

Thinking in Words, Seeing in Pictures

A Q&A with Eileen Myles

Eileen Myles is a veritable force in the world of poetry and writing. Author of 19 books, including the landmark *Chelsea Girls*, Myles divides her time between New York City and Marfa, Texas. But the celebrated writer has had a long relationship with Provincetown, most recently as an honoree at the Fine Arts Work Center last month, along with actor and writer James Lechesne.

A vivid and provocative voice in writing and an important and influential feminist thinker of our times, Myles' iconoclastic style continually transcends the issues before us as a people. She fearlessly creates and she continually provokes for progress, like in 1992 when she ran a write-in campaign for president as an "openly female" candidate. And this past February, she wrote a piece for Buzzfeed entitled "Hillary Clinton: The Leader You Want When The World Ends."

Now Myles turns to the visual arts as her photographic prints of her Instagram feed are part of a group show at the Schoolhouse Gallery here in Provincetown. Myles took some time to talk with *Provincetown Magazine* about what social media means to modern society, what this year's Presidential election says about the status of women in America, and what Provincetown mean to her.

— SKD

Provincetown Magazine: What inspired you to do a show of your Instagram photos?

Eileen Myles: The gallerist Michael Carroll asked me if I'd do it. I'd already seen them written about in a longer article in *Aperture* about artists' Instagram [feeds], and I was so delighted to be looked at in that way that the chance to show them was like catnip to me.

PM: Social media can be heavily criticized for a variety of reasons. What are your viewpoints on social media and its possibilities?

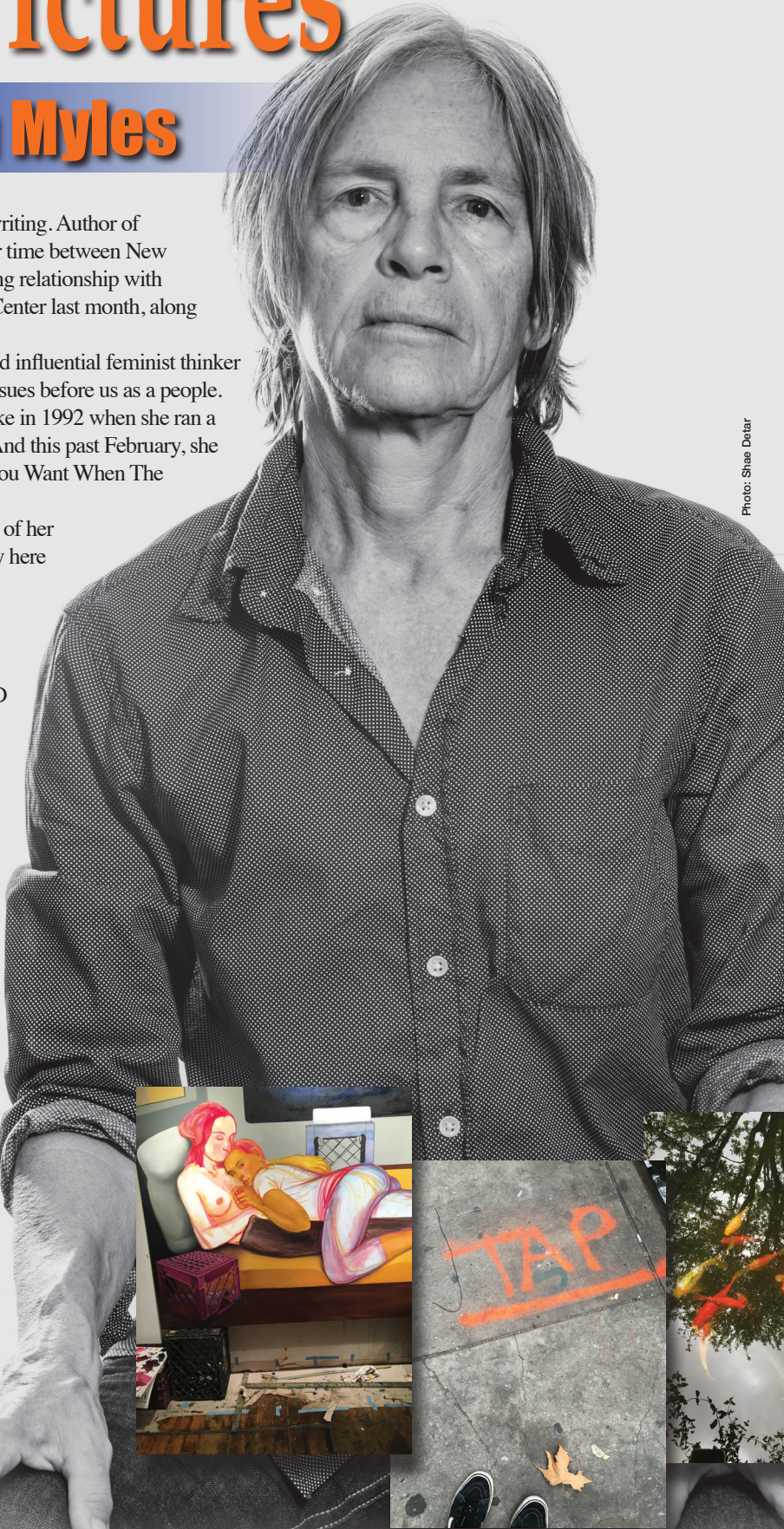
EM: I think it's the kind of global community we dreamed of when we first met the web. People's desires to like your pictures, or you theirs, is a new kind of visitation that suits the slightly abstracted, slightly literal way we are living now.

PM: How does working in this medium relate to your work as a writer and poet?

EM: It's a different kind of summary, or component, or perspective. In my poems, etc., I'm "using" the world, but with Instagram you get to say this is what I see and from there add words if it spins it further or slows the image down.

PM: Is it informed by writing, or did you pursue this project as a completely new endeavor?

EM: I think in words and I see pictures. It's natural for me to shape what I see or condition it with words. It's like a big dog whose coat I am able to leave alone or call attention to in particular ways.



PM: The life of an artist and writer has changed significantly over the past several decades in terms of financial opportunities and, in particular, in regards to the gentrification of many of our country's creative capitols. New York City has changed significantly since you moved there in 1974, as has Provincetown. Where do you see the future great thinkers, artists, and writers congregating now?

EM: They meet how they can and where they can. The meeting is the point. I think if you put your work out, somehow wherever you are you will find your people. I loved the chuckle in Clinton's speech [at the Democratic National Convention] about meeting Hillary and how he followed her into registration line to sign up for classes. That's how we did that then, he added. I realize that so much of the future was planned in person in the past, and now it's all on our computers. People will, do organize places more deliberately now since that animal encounter could easily not happen. I guess our relation to the accident—picking up a book, seeing a person— is vanishing in some ways. I don't like deliberation that much, but I try and make the deliberate be a little scribbly or accidental. Even as a style rather than a fact.

PM: How do you think people become, or stay, artists and writers now and manage to survive and thrive?

EM: If they are lucky enough to know when they do something right and build on it. If they are lucky enough to know people who will say when they do something good that it happened, is happening. People need each other to perform their art.

PM: Much has also changed since your write-in candidacy for president in 1992. From your perspective, what has this presidential election shown us about the status of women in America?

EM: That it's dreadful but that everyone knows it. Finally, amidst all the nastiness around the "coronation," people are getting that this is a giant historical moment for a woman in our country to get the top job.

PM: You've had a relationship with Provincetown for quite some time now. What does Provincetown mean to you?

EM: The place where art, landscape, queerness, Massachusetts, and time meet. I always feel at home in Ptown because there's nowhere else in the world with that same confluence. It's edgy, homey, and laughable, too. Any place as attractive as Provincetown is busily telling you what it is. But I think you find it your own way still. The pleasure and the exact quiet are possible.

The work of Eileen Myles will be on display at the Schoolhouse Gallery, 494 Commercial St., Provincetown, August 5–24. There will be an opening reception from Friday, August 5, 6–9 p.m. For more information, call 508.487.4800 or visit galleryschoolhouse.com.

Images from Eileen Myles' show at Schoolhouse Gallery

