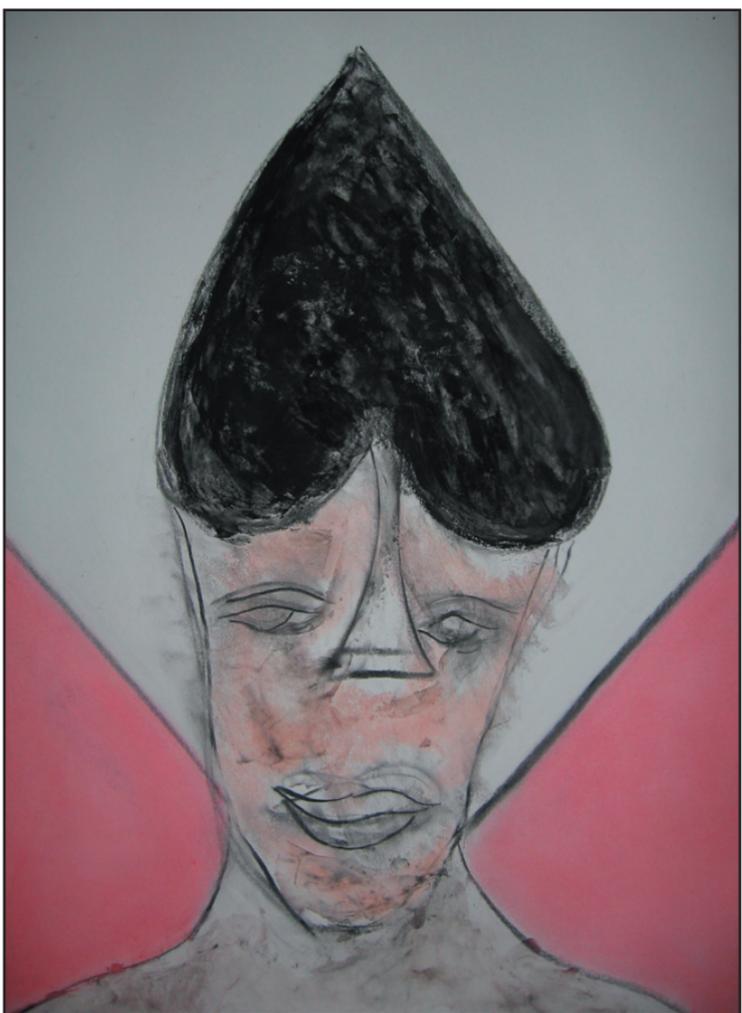
**And the premiere of the film  
*Basil King: Mirage***

**Sat., September 22  
12 noon to 6:00 p.m.**

**free & open to the public**

***Anthology Film Archives*  
32 Second Ave. at Second Street  
New York City**

**WWW.BASILKING.NET**



"STUDY FOR QUEEN OF SPADES," CHARCOAL AND CHALK ON PAPER, 20" x 30"  
©BASIL KING, 2010. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

# Basil's Arc: A Full



"STUDY FOR PASTORALE," CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 30" X 44", ©BASIL KING, 1983. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST. (THE PAINTING OF "PASTORALE" IS OWNED BY TOM SEAVER.)



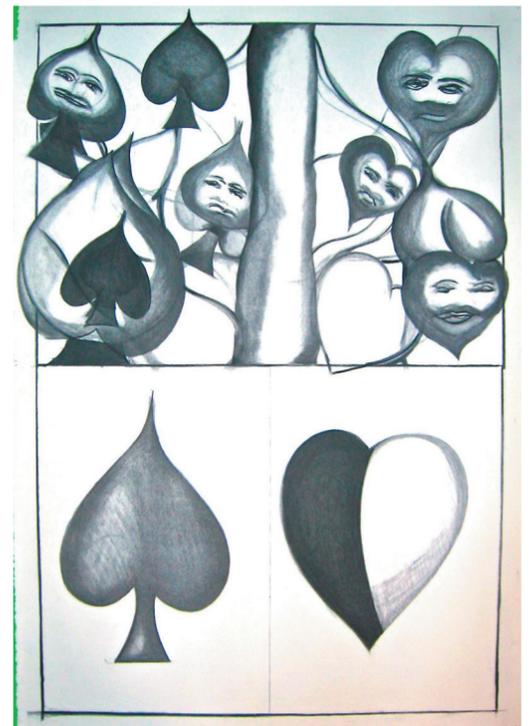
"LOOKING FOR THE GREEN MAN," CHARCOAL AND LIBRARY CHALK ON PAPER, 30" X 22", ©BASIL KING, 2010. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

"It's like when I pitch. It goes straight to the **imagination.**"  
—Tom Seaver

*"I have to RETURN TO THESE IMAGES again and again."*  
—Hubert Selby Jr.



"QUEEN," MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 8.5" X 8" ©BASIL KING, 2011. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.



"UNTITLED CARDS. (FULL HOUSE?)," CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 30" X 44", ©BASIL KING, 1985. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

Three faces, three diamond face cards, make a wall across the highway. I am Ali Baba, the thief. I open the wall. I own the wall. The drawings are my intimates, my dots, my hours. If you want to hear the rain talking to the rain, if you want to walk on the land, if you want Arizona, break bread with the sun and the moon. Nipper, Box Jockey. Snow Flake. On the lam, Highway Obstacle II runs and hides like a criminal. —Basil King, excerpt from Identity, section 3, of *Warp Spasm*

# House and Beyond



"QUEEN OF HEARTS," CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 22" X 30", ©BASIL KING, 1985. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

*"The liberties  
[King] takes  
with form are  
less unsettling  
given the artist's  
absolute belief in  
the reality of his  
images..."*

*—David P. Curry*



"JACK," MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 5" X 6 3/4", ©BASIL KING, 1994. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.



"LOOKING FOR THE GREEN MAN," MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 30" X 22", ©BASIL KING, 2009. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

Each of Basil King's lines (both written and drawn) is infused with history. The residue of his remarkable experiences resides throughout his oeuvre. His lines are noble, curious, playful, and personal.

King lays distance bare. He captivates time. He draws without periods. He documents the ineffable, his imagery is drawn from a font of welling atmosphere. He reckons on the sums of memory and returns them to the realm of experience.

In the Looking for the Green Man series elemental forms cluster in the enveloping foreground. Ovals poise above columns, signifying characters engaged in stagecraft. Solidified auras sing in a blazing aria. The subjects activate an arena where archetypal dramas are sustained.

In the Kings and Queens, colorful symmetry joins classical and modern conceits. Blocking out territory, shapes boldly establish autonomy. Like self portraits painted with a divining rod, these stylized heads convey majesty and wisdom.

"There is no finishing line," King notes. There is always the reach to touch what lasts. That's what his lines do.

*— Jeffrey Cyphers Wright*

# Who's Who in "Basil's Arc"

**Basil King** is a painter and poet, born in England in 1935 and living in Brooklyn since 1968. He attended Black Mountain College as a teenager and completed an apprenticeship as an abstract expressionist painter in San Francisco and New York. Since



1958, he has been producing covers and art for poetry books (more than 40 to date). He began to write himself in the 1980s and now writes and paints daily. His books include *mirage: a poem in 22 sections*, *Warp Spasm*, *Identity*, and *77 Beasts/Basil King's Bestiary*. Three recent chapbooks, *In the Field Where Daffodils Grow* (Libellum) and *Wild Cards and Portraits* (both Cy Gist) contain his art and excerpts from his on-going work "Learning to Draw/A History." An exhibition of his paintings, "The Green Man," was presented at Poets House in New York in 2010. A book-length *Learning to Draw/A History* was published by Skylight Press in 2011. Visit [www.basilking.net](http://www.basilking.net).

**Edna Augusta** is a graduate of New York University (B.A. '05-History; M.A. '08-Museum Studies). With a strong interest in curating, Augusta focused her graduate research on the



representations of Atlantic slavery in American museums and other historical institutions. She interned at the Museum of the City of New York, New-York Historical Society, and Fraunces Tavern Museum. Since September 2008, Augusta has been working with Basil and Martha King to catalog and archive the body of King's work stored in his Brooklyn residence. She is director of admissions for the Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology at Yeshiva University. A native of New York City, Augusta lives in the Bronx.

**William Benton** received his early training in music, and worked as a jazz musician before becoming a writer. He is the author of several books of poetry, including *Marmalade* (with drawings by James McGarrell), *Normal Meanings*, *Eye La View*, and *The Bell Poems*. His poetry has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Open City*, and other magazines. He is also the author of *Madly*, a novel. His most recent books are *A Quatrain on Sleeping Beauty's Tomb*, a translation of Boris Pasternak's poems, and *Exchanging Hats*, on the paintings of Elizabeth Bishop. He lives in New York City.



**Laurie Duggan** was born in Melbourne in 1949 and has subsequently lived in Sydney and Brisbane. He was in Washington, D.C. for three months in 1992 when he first met Basil King. Duggan moved to the U.K. in 2006 to Faversham, Kent, and is a regular reader on the London poetry circuit. He has taught art history, cultural studies, and creative writing and worked as a screenwriter, art critic, and poetry editor. He has published 20 or so books of poems plus a critical work, *Ghost Nation: Imagined Space and Australian Visual Culture 1901-1939* (University of Queensland Press). His most recent books are *Crab & Winkle* (Shearsman), a new edition of *The Epigrams of Martial* (Pressed Wafer), *Allotments* (fewer & further) and *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Shearsman). His blog, often featuring wonderful photographs, is at [www.graveneymarsh.blogspot.com](http://www.graveneymarsh.blogspot.com)



**Thomas Fink**, professor of English at CUNY-LaGuardia, is the author of two books of criticism, including *A Different Sense of Power: Problems of Community in Late-Twentieth-Century U.S.*



*Poetry* and seven books of poetry, including *Peace Conference* (Marsh Hawk). He has also served as co-editor of two anthologies. His work has appeared in *Talisman*, *Jacket*, *Barrow Street*, *Contemporary Literature*, *American Poetry Review*, *American Book Review*, and numerous other publications. His paintings hang in various collections.

**Mitch Highfill** is a poet and the author of *Rebis* (Open Mouth) which features cover art by Basil King and is based on alchemical drawings, mostly from the Hermetic Museum.



Originally from Nashville, Tenn., Highfill came to New York in 1980 to meet Jackson MacLow and to attend poetry readings. A job at the Ear Inn led to a 20-year history of coordinating various reading series in the city. His books of poetry include *No Precautions* (Next Century Books), *Liquid Affairs* (United Artists), *The Blue Dahlia* (Detour), *Moth Light* (Abraham Lincoln), and *Koenig's Sphere* (Situations). Highfill lives in Brooklyn.

**Paolo Javier** is the Queens Borough Poet Laureate. He is the author of four chapbooks and three poetry collections, including *The Feeling Is Actual* (Marsh Hawk) and curates Queens Poet



Lore, a roving literary series in venues across the borough. A native of the Philippines, the widely traveled Javier has been a resident of Queens for over a decade. He has an M.F.A. from Bard College and is the recipient of grants from the Queens Council on the Arts and New York State Council on the Arts. He is also publisher of a Queens-based tiny press, 2nd Avenue Poetry ([www.2ndavepoetry.com](http://www.2ndavepoetry.com)).

**Miles Joris-Peyrafitte** is a junior at Bard College where he pursues a double major in film and writing. His filmography includes *Basil King: MIRAGE* (as editor, composer, and co-



director with Nicole Peyrafitte); *Grace*, a 22-minute film he wrote, shot, and directed; music videos for his group, Dr. Skinnybones, and two videos on the Katrina catastrophe with poems by Megan Burns and Dave Brinks. As an actor he has had lead roles in theater and films including *Counting to Infinity* and the underground classic, *Muttnik*. Miles plays drums in Dr. Skinnybones. His compositions are featured on a CD of the band St. Jacques (Miles on vocals, guitar, and banjo; Aidan Shepard on drums), as well as in the Basil King film. He has also published two chapbooks of poetry. For more information visit [www.milesjorispeyrafitte.com](http://www.milesjorispeyrafitte.com)

**Vincent Katz** is a poet, translator, and teacher. He is the author of 11 books of poetry, two books of translation, and his criticism has been published in numerous books, catalogues, and journals.



He curated an exhibition on the arts at Black Mountain College for the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid and was the editor of *Black Mountain College: Experiment In Art* (MIT Press). A second printing is scheduled for 2013. He is the translator of *The Complete Elegies Of Sextus Propertius* (Princeton) and the author of *Alcuni Telefonini* (Granary Books), a book of poems in collaboration with painter

Francesco Clemente. Katz is the publisher of the poetry and arts journal *VANITAS* and of Libellum books. He teaches in the M.F.A. Program in Art Criticism and Writing at the School of Visual Arts in New York, where he recently taught a course entitled "Investigating Interdisciplinarity." *Photo by Vivien Bittencourt, "Vincent Katz, Vienna, 2010."*

**Burt Kimmelman** has published seven collections of poems, the most recent being *The Way We Live* (Dos Madres), four books of literary criticism, more than 80



articles on medieval, modern, and contemporary poetry as well as an essay on Basil King's writing and art (available online at *Galatea Resurrects*). Recent interviews of Kimmelman are available online: with Tom Fink in *Jacket2* (text) and with George Spencer at *Poetry Thin Air* (video). More on Kimmelman can be found at "Burt Kimmelman: A Survey," which includes critical commentary and poetry samples selected by Karl Young, a part of Young's *Light & Dust Poetry Anthology*. For more information, visit [www.BurtKimmelman.com](http://www.BurtKimmelman.com). He teaches at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

**Martha King** attended Black Mountain College in the summer of 1955 and married Basil King in 1958. She and Basil have lived in Brooklyn since 1968. Her collections of short stories include *North &*



*South* (Spuyten Duyvil), *Separate Parts* (Avec), and *Little Tales of Family and War* (Spuyten Duyvil). Other stories have been anthologized in *Fiction from the Rail* and *The Wreckage of Reason*. A collection of her poetry, *Imperfect Fit* (Marsh Hawk), was published in 2004. King is at work on a memoir, "Outside Inside," chapters of which have appeared online in *Jacket #40*, *Bombay Gin*, *BlazeVox*, and *New York Stories*. She is co-curator (with Elinor Nauen) of the monthly prose reading series, *Prose Pros* at SideWalk Cafe, and she blogs at King Ink, [www.blog.basilking.net](http://www.blog.basilking.net).

**Andrew Levy's** recent titles of poetry and prose include *Nothing Is in Here* (EOAGH), *Cracking Up* (Truck) and *Don't Forget to Breathe* (Chax). He is a contributing writer



in collaboration with the President of the United Hearts Collective to *The Big Melt* (Factory School), and author of *Memories of My Father* (Innerer Klang), *Ashoka* (Zasterle), *Paper Head Last Lyrics* (Roof), *Curve 2* (Potes & Poets), *Curve* (O), *Democracy Assemblages* (Innerer Klang), *Values Chauffeur You* (O), and several others. His poems and essays have appeared in numerous American and international magazines and anthologies. He was co-editor with Roberto Harrison and publisher of the poetry journal *Crayon* from 1997 to 2008. Levy teaches critical thinking and journalism at Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY. He lives in Manhattan with his wife and two daughters.

**Harry Lewis** was born and grew up in the Coney Island/Brighton Beach/Sheepshead Bay part of Brooklyn. He is a poet, translator, teacher and occasional essayist and fiction writer, and, for the past 35 years, a psychotherapist in private practice. He considers King one of his major influences as well as a dear old friend. Lewis founded, with Basil King and David Glotzer, *Mulch* magazine and Mulch Press in 1969. "We had a fine and fun run for about eight years," he says. "My feelings about Basil have always been clearly driven by the knowledge that he is a truly generative creative force as a painter and a writer = Artist = Maker." Lewis owns a large



private collection of Basil King's art. He lives in Manhattan with his wife, Estelle, and he looks forward to escaping the new Manhattan and perhaps returning to Brooklyn.

**Kimberly Lyons** is the author of several books of poetry, most recently *The Practice of Residue* (Subpress). *Asterisk 12*, from fewer and further Press, features her work in broadside form. *Rouge* is forthcoming from



Instance Press—with a cover by Basil King. Recent work is in both print and online magazines, including *Talisman*, *Peaches and Bats*, *New American Writing*, and *Peep/Show Poetry*. Her essay on Bernadette Mayer's *Studying Hunger* appeared in the journal, *Aufgabe*. An essay on the work of Joe Ceravalo is forthcoming in *Jacket 2*. She is the publisher of Lunar Chandelier Press ([www.lunarchandelier-lunarchandelier.blogspot.com](http://www.lunarchandelier-lunarchandelier.blogspot.com)). Lyons has been a guiding spirit to The Friends of Basil King, organizing the program and co-producing the film *Basil King-MIRAGE*.

**Tom Patterson** has been writing about contemporary art for 30 years. He is the author of *St. EOM in The Land of Pasaquan* (Jargon Society), *Howard Finster: Stranger from Another World* (Abbeville)



and *Contemporary Folk Art: Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art Museum* (Watson-Guptill). He has written extensively on the work of so-called "outsider" artists—individuals operating with relative autonomy on the margins of the academic art system. His writings have appeared in *afterimage*, *American Ceramics*, *American Craft*, *Aperture*, *ARTnews*, *Art Papers*, *BOMB*, *Folk Art*, *New Art Examiner*, and *Public Art Review*. As an independent curator he has organized group and solo exhibitions for the American Visionary Art Museum (Baltimore), the High Museum of Art (Atlanta), the Terra Museum of American Art (Chicago), and the Center on Contemporary Art (Seattle) among others. He is a U.S. editorial contributor to *Raw Vision*, an international journal of outsider art. He lives in Winston-Salem, N.C. *Photo by Nick Greenway*.

**Nicole Peyrafitte** is a Pyrenean-born multidisciplinary artist whose videos, paintings, writings, singing, and cooking are often integrated into multimedia stage performances. Her



work draws on her eclectic background and the experiences of shaping identity across two continents and four languages. Her work has been presented at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, The University of Bordeaux, Birbeck College at the University of London, Poets House and The Poetry Project in New York, Cave Poesie in Toulouse, Wayne State University in Michigan, and Naropa University in Colorado, among others. She created two CDs with Michael Bisio, bassist, and the DVD *Sax, Soup, Poetry & Voice*, with Pierre Joris and Joe Giardullo. In addition to producing and directing *Basil King: MIRAGE* (with Miles Joris-Peyrafitte), she has been presenting "Bi-Valve," a multimedia solo performance that incorporates her paintings and videos along with various texts. Peyrafitte has also illustrated and created covers for books by Pierre Joris. For more information: [www.nicolepeyrafitte.com](http://www.nicolepeyrafitte.com)

**George Quasha** is a poet, artist, and musician whose work explores principles in common among the arts. His poetry includes *Somapoetics* (Sumac), *Ainu Dreams*, *Verbal Paradise* (preverbs), and *Scorned Beauty*



# BASIL'S ARC

## The Paintings and Poetics of Basil King

### PROGRAM

#### 12:00 p.m. Doors open

Coffee and book table with materials that are available for examination or sale

#### 12:20 p.m. KIMBERLY LYONS: Welcome

**BURT KIMMELMAN:** Brief remarks on the Friends of Basil King and why the Friends organized this event.

#### 12:40 p.m. DANIEL STANIFORTH: "The Green Man," a music video

Staniforth's original music and images from King's *The Green Man* paintings.

#### 1:00 p.m. "Origins and Sources"

**ANDREW LEVY, MC, with EDNA AUGUSTA, HARRY LEWIS, and TOM PATTERSON:** Tom Patterson on why Basil is not an "outsider" artist but a "hidden insider artist." Harry Lewis on two paintings done when King was in high school, and how they relate to the development of King's mature art. Edna Augusta, archivist, on her experience of discovering King's art from 1960s to present.

#### 2:00 p.m. Open for audience questions and comments

#### 2:15 p.m. "The Poetics of Basil King's Art"

**VINCENT KATZ, MC, with TOM FINK, PAOLO JAVIER, and BARRY SCHWABSKY:** A wide ranging, conversation that tackles themes including hybridity, embodiment of image, poetic and visual line and color, spatiality and surface, and engagement with precursors in King's work.

#### 3:10 p.m. Open for audience questions and comments

#### 3:20 p.m. "Selected Texts by Basil King"

**MITCH HIGHFILL,** curator, with invited readers, and a performance of "I have a little song," with original music by **NICOLE PEYRAFITTE** and text from King's *Mirage*.

#### 4:00 p.m. "Place and Placelessness in Basil King's Art"

**KIMBERLY LYONS, MC, with WILLIAM BENTON, LAURIE DUGGAN, and GEORGE QUASHA:** Taking off from King's points of arrival, arriving at unknown ground, and figuring the where his paintings bring us to. With reference to the American and the European, geographic and minute, local/personal and art historical.

#### 5:00 p.m. Open for audience questions and comments

#### 5:15 p.m. "Premiere of the 22-minute film, *Basil King: MIRAGE*"

**NICOLE PEYRAFITTE** and **MILES JORIS-PEYRAFITTE,** filmmakers: Brief introductory remarks about the making of the film, shot in Basil King's studio in January 2012.

#### 5:45 p.m. KIMBERLY LYONS: Concluding remarks.

All are invited to *B Bar and Grill, E. 4th St. @ Bowery, after the program. Cash bar.*

*Comes Up From Behind* (preverbs)—all from Station Hill Press. *Axial Stones: An Art of Precarious Balance* (North Atlantic) focuses on his sculpture, drawings, and language. His visual art has been exhibited at the Baumgartner Gallery, Slought Foundation, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, and other venues. His video projects include *art is: Speaking Portraits*, recording some 1000 artists, poets, and musicians in 11 countries, and his writing on art includes *An Art of Limina: Gary Hill's Works and Writings* (with Charles Stein; foreword Lynne Cooke, Poligrafia). Quasha has presented performance art both solo and in collaboration with Gary Hill, Charles Stein, and David Arner. He is co-founder and publisher with Susan Quasha of Station Hill of Barrytown. Continuing work can be found at [www.quasha.com](http://www.quasha.com).

#### Barry Schwabsky



was born in Paterson, N.J., and now lives in New York City. He is art critic for *The Nation* and co-editor of international reviews for *Artforum*. His publications of poetry include *Opera: Poems 1981-2002* (Meritage), *Book Left Open in the Rain* (Black Square Editions/The Brooklyn Rail), and *12 Abandoned Poems* (Kilmog Press). The CD, *A Voice Hears You from Mysterious Places*, a collaboration with musician Marianne Nowotny, has just been released by Abaton Book Company. *Photo by Ryan Gander, 2009: "We Are Constant: Barry Schwabsky looking at Untitled (Self Portrait), 1975, by Goran Trbuljak at Galerija Gregor Podnar."*

#### Daniel Staniforth



is a writer, scholar, multi-instrumentalist and composer. Originally from England, he teaches English composition and literature at the Metropolitan State University of Denver and recently served in various capacities at Miami University and the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University. His publications include a poetry collection, *Weaver in the Sluices*, and a book of short stories, *Diddle*. Staniforth edited Basil King's *Learning to Draw/ A History* and the forthcoming *Kaleidoscopic Omniscience* by Will Alexander for Skylight Press, U.K. He writes, records, and produces alternative, classical, and experimental music including "sonic poemscapes" that fuse music and spoken word. His recordings can be found on the Flowforth Productions website ([www.flowforth.com](http://www.flowforth.com)). In 2011 he released *Ruins*, sonic readings of Margaret Randall's work.

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Tues. Oct. 30, 6:30 p.m.

**Amy King**

reads and gives a workshop

**Sidewalk Cafe**

94 Ave. A. (@ E. 6th St.), NYC

# The Green Man at Poets House

## Basil King at 75

BY TOM PATTERSON

A Poets House exhibition from Basil King's "Green Man" series cast a rare light on an artist who has charted an independent course.

"Responsibility is to keep  
the ability to respond."  
—Robert Duncan

The selection of paintings and drawings by Basil King on view through spring 2010 in the new home of Poets House, in Lower Manhattan's Battery Park City, was a small, low-key exhibition, but it marked a minor milestone for this irrepressible veteran of the New York art scene, whose work has been far too rarely shown in New York or elsewhere. King, who turned 75 during the show's run (May 30), is an alumnus of Black Mountain College, the backwater bastion of avant-garde art that existed in the North Carolina mountains for about twenty-five years spanning the mid-20th century. While other artists associated with Black Mountain (Franz Kline, Willem De Kooning, Jacob Lawrence, Kenneth Noland, Robert Rauschenberg, Dorothea Rockburne, Cy Twombly et al.) long ago gained international recognition, King has languished in relative obscurity, despite his steady output of distinctive work, his longtime residence in New York, and close friendships with cultural luminaries on both coasts.

Given the rarity of public opportunities to see King's work, Poets House's showing from his series "The Green Man" was worthy of celebration and a proper critical response. Despite the less-than-ideal conditions under which these pieces were presented; it was good to see them on view before a potentially receptive audience in the city where King has lived for fifty years. They offered a tantalizing glimpse of his oeuvre.

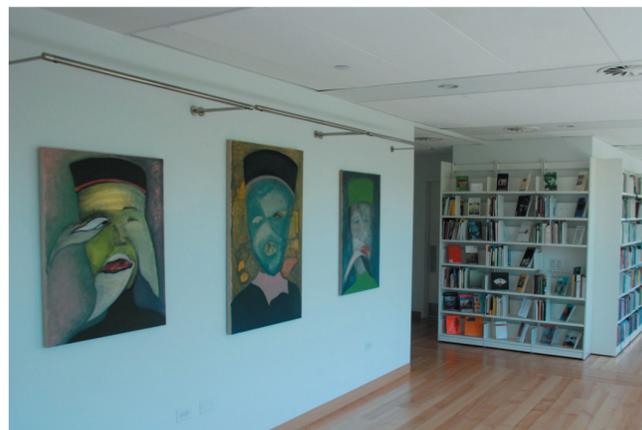
Since the end of the 1960s King and his wife Martha—a writer and editor who briefly attended Black Mountain—have occupied the same Brooklyn brownstone, where they've raised two daughters while continuing their creative work and remaining engaged with the city's cultural life. New paintings and drawings are almost always in varying stages of progress in King's third-floor home studio, which I've been privileged to visit repeatedly. But since 1979, when he had his last one-artist show in a New York gallery, his only solo exhibitions in New York have been at literary venues such as the Gotham Book Mart, the Poetry Project at St. Marks, and the Bowery Poetry Club. Veteran New York art dealers, curators, and critics know King's name and maybe a little about the art, but he remains without a New York gallery affiliation, and he has never had anything resembling the proper retrospective his work deserves.

Poets and poetry-centered organizations have been receptive to King's art because of his longtime interest in poetry, his friendships with important American poets, and his own poetry, which he began writing in the mid-1980s. Although a relative late-comer to poetic practice, he evidently retained plenty of what he picked up in his studies at Black Mountain with

Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Charles Olson. He writes like none of them, but there's a clear literary kinship. Seven of his books and six chapbooks have been issued by small-press publishers such as Cy Gist, Marsh Hawk, and Spuyten Duyvil, and his poems have appeared in a number of independent print and online magazines. Some of his paintings and drawings have been reproduced on the covers and inside pages of his own books, and others have appeared in literary magazines and books by fellow poets including Paul Blackburn, Allen Ginsberg, Theodore Enslin, LeRoi Jones, Carl Rakosi, and David Rattray. (There have been about forty such book covers, by King's estimate.) King's identity as an artist first and foremost (and one with a formidable knowledge of art history) is reflected in the substantial amount of his poetry about visual art, artists, and art-making.

That King's own art has been so consistently neglected is inexcusable, but I suspect commercial and curatorial resistance to the work stems from its unfamiliarity and refusal to fit neatly into existing categories. King's strikingly idiosyncratic paintings occupy their own aesthetic terrain, so the standard brush-off line of gallerists when rejecting an artist's work—"It doesn't fit with what we're showing"—is, unfortunately, always applicable in his case. His career illustrates some of the perils of going one's own way in an increasingly systematized, globalized art world. The uncompromising integrity of his vision is matched by the determined perseverance with which—in spite of the long odds—he has continued working. In Duncan's terms, he has kept "the ability to respond."

Like most of the other artists who were students at Black Mountain in the 1950s, King painted in an abstract-expressionist vein at the outset of his career. But he abandoned this way of working when he was in his late twenties. At the time he was a new father feeling increasingly dissatisfied with his art and out of step with his generation, and the resultant stress triggered a nervous breakdown that creatively immobilized him. After a hiatus of about two years and a reassessment of his creative priorities, King resumed painting and experimented for several years with a repertoire of biomorphic shapes. Eventually such forms evolved into—or were replaced by—loose depictions of figures as King



VIEW OF POETS HOUSE INSTALLATION, MARCH-JUNE 2010.

began developing a more personal approach, applying his own kind of gestural, painterly, ab-ex treatment to recognizable but sparingly detailed imagery. He has continued to pursue this evidently fertile line of visual investigation in subsequent years to produce more than 500 paintings and countless drawings.

One of the singular aspects of the hybrid vision King has evolved over the last forty years is the way his imagery often appears

to be emerging from or slipping into murky, abstract space. To my eye the vaguely defined figures in some of the paintings suggest ghostly apparitions undergoing metamorphosis, an essential theme in King's art. (He has observed that he sees "continuous metamorphosis all the time.") There is also often the suggestion that his figures are moving or mediating between two worlds.

In the case of "The Green Man" series, the operative mediation is between human identity and wild nature. All thirteen of the paintings are tightly composed oil portrait busts of figures wearing fez-like headgear. King made them in 1996 following a trip to England, where he was born and lived until he was twelve. Their inspiration was the carved figures that have come to be collectively known as the Green Man, incorporated into the architecture of England's medieval cathedrals. For the first time during that trip he paid close attention to these figures, with their faces peering out from dense growths of leaves and vines. In the centuries since they were first sculpted by anonymous artisans, they have been symbolically associated with the energies of the forest and the forces that inspire artistic creation. Today the Green Man remains relevant in part because he is appropriately emblematic of the green movement, aimed at restoring ecological balance to an increasingly human-poisoned world. The image's currency was reflected in the 2007 installment of Burning Man, the annual psychedelic arts festival in the Nevada desert, for which the Green Man served as the official theme.

In King's variations on the archetype, leaf-like forms are often incorporated directly into the facial features—as lips, eyebrows, or mouths, as if cellulose and human skin were equivalent. In one painting two symmetrically intersecting paisley shapes that resemble leaves (or a pair of disembodied bird wings) are superimposed directly over the eyes to create a kind of raccoon-face mask. In another a leaf-like form superimposed over the face's single, cyclopean eye also reads as the profile head of a bird whose long neck runs down along the nose-line to the leaf-like lips. King has characterized these paintings as "portraits of the Green Man's facets," and because of the Green Man's English origins he has given them single-name titles he associates with English historical figures—Guy (Fawkes), Robin (Hood), (Christopher) Marlowe, Horatio (Nelson), Walter (Raleigh), and so on. (King has also treated the Green Man theme in a series of poems)

The palette for this group of paintings features shades of green, of course, and other colors typically found in forested landscapes—grays and browns, as well as the pink, orange and white of certain wildflowers. Other hues are employed in three thematically related, untitled drawings also at Poets House, from a

2009 series called "Looking for the Green Man." Each of them includes two or more abstracted, faceless figures presumably representing seekers of the creative, regenerative energies



"DICK T" FROM THE GREEN MAN SERIES, OIL ON CANVAS, 36" x 28.25", ©BASIL KING, 1996. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

the Green Man symbolizes. The group of six standing figures in one drawing suggests an entourage of pilgrims, while four dark-clad figures in another are huddled together as if plotting their search. In the show's most striking drawing, a blue, birdlike entity stands or perches alongside a yellow figure of about the same size, more amorphous but vaguely humanoid—a suspended moment from an interspecies encounter, perhaps.

At Poets House King's paintings and drawings were dispersed among in-service bookshelves and other furnishings in three separate rooms, and none were accompanied by wall labels, nor was there any other wall text to identify the artist or briefly summarize the unifying theme of the works. Poets House made this information available only in the form of a two-page printed handout that was easy for visitors to overlook.

To be fair, Poets House makes no pretense at being an art museum or gallery, and the organization is still settling into its new digs. Due to the frequent intersection of poetry and visual art in collaborative projects, illustrated books, and poet-penned art criticism, it makes good sense for Poets House to maintain an art-exhibition component. But the set-up in the new headquarters doesn't lend itself very well to that purpose, so I hope the directors and staff will consider improving accommodations for the art they show. With that caveat, Poets House deserves credit for exhibiting the work of this autonomously motivated, boundlessly inspired, and undeservedly neglected New York artist. At this writing it remains to be seen whether this small selection might have caught the eye of anyone with the capacity and inclination to mount a larger, more proper exhibition of King's work. That would be a best-case scenario, but one knows better than to count on such responsive attention in a world where just about everyone has gotten too busy to look, much less to see.

"The Green Man: Paintings and Drawings by Basil King" was on view from March 20 through June 19, 2010, at Poets House, 10 River Terrace (at Murray Street), New York.

© Thomas Patterson, 2010. First published by Andrei Codrescu in the online magazine Exquisite Corpse.

# Basil King Books in Print

2012 — *Portraits from Learning to Draw/A history*, 36 pages (unpaged), hand sewn, with 11 drawings by Basil King (colored marking pens); New York: Cy Gist Press.

2011 — *Learning to Draw/A History*, 270 pages, cover art and frontispiece by Basil King, edited by Daniel Staniforth; Cheltenham, U.K.: Skylight Press.

2010 — *Wild Cards from Learning to Draw/A history*, 42 pages (unpaged), hand sewn, with cover and interior art by Basil King (colored pencil, oil sticks, charcoal, ink); New York: Cy Gist Press.

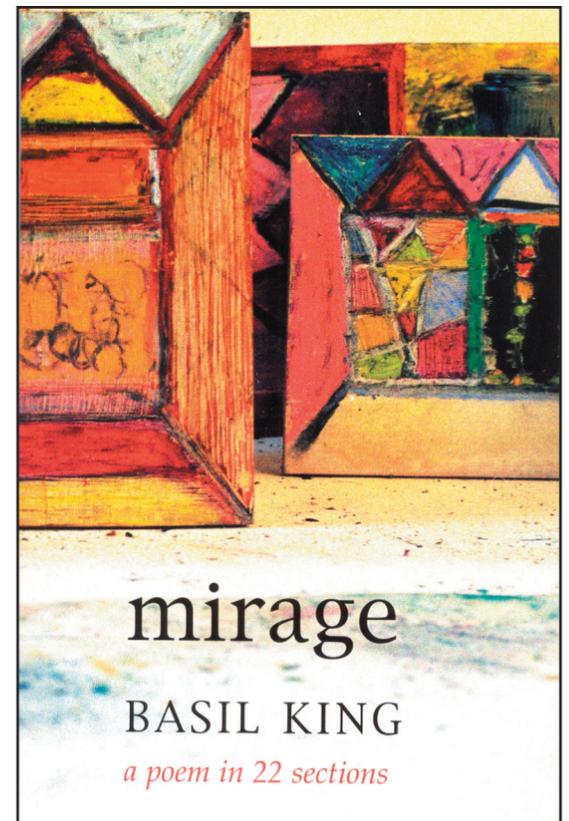
2009 — *In the Field Where Daffodils Grow from Learning to Draw/A history*, 38 pages, with cover and interior art (charcoal on paper) by Basil King; New York: Libellum Books.

2007 — *77 Beasts: Basil King's Bestiary*, 176 pages, with cover art by Basil King; New York: Marsh Hawk Press.

*Solo*, from *Learning to Draw/A history*, 28 pages (unpaged), West Hartford, Conn.: Small Chapbook Project.

2005 — *Twin Towers*, from *Learning to Draw/A history*, 26 pages, Austin, Texas: Skanky Possum chapbook (out of print but still available from SPD).

2003 — *mirage: A poem in 22 sections*, 160 pages, with cover and back cover art (mixed media on wood) and an unpagged portfolio of seven oil paintings by Basil King; New York: Marsh Hawk Press.



2001 — *Warp Spasm*, 116 pages, with cover art (mixed media on paper) by Basil King; New York: Spuyten Duyvil.

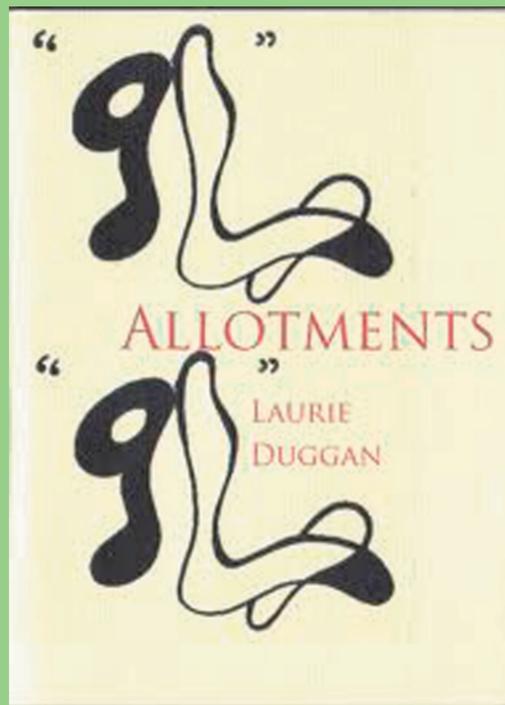
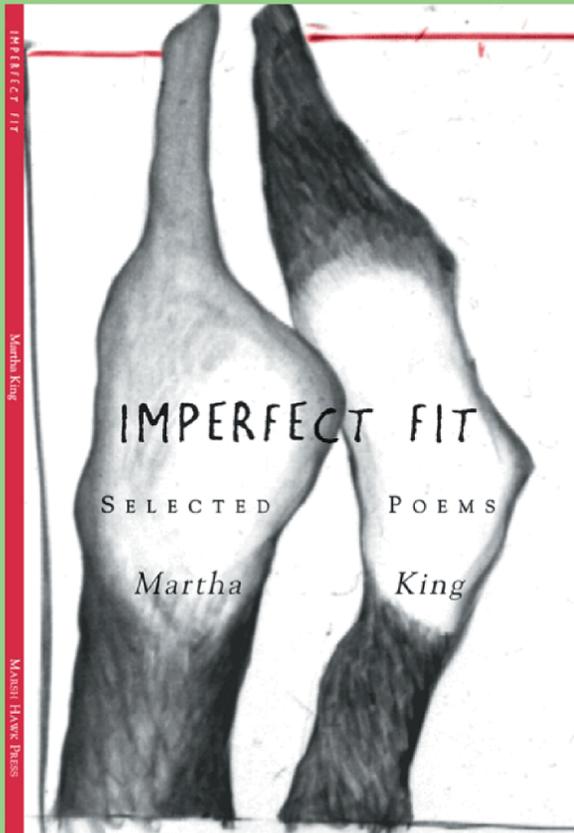
2000 — *Identity*, 36 pages, with cover and six paintings (mixed media on paper) by Basil King; New York: Spuyten Duyvil.

2000 — *The Poet*, 228 pages, with 115 sketch portraits in pencil and brief narratives about 39 contemporary writers; New York: Spuyten Duyvil.

1997 — *Devotions with Selections from A Painter's Bestiary*, 74 pages, with 14 drawings (pencil) from the "Intentions" series by Basil King; London: Stop Press.

1997 — *The Complete Miniatures*, 54 pages, with 11 drawings (pencil) from "Preparation for a Self-Portrait" by Basil King; London: Stop Press.

All publications may be available from the publishers, [www.spdbooks.org](http://www.spdbooks.org), or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).



## Basil King's Book Art for Others

The above two titles—Martha King's *Imperfect Fit* (Marsh Hawk) and Laurie Duggan's *Allotments* (fewer and further)—of the over 40 books for which King has created cover art.

## Why Does an Artist Write? Why Does a Poet Paint?

Marsden Hartley. Michelangelo. Emily Carr. Vasari. From the Renaissance on dual practitioners have appeared, with no discernable mega-pattern uniting them. But several interviewers have recently asked that very large question about Basil King in particular—leading to some texts currently available on the web.

*Ask/Tell* ([www.eeevee2.blogspot.com/features](http://www.eeevee2.blogspot.com/features)) published a Q&A piece by Tom Fink (one of our panelists), "Exchange on Basil King's *Learning to Draw/A History*," on May 9, 2012:

Fink: After a prose passage on Walt Whitman and the Civil War and the racial situation during early Reconstruction, you break into a highly evocative free-verse strophe on the painting process that seems a statement of poetics:

We paint from memory  
But experience gives  
Us our background  
Background: the sum of  
One's experience re-invented  
And made conspicuous  
Brings the disparate together (79)

... does the strophe, which, I think, gives "re-invention" some degree of priority over "memory," help us understand not only your process of painting but your intentions? Also, what tends to motivate the decision to use lines of verse rather than prose, or vice-versa?

King: The process immediately after the Civil War, Reconstruction, was redoing something. Reinventing a society that would work differently. That would be better for everybody. What came to my mind next was how I begin a painting. I don't think about reinventing society but I do think about reinventing what I already know. That means working with my memory. Reinvention has to start with memory.



Kevin Ring in his U.K. magazine *Beat Scene* (#67, available in print from [www.beatscene.net/index.asp](http://www.beatscene.net/index.asp)) pursued many aesthetic and biographical questions in his lengthy interview, including what King gained from his involvement in *Mulch* magazine (eight issues from 1971 to 1976):

King: It was while making the magazine's structure that I began to work out how to put disparate things together and make something other than a collage. And it was kind of crazy because before the three of us [Harry Lewis, David Glotzer, and King] began the mag, we went hunting for money. And everyone said putting all these things together couldn't be done.... I must say that at that time I didn't completely know what I was doing in my painting. It was years later that I knew I was putting "Muscles & Triangles" together—that is, math and the organic. And *Mulch* helped. It activated my senses.

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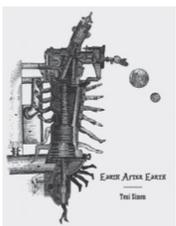
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*Steiner, Ralph*  
Untitled, 1965

*Gelatin silver*  
print, 1981.