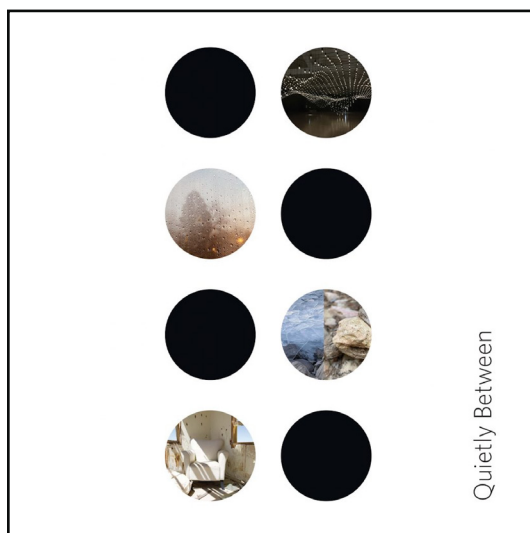


A Viewing Space :

Quietly Between



Quietly Between, the first project from A Viewing Space, features poetry and photography from Brad Vogler, Sarah Green, Megan Kaminski and Lori Anderson Moseman. The book features one section from each writer, moving geographically West through its pages: “this wide open heavy” in Lawrence, Kansas (Kaminski), “Ceremony of Knotted Songs” in Fort Collins, Colorado (Vogler), “(t)here now soon new” in Provo, Utah (Anderson Moseman), and “Holding Ground” in Joshua Tree, California (Green).

Each section features corresponding poems and photography that examine the writer’s relationship with that particular place and time. Much of the book was written during the first year of the Covid pandemic, while the world sheltered in place. The work captures the heavy shift taking place during these recent events, and yet simultaneously feels timeless in its references. The concept, based on a shared prompt described in the back of the book, has each writer approaching their responsive words and images in a way that reflects the very landscape they found themselves in at this time.

Kaminski, Vogler, Anderson Moseman, and Green discussed the project with Opt West, and how despite working so far apart from one another, the individual works within the book somehow form a larger conversation: between each section and between the writers and the places in which their poems were formed.

Quietly Between is available at www.aviewingspace.com

OW: It seems like all of you have done some sort of cross-country move or moving around in general. How does moving from one home to another affect your work and your experience as a writer?

LAM: I move a lot. One of the things that has happened to me since I've moved here, to Oregon, is that we've been going to the ocean. I was born in Montana, but I grew up in central California, like eight miles from the ocean. So I'm in a landscape that is a homecoming for me. There's this image in the book, where I juxtapose this gull and a rock formation from Lick Wash, that always irritated me. I think: why did you put those two together if they don't work?

I wasn't even sure why I was so fascinated with that block of stone and the snow that was on it. But then when I got to the ocean, I was framing a picture of a receding wave and its foam line on the sand; suddenly, I see it's the same rectangle that's in the book! The question then becomes for me, was I recognizing the beach in this foreign landscape of the canyon land of Utah - where I had just moved? Was I seeing a home shore in this block of stone that had originally been sand and then became a wall of rock? It was the same pattern, and that pattern was comforting to me, I guess. What I'm noticing now in my work is that these visual patterns whether they're familiar or novel often repeat - it's almost like I am shuffling through a Rolodex. It's like these cards are stacked in my head, and there's a set pile that I bring with me that is my comfort stack. And I don't know whether I'm just getting to an age where I like connecting those together to give a sense of continuity, not just for that moment but for the body of my work and the ideas I write about.



Lori Anderson Moseman - for *Quietly Between*

BV: I haven't moved in a long time. The last big move I made was out here to Colorado, and I've lived in the same apartment for 12 years. My writing changed quite a bit when I came out here, because I was in the MFA program at Colorado State. But I think now with this project, and with some of the work that's in the first *Opt West*, there's this impulse for me to go back to places that I lived, sometimes physically returning, to interact with how I remember them. And that's been an interesting way to experience those places. Lori talked about a Rolodex, and I think we all probably still have photos of places that we lived, and it's a different sort of encounter to go back to those photos, or even letters that my mom has sent me, or journal entries I've made, and to try to rediscover those places through them.

SG: For me, moving definitely accentuates everything because everything is novel, everything is new, right? When we stay in a place for so long, we can kind of take for granted our surroundings or maybe how we're affected by them. And so for me, moving to an environment like Joshua Tree that was so foreign- I had never lived in the desert before- it became very obvious to me how impacted I was by my surroundings. It really highlighted that, and made me reflect on how I'm probably equally as impacted by my environment all the time, but maybe not as aware of it, but, because it's new, I was paying more attention to those things and how that was informing my experience in the world.

LAM: So was that attention a physicality, a sensory attention, first before it was a mental or a memory attention? I don't know if you can separate them, but -

SG: Yeah, I think the whole phenomenology of being in the world. I don't really subscribe to a subject/object dichotomy. I think we're all existing in relation to other things, right? And so it made me more aware and more conscious of what I was perceiving and how that was influencing my sense of self and the particular dynamic in this environment, my own positionality.

OW: It almost seemed just from reading your section, Sarah, that your feelings and your experiences were almost mirroring the landscape. Your poems speak of fault lines, which for anyone in California is always kind of at the back of your mind, this shifting. It seemed like your experiences were kind of rooted in that desert environment where you were, at least from my experience, reading it, taking on a lot of that within yourself.

SG: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's one reason I chose the desert, was, well part of it was the pandemic, right? It was this rare, once in a lifetime opportunity to experience this reprieve from the world. And instead of resisting that, I decided to just lean into it and take it to the extreme almost.

I was also going through a period of profound personal loss and grief. As lonely and isolating as the desert can feel, I needed that as a cathartic experience to be still so that I could be receptive and actually hear what I needed at that time. It was also really profound for me, because I feel, in an apophatic sense, it was empty, but it was also very full. I'd never experienced such stillness and the silence felt so full and it's really hard to describe without experiencing firsthand, but that was also very healing, to realize there was a fullness in the emptiness.

MK: I've lived all over the place. I guess I didn't feel in some ways like I had a set home. I was in Los Angeles and New York and Paris and Casablanca, and then back to LA and then grad school in the Bay Area, and then Portland, Oregon. Lots of movement. And then I ended up in Kansas because of a job. I never imagined I'd step foot in Kansas. It's not a place that people dream of going. So for my poetry and for this project especially, I'm thinking about what it means to make a place home and to become a part of that place.

Part of this was thinking about being a professor at a university and the kind of fraught relationship that people have there. I teach at this big state school and most of my students are from this place, but oftentimes faculty at the university feel like they are just passing through. I was also wanting to understand and challenge settler-colonial relationships with land. I was thinking about the ways in which Robin Wall Kimmerer talks about becoming indigenous to a place; to learn from the plants and animals and the people who are here, instead of imparting my own experiences on top of that and seeing this as an empty vessel for my feelings.

OW: Megan, your section really focuses on Kansas in spring and its blue skies and everything in bloom. How did not only the place you were in, but the season of the place inform your section?

MK: Kansas is amazingly beautiful. I post these pictures on Instagram and people are like: What? Where's that? I'm like, it's Kansas! It's awesome. When I was writing my poems for the book, I think it was right around the time when I got my first Covid vaccination, and it felt like this wild possibility of spring in the natural world.

And then having some kind of, at least at the time, semblance of reentry. All of these openings. But at the same time there was tremendous grief. I ride my bike and a lot of my photos are taken from the Wakarusa wetlands, which is partially on the site of Haskell Indian Nations University, which used to be a residential school. There's a trafficway over part of the wetlands and paved over sacred grounds. So thinking about that, too, as well as thinking about being excited to be vaccinated, and thinking about all of the people who were lost in Covid. I guess it was just this layering, this de-layering, and maybe spring is like that too? All of the plants are pushing up through the compost, through last year's dead materials that provide nurturance. I was feeling all of those things together.

OW: I want to talk a little bit about Covid's effect on the project. We were all so isolated at that time, and each of you are living in different places around the country. In the book you can feel that you are all working through similar emotions about what's going on in the world, through this very thorough study of a small area that you're contained in.

SG: I think it played a huge role in that we were all more attentive to our personal spaces during this time because we were more confined and not able to go out in the world in the same way. Everyone was more conscious of their immediate space and how it made them feel. This was the perfect opportunity to dive into that and really explore.

BV: Yeah, when Sarah and I first started talking about doing some sort of project, it was during the middle of that, so it's hard to say whether we would have even started talking about this prompt at all if it weren't. Once things started to come together I thought to invite Lori and Megan to join us. It makes me think that the book probably wouldn't have happened if it wasn't during that space where one conversation led to another, to this conversation even. And I will say, I live in a way where I'm not going out as much as the others, I've been introduced as a hermit at a reading. So to be able to go out and have the quiet, just to walk around in some of the spaces was really welcome to me. As much as the disaster that was going on outside of that quiet was overwhelming, it felt like this was a time to be allowed to go into a quiet space to dwell and reflect.

LAM: We left New York on the day they closed New York, on March 20th, 2020. So even the drive to move to the place where I would start taking these photos was kind of fraught because it was all so new. We didn't know if we could cross state lines or if we could find food. And as we were driving down into Utah, there was an earthquake the day we arrived. I was returning to Utah in part because I had family there. And I'd spent a couple years there before, three years there as my mother died. So it was a place already laden with loss but hopefulness because there was the vitality of family, which provided this wonderful bubble community that I could partake in.

But the lake I would go to just because I love going to lakes; that's also a place my mother had shown me. I mean, basically she had moved to Utah to die. And the mountains that you could see from the lake are the mountains that loomed outside of her deathbed window. I love the point in Sarah's poem when she's not calling the landscape by its technical terms, but she's calling it mama, papa, baby, you know, the landscape becoming part of the relation - the landforms becoming familial in a strange way. I don't know that I would ever have called the mountain mother before my mother died. And then Brad's poem to his mother, which always has a lake, and that's happened in many of Brad's works. I feel like the project was asking me to compose during a time period that was kind of fraught. I mean, the daily death tolls, it was just too much. I was also spending a lot of time when I wasn't at the lake up in avalanche country. And so for me, there was the horror of not knowing how to read snow.

I lived in Minnesota, so I could read a flat plane of snow, but when is it deadly? So I was also reading the avalanche death tolls. And, it was just a little overwhelming. The poems became this place of refuge, but also the kind of portal in which some of that grief could be voiced. It was a calming space. The practice of taking photos, the practice of walking out in these spaces, has always been a part of my life.

OW: How was the experience to be writing, and knowing that you had these other collaborators who were working on the same prompt? Did you reach out to each other a lot?

BV: It's amazing to me how much the sections intertwine themselves without having had any conversations as a group. Megan's poems open the book with the words, "to enter," and then Sarah's poem, the last poem in the book, starts with the line, "I came here." And so there's these two people who didn't really correspond during the writing, but yet their work ties its way together.

LAM: Well in some ways, we had the prompt, but we also had Brad's poem. It was present, it was already written. He was gathering images. I know, at least for me, I composed in conversation. I think with poets we're in conversation with the books we read, we're in conversation by writing in response to other people's works. I too had imagined more verbal conversations, but I don't know that we needed them. It was about communicating with the work of everyone else without even verbalizing anything about that active interaction.

OW: Besides each other, what other works were you in conversation with for this book? Megan, you incorporated an art piece, *Pulse Topology* by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, into your section.

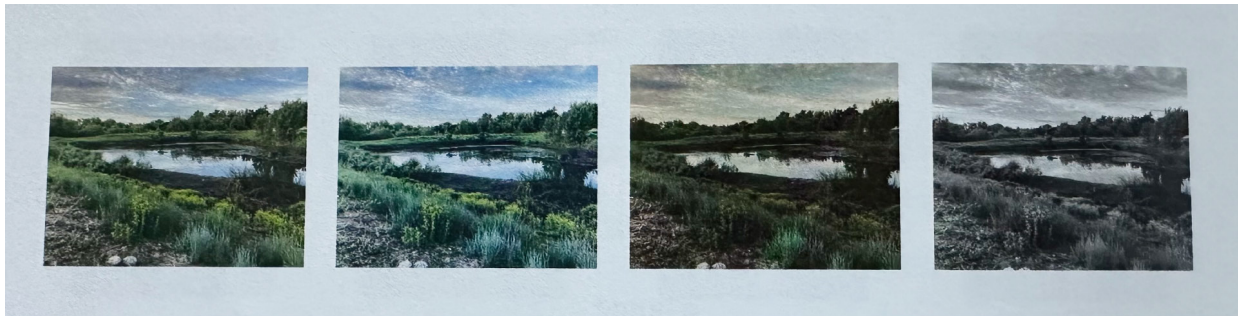
MK: Yeah, that piece was the first time I'd been back in a large public space. It was at the Kemper in Kansas City, and it's this installation with lights that respond to people's movement, like a pulse. Physically being in company with other people was pretty exciting. I was very careful during the lockdown. I have some chronic health conditions that put me at higher risk for Covid complications. And there were other kind of communities and influences that also came out of this isolation with Covid. I joined an online queer and disability focused arts group, Turtle Disco, which Stephanie Heit and Petra Koppers in Michigan organize. It went online with the pandemic. I was having in some ways more regular community around writing than I did in my daily life before the pandemic.

During that time, having a disability and queer-centered community seemed really important. Especially with the way we dealt with the pandemic in the US; you're supposed to isolate in your family unit, right? As a queer single woman living alone, this community felt like chosen family in a way that was very sustaining.

And also writing in response to Brad's poems and Lori's - I think we were writing at about the same time- I saw some of Lori's poems in progress. I think she saw some of my poems in progress, too. It made me think about this giant network of influence and space.

SG: I mentioned in my essay Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, which was a book I decided to revisit during Covid, and that definitely profoundly influenced my project. What I love about it is it talks about the psychology of your spatial environment. Like the basement represents your subconscious, right? Or the attic is your dream space.

So I was definitely thinking about that when I was in the desert, and especially while I was visiting all these abandoned homesteads and all of these gutted interiors. It was a reflection, again, of the self—this peeling away of layers and being exposed—being able to see through to the floor. That book makes even a drawer feel like a whole world unto itself. And so I was looking at all these objects, the remnants of things people left behind, and I was finding these fascinating worlds that revealed more than themselves. There were these past lives that things gestured towards- who were the people these objects belonged to, who occupied these houses? It definitely made that a richer experience.



Brad Vogler - for *Quietly Between*

BV: I often work with texts to push me outside of my usual vocabulary and rhythms. I wanted the “ceremony” part of my poems to be a process. When I would write, I would read the corresponding sections from five texts: the *Psalms*, two versions of Daode Jing, a scholarly version and Thomas Meyer's version, and two longer sequences by Theodore Enslin, *The Weather Within* and *Part Songs*. I would do this each time I sat to write. Or if I went out to walk that day, I'd walk back to the same places over and over while working on the same poem. Those things certainly show up in my poems, but I think too what's probably happening, just from talking to everyone and seeing their work, is that they showed up somewhere in my poems as well.

But yeah, I think that's been the nice part- like Lori mentioned the conversations that are happening aren't necessarily happening while I'm sitting in a room with someone. I didn't want to steer anybody either. If we had talked more during the process, I wonder if things would've fallen apart in some ways because we would've been maybe too involved to just write our own place.

OW: Lori, there is another conversation taking place in your section. You have these photographs of a place you go to and see every day and you have juxtaposed it with photographs from a place you have only been once. You took two places you have a completely different relationship with and put them together.

LAM: I think my instinct at all times is to jam two unfamiliar things together and see what comes together; that's kind of a default setting in my life. My mother would pick up strange objects in the gutter or at the junk store and then transform them into something. That's just how creativity happened in my house. Brad really had challenged me in a conversation where we were talking about the format of the book when he said : well, you don't have to just have one image per page. I realized I had given myself a rule. And if that was a rule, what would I do to mix that up? And so then I wanted to just juxtapose those. The text is never a literal description of what's in the image. I could probably jam anything in there and still think I could keep that poem there. It's an interesting process. But adding another visual element helped me to go back into the text and play with it.

I've also been thinking about how this book is working for me after the fact. I spent a lot of time this summer in Montana helping my aunt and she lives on the Dakota border, on the Yellowstone River, but also near these Badlands called Makoshika. Eons ago when the land was covered with water, it used to be called Lake Glendive. Now it is called the Hell Creek Formation. They're pulling all sorts of dinosaur bones out of it. But I started to think about this notion of being near water, Utah Lake or the Yellowstone River, and then being at Lick Wash, this stone place, has been part of my family's life for generations. The juxtaposition of these rock areas and this lush river - that's been there all along, and I'm just finding new iterations of it.

OW: How did the writing influence the photography, or the photography influence the writing, for everyone else?

BV: I would run through the filters on my phone just to make myself stand and take in the space. I was using the photos to mark time, so that even if they looked the same, I'm sure my hand moved or something moved and each one was taken in a certain sequence so that those would hopefully show the passage of time in that place.

I think some of my photos align with the content of the poem, but I wanted to be pretty deliberate in allowing myself to not do that. And when I took the photos while I was working on an individual poem, they could have been taken anywhere in the couple of weeks that it took me to write the poem, even if they were in the same place. I went back through and I looked and most of them are taken in the one area that's right along the river from me. You can see the seasons change. There are the winter shots that transition into spring. So those run that way as the poems move along.

SG: There were so many photos that didn't make it into the book, so it was interesting because in a way I did try to curate the images by framing and trying to get them to look aesthetically pleasing but at the same time, they were very accidental, right? I would set out and I didn't know what I was going to come upon, or what I was going to photograph, what the subject matter was going to be. It was a challenge to live in the moment and kind of let some of that control go.

MK: At the start of the pandemic, before we started collaborating, I took Laurie Santos online class that she teaches through Yale University on happiness. She talks about savoring, and so I started being really intentional with taking photographs of where I was as a way of seeing and paying attention to the world around me and seeing it differently.

I used the photograph as the moment to write the poem and the moment to see, and to be with, the photograph as the poem. I think about it as a way of seeing, as a way of paying attention, and of really savoring a place and moment. I also like keeping track of things. I like to think about keeping a record and paying attention to what place is telling us about where we should be and what's going on right now. And to track weather, plant growth, etc, and see how that changes over time and how things are shifting here in Northeast Kansas.

OW: What's next for A Viewing Space?

BV: When I went to see Sarah for the first time in Joshua Tree, she had a book there by Kim Stringfellow, *Jackrabbit Homestead*. It opens with an essay that's personal, but also is a brief history of that place, and then there are photos in it. There's another, Muriel Rukeyser's, *Book of the Dead* from West Virginia University Press with an introduction by Catherine Venable Moore. There are not as many images in that, but she's tracking Rukeyser's poems as she writes her essay, and there's this really personal response to them at moments. I really would like to do some sort of non-fiction thing like that, a series of books that are 30 to 50 pages where people are writing about their place and photographing it. And just in the conversation here talking about this project and prompt, you could have hundreds of people start with the same place and have completely different books. That's really exciting to me. I love those personal essays; there are lines in some of them where you can really feel how much that place is entwined in that person.