

Mick Vranich, 1946–2010

Christine Monhollen

Our friend and comrade, Mick Vranich, died March 29 following a terrible construction accident in February. If you ever met Mick, you wouldn't forget him. You may have seen him perform his poetry, punctuating lines with a stoic stare or watched him play guitar, amazed at his ability to perfect each note, each chord in sync with poetic ease. Perhaps you attended one of his benefits calling for freedom for Leonard Peltier. Maybe you just stopped by his Solstice campfire in the middle of Detroit and were offered a cup of coffee and some real, true talk, or poems like the ones of his on this page.

PURGE THE EXCESS

high seas the threat of sharks
the thrashing machine strapped
to your brain with bailing wire
embarking on one more step
into the water to avoid
stripped of your defenses.

The community has lost a friend whose warmth and generosity transcended the generations. He was an amazing poet, and guitar player, who championed those who were dealt a bad hand by the justice system. Mick made his living as a carpenter and lived in an always to be restored Victorian mansion in the Detroit's Cass Corridor with his wife and founder of Alley Culture, artist, Sherry Hendrick. Besides his legion of friends and cultural collaborators, he leaves behind four books of poetry and dozens of recorded music and spoken word CDs.

SUN DOWN SUN UP

another notch off the slice
of time here on the edge of
the millennium looks like we
got more to do than we set
out to do when we first put
the spirit boat into the water
yanked on the lines the sails
filled with the sweet winds
of dawn but the storm kicked up
so unpredictably darkness crashed
down like a muddy heel

we had to find the other source
of strength to propel the vision
fling it through space like
an alchemical flashlight
winging it over the lakes.

When reading or playing with his band, Mick would often tilt his head slightly and stare out from blue eyes to clear the path ahead, our flashlight into the millennium; gone; there is a new darkness.

CLOAK OF SKIN

by Mick Vranich
surrounded and left alone
more marks that don't connect
movies with the faces as big
as worlds of flesh in bright
light on the thin screen.
i don't have anything to say about
it you should talk
to someone else like the wind
working up into a frenzy
in the trees bending and breaking
branches thrown to the ground
like a blanket made of sticks
the ceremonial fire is raging.
no one is watching
maybe a few are seeing it
in the corner of their eyes
the axis is crooked
the hole is getting bigger.
I am nothing
just the dream of becoming
in this cloak of skin
hear what I'm saying
the cloak of skin has a mouth
to talk with the shadows here
that won't go away
until they see what happens
to it all
what happens to it all.
But i am nothing in this
cloak of skin dragged
through the streets
at the end of a rotting rope
unnoticed because the big screen
is showing how the faces should look
with the smiles riveted in place
put behind the glass
examined carefully thrown
in the heap like the rest

of the bulldozed bodies
still warm still quivering.
i am nothing
just this cloak of skin
with a mouth saying
don't kill everything so soon.
while you load your rifles
while you slit a throat
while you fill the lung
with poison gas
ravage the earth to the bone
incinerate the bones
to run the conveyor belt
pile up the goods for the ones
who traded in their souls
for a shoe shine.
don't talk to me
about what you do
your words don't mean anything
to me you think you are
someone because you have something
a gold watch a gold car
a gold house a gold chain
around your neck
a gold shackle
around your leg
a big smile your words have
no meaning to me
i am nothing
a cloak of skin
with a mouth saying
don't kill everything
so soon.

fifth Estate

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