

>> Sorry, one second. Hello, everyone. My name is Amanda sang. I'm a recent Humber graduate, and today I have the pleasure of introducing the artist performances for today.

When posting about the conference, use the hashtag cultures compass 2020. I have two dynamic poets with me, Nicole Sealey and John Murillo.

They'll be our first performers for the day. Born in St. Thomas virgin island, I in coalle Sealey is an author of a winner the 2015 chat book poetry prize.

Nicole is the former executive director at Kave cannon foundfoundation and received many honours. Stanley Kunitz surprise and her recent Rome surprise for literature.

Joining her is John Murillo the author of the poetry checks of upjump the boogie that was the finalist for the pen open book award. John has two Larry Neil writers awards, a patient of push cart prizes and the Jay Howard and Barbara M.J. wood prize. He's an assistant professor and teaches in the low residency program, the MFA program at Sierra Nevada university. We'll have our first performance by Nicole and following that, John Murillo.

>> Thank you very much, Amanda.

Thank you to Humber, Jennifer and Kyla and everybody there.

Thank you for the invitation.

Sorry about that. And all of you in attendance. I'm going to read a few poems and then John will follow. The first of which is a poem from my mom. It's called the first person who will live to be 150 years old has already been born. Scientists say the average human life gets three months longer every year.

By this math, death will be optional like a tie or dessert or suffering. My mother asks whether I would want to live forever. I would get bored, I tell her. But she says there's so much to do, meaning she believes there's much she hasn't done. 30 years ago, she was the age I am now, but unlike me, too industrious to think about birds disappeared by rain. If only we had more time or enough money to be kept on ice until such a time, science could bring us back. Of late, my mother has begun to think life short lived.

I'm too young to convince her otherwise. The one and only occasion I was in the same room as the Mona Lisa, it was encased in glass behind what I imagine were velvet ropes. There's far less between our spells and oblivion, skin that often defeats its very purpose, or maybe its purpose isn't protection at all, but rather to

provide a place similar to a doctor's waiting room in which to sit until our names are called. Hold your questions until the end. Mother, measure my wide open arms. We still have this much time to kill.

Hysterical strength. When I hear news of a hitch hiker struck by lightning yet living or a child lifting a 2-tonne sedan to free his father pinned underneath, or a camper fighting off a grizzly with her bear hands -- bare hands until someone, a hunter perhaps, can shoot it dead, my thoughts turn to Black people w hysterical strength we must possess to survive which I fear many is a freak occurrence. This next poem was inspired by a work of art by the artist Thomas Ershelam and the piece likes like -- it's a bunch of mannequins wrapped up in tape and lifted on a wooden structure. So this is a poem inspired by that piece. It's called candle an rawith heads.

Can I not brought with me my mind as it has been made this thing, this through of mannequins coo cooned and mounted on a wooden scaffold might be eight infants SWADled and sleeping. Might be eight flushy fingers on one hand.

Might be a family tree with eight pictured frames such trees occur in brand. You see them hanging. Their shadow is a crowd stripping the tree of souvenirs. Skin shrinks and splits and can you smell them burning. Their perfume climbing as Wisteria would a trellis. As witsteria would a trellis burning, their perfume climbing fat the colour of yolk. Can you smell them. Skin shrinks and splits. The bodies weep. Is the crowd stripping the tree of souvenirs. You can see them hanging? Their shadow frames.

Such trees occur in the brain.

Might be a family tree with eight pictures. Might be eight fleshy fingers on one hand.

Might be eight infants SWADled and sweeping and mounted on a wooden scaffold. This brood of mannequins cocooned as it has been made. Had I not brought with me my mind, who can see this and not see lynchings.

This next poem was inspired by the last poem. In my chat book the animal after whom other animals are named, the suggestion of editors, I extracted the last line who can see this and not see lynchings, but in my full-length, I decided to include that last line, because I thought it was important. So this poem is speaks to that decision to include that last line. It's called in defence of candle an rawith heads. If you've read the candelabra with heads in this check and the one with the animal, thank you. The original, the one included here is an example and told of a poem

that can speak for itself but loses faith in its ability to do so by ending with a thesis question. .

Why eats said a poem should click shot like a well-made box.

I don't disagree. I ask who can see this and not see lynchings not because I don't trust you, dear reader or my own abilities.

I ask because the imagination would have us believe much like faith, faith, the original candelabra lots in things unseen. You should know that human limbs burn like branches and branches like human limbs.

Only after man began hanging man from trees and then setting them on fire which would jump from limb to branch like a bastard species of bird did we come to know such things. A hundred years from now, October 9, 2116, 8:8:00 p.m. when all of [not audible] are good and dead may someone happen upon the question and question. May that lucky someone be Black and so far removed from the verb lynch that she would be dumbfounded by its meaning. May she that call up her candelabras with heads. May her imagination not memory run wild. This next poem takes its title from the motto of equinox, which is a luxury gym. And it's called its not fitness. It's a lifestyle. I'm waiting for white woman in this overpriced equinox to mistake me for someone other than a paying member. I can see it now as I leave the steam room naked before my wooden ring, she'll ask whether I finished cleaning it. Every time I'm at an airport, I see a bird flying around inside, so fast I can't make out its wings. I ask myself, what is it doing here.

I've come to answer what is any of us. Medical history. I've been pregnant. I've had sex with a man who has had sex with men. I can't sleep. My mother has, my mother's mother had asthma. My father had a stroke.

My father's mother has high blood pressure. Both grandfathers died from diabetes. I drink. I don't smoke. Xanax for flying, propana love for anxiety, my eyes are bad and scooped by wind. Cousin Lilly died from an aneurysm. He was hit by a car as if to disprove whatever I write and I understand the stars in the sky are already dead. Here's a short one. It's called heretofore unutter. As if God despite his compulsions were decent and had the tendency to throw off all appearance of decorum, here I am, admiring the single violet orchid. How lucky am I to go unnoticed or so I imagine, when at this writing, 32 a red-tailed hawk somewhere tracking the soft shrills of newborn song birds. I think I just have a handful more. Which is to say three. 3 more.

Imagine happy. Give me tonight to be inconsolable so the death drive does not declare itself, so the moonlight does not convince sunrise. I was born before sunrise, when morning masquerades as night, the temperature of blood, quivering like a mouth in mourning. How do we author our gentle birth?

The height we were, were we God's rolling stars across a sun dot sky, the same as scab abs.

We fit somewhere between God and mineral, angel and animal, believing a thing as sacred as the sun rises and falls like an ordinary beast. Dear Smith before leaving, elephants encircle the tusks and skulls of their dead and then wanting to leave the bones behind, knowing their leave will lessen the loss. But birds pluck their own feathers. Dogs lick them.

Allow me to luxury. Give me tonight to cut and salt the open. Give me a shovel to uproot the mandrake and listen for its scream. Give me a face that toils so closely with stone, it is itself stone. I promise to enter the flesh again.

I promise to circle to ascend.

I promise to be happy to model.

Even the gods. Even the gods misuse the unfolding blue. Even the gods misread the wind flowers nod towards sunlight as consent to consume.

Still, you envy the horse that draws their chariot, bone of their bone, the wilting mash of air alone keeps you from scaling Olympus with gifts of dead or dying things dangling from your mouth.

Your breath, like the sea, inching away. It is rumoured God's grow or the blood of a hanged man drips. You insist on being this man. The gods abuse your grace. Still, you would rather live among the clear Cloudless white, enjoying what is left of their ambrosia. Who should be happy this time? Who brings cake to whom? Pray the gods do not misquote your coveted post for chaos, the black from which they were conceived. Even the eyes of God adjust to light. Even the gods have those. And my final poem is for my husband John who is next. It's called object permanence. We wake as if surprised the other is still there, each petting the sheet to be sure. How have we managed our way to this bed? Beholden to heat like dawn indebted to light. No, we're not so self-important as to think everything has led to this, everything has led to this.

There's a name for the animal love makes of us. Name, I think, like rain for the sound it makes. You are the animal after whom other animals are named. Until

there's none left to laugh. Gaze will start with the same startle and end with caterpillars gorged on milkweed.

Oh, how we entertain the angels with our brief [not audible], oh how I'll miss you when we're dead. Thank you so much.

>> Hey hey. Can you guys hear me OK? Yeah. All right. Thank you. Thank you, Nicole. I am the animal after other animals are named, she says. Thank you aAmanda. Thank you, Kyla.

Thank you, Jennifer Gordon and Humber and everybody for showing up. This is fun. I also, while I have all these eyes on me, want to shout out another poet that I've seen in the comment thread named Monica Sok whose buck a nail the evening hangs on is a wonderful debut. She's a young poet who you guys are going to be hearing a lot from in the coming years. And she's part of the same tribe as Nicole and I. If you like our work, you will probably like her work.

Monica Sok. I'm going to highlight another poet, a poet you guys have heard of, I'm sure, Robert Hayden. I want to read a sonnet of his in tribute to all the people out there who have been on the front lines protesting, people who have been in their home protesting, and doing what they can to support those people. I think it change is afoot and I'm here for it. This sonnet is called Frederick Douglas. When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful and terrible thing, needful to man as air, usable as earth. When it belongs at last to call, when it is truly instinct, brain matter, dicast oly, systole, reflex action. When it is finally one, when it is more than the mumbo jumbo of politicians, this man, this Douglas, this former slave, this negro beaten to his knees, exiled, envisioning a world where none is lons lonsly, none is hunted, alien, this man superb in love and logic, this man shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues, rhetoric, not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone, but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives fleshing his dreams of the beautiful needful thing. That's Robert Hayden.

OK. So I have good news and bad news for you guys. The good news is I'm only going to read two poems. The bad news is that they are the odyssey and the il-Yad. Just kidding. I stole that joke but I like it. These aren't long poems. I'm going to read two of them. They're both from my new collection contemporary American poetry. The first is called unconfessionalism. Not sleep walking but waking still with my hand on a gun and a gun in a mouth and the mouth on the face of a man on his knees. Autumn of 'quaint 89, and I'm standing in a section 8 apartment parking lot,

pistol cocked and staring up in the mug of an old woman staring watering the single sad flower to the left of her soup, the flower also staring. My engine idling behind me, a slow moaning baseline in the dark of a dead rapper nudging me on, all to say someone's brokenhearted.

And this man with the gun in his mouth, this man who like me, is really little more than a boy, may or may not have something to do with it, may or may not have said a thing or two, betrayed a secret say that walk my love awayaway, and why not say it? She adored me. And I her, more than anyone, anything in life up to then and then still for two decades after, and therefore, went for broke. Blacked out and woke having gutted my piggy and pawned all my gold to buy what a home boy said was a bereta, blacked out and woke, my hand on the gun, my gun in the mouth, a man who was really a boy on his knees and because I love the girl, I actually paused before I pulled the trigger. Once, twice, three times. Then panicked not just because the gun jammed, but because what if it hadn't? Because who did I almost become there that afternoon in a section 8 apartment parking lot, pistol cocked with the sad flower stare staring? Because I knew the girl I loved, no matter how this all played out would never have me back. Day of damaged ammo or grime they clog the chamber, they of faulty rods or springs come loose in my fist, they day nobody died. Why not hallelujah say amen or thank you. My mother sang for years of God, babes, and fools. My father limp node masses phasing from his X rays said surviving one thing means another comes and kills you. He's dead. And so I trust him. Dead and so I wonder years about the work I left undone. Boy on his knees, a man now, risen and likely plotting his long way back to me. Fuck it. I touch my tool like the movie gangsters do, and jumped back in my bucket, cold enough day to make a young man weep.

Anch when everything or nothing changed forever. The dead rapper grunted, the baseline faded. My spirits whispered something from the trees. I left and then lost the pistol in a storm drain somewhere between that life and this. Left the pistol in a storm drain but never got around to wiping away the prints. So that's one poem.

Thank you guys for listening.

This is really, really a dope idea, this conference, this festival. And we appreciate you making time for us this morning.

The second poem is another long one. But stay with me. And I won't say too much to introduce the poem. Nicole says I say too much about it. So I won't. But I'll only

say that the title is a bleeding title, meaning the title is the first line of the poem. Upon reading that Eric Dofy transcribed even the calls of certain species of birds I think first of two sparrows I met when walking home late night years ago in another city not unlike this, the one bird frantic, attacking our thought, the way she swooped down, circled my head and flailed her wings in my face, how she seemed to scream each time I swung, how she dashed back and forth between me and a blood-red Corolla parked near the opposite curb, how finally, I understood. I spied another bird also calling, his foot inexplicably caught in the car door, trying to bang itself free. Who knows how long he'd been there flailing, who knows. He and the other I mistook at first for a bat. They called to me. Something between squawk and chirp, something between song and prayer, to do something, anything. And like any good God, I disappear, not indifferent exactly, but with things to do and most likely on my way home from another heartbreak. Call it 1997. And say I'm several thousand miles from home by which I mean those were the days I made of everyone a love song. By which I mean I was lonely and unrequited. But that's not quite it either. Truth is I did manage to find a few to love me but couldn't always love them back. The rasta law professor, the firefighters's wife, the burrburlesque dancer's daughter, the sky was full of birds the day her daddy died. I think with widow said he drowned one morning on a fishing strep. Anyway, I'm digressing. If you ask that night, did I mention it was night. Why I didn't try to jimmy the lock to spring the sparrow. I can't say it had anything to do with envy as wanting a woman to call for me as did these sparrows. I said something about the neighbourhood. Car thief shot a block and a half east the week before or about the men I came across nights prior sweat slicked and shirtless grappling in the middle of the street, the larger one's chest pressed to the back of the smaller, bruised and bleeding, both. I know you thought this was about birds, but stay with me. I left them both in the street, the same street where I leave the sparrows, the men embracing, and for all one knows, they could have been lovers, the one whispering an old, old tune into the ear of the other. Baby, baby, don't leave me this way. I left the men where I leave the sparrows and their song. And as I walked away, I heard one of the men call to me, please or help or brother or some such, and I didn't break stride, not one bit. It's how I've learned

to save myself.

Let me try this another way.

Call it 1977, and say I'm back west, south central Los Angeles, my mother and father at it again, but this time, in the street, broad daylight, and all the neighbors watching. One, I think his name was Sonny runs out from his duplex to pull my father off. You see where I'm going with this. My mother crying out, fragile as a sparrow, Sonny fighting my father, fragile as a sparrow, and me years later, trying to get it all down. As much for you, I'm saying, as for me. Sonny catches a left, lies flat on his back, blood starting to pool in his own wife wailing. My mother wailing and traffic back now half a block, horns, whistles and soon sirens. 1977, summer, and all the trees full of birds, hundreds, I swear. And since I'm the one writing it, I'll tell you they were crying, which brings me back to Dofi and his transcribetranscribing. The jazz man, I think, wanted only to get it down pure, to get it down exact.

The animal racking itself against a car's sealed door, the animals and the trees reporting, the animals we make of ourselves and one another flailing, failing, stay with me now. Days after the dust-up, my parents took me to the park, and in this park was a pond, and in this pond were birds. Not sparrows, but swans. And my father spread a blanket and brought from a basket some apples and a paring knife. Summertime. My mother wore sunglasses and long sleeve sleeves. My father now sober cursed himself for leaving the radio, but my mother forgave him and said as she caressed the back of his hand that we could just listen to the swans, and we listened, and I watched, two birds coupling, one beating its wings as it mounted the other, summer, 1977, I listened and watched when my parents made love late into that night, I covered my ears in the next room, scanning the encyclopedia for swans. It meant nothing to me. Then at least. But did you know the collective noun for swans is alamination, and is alamin daying not its own species of song? What a woman wails punch-drunk in the streets or what a widow might sing learning her man was drowned by swans, a lamination of them.

Imagine the capsized boat, the panicked man struck about the eyes, nose, and mouth each time he comes up for air.

Imagine the birds coasting away and the waters suddenly calm, either Trumpet swans or mutes.

The dead man's wife running for help crying to any who listen, a lamination and a city busy saving itself. I'm digressing, sure. But did you know that to digRES means

to stray from the flock? When I left my parents' house, I never looked back, by which I mean I made like a God and disappeared. As when I left the sparrows and the copulating swans as when some day I'll leave this city, its every flailing, its every animal song.

Thank you, guys.

>> Thank you, again, Nicole and John. It was a pleasure having two highly regarded and accomplished poets with us today. And now we'll be taking an hour break. We'll be back again at 1:00 p.m. with financial sustainability and fundraising.