



## Surface Tension

poetry by Derek Beaulieu

ISBN 978 1 55245 450 3 | \$23.95 CDN | \$19.95 US

'With his distinctive visual palindromes and angled axes of symmetry, Derek Beaulieu has developed a signature mastery of Letraset, leveraging the twentieth-century technology as a vehicle for bringing concrete poetry into the twenty-first century. With *Surface Tension*, Beaulieu takes the possibilities of that new idiom even further, unsettling the fixity his symmetries once reinforced and dislodging the set in Letraset as poems distort in fun-house-mirror swerves, sag as if under their own weight, pool and smear in the liquid logic of heated ink, or swoop and blur as if in motion. In the process, these poems make visible the filmic potential of the photocopier, the facture of abraded transfers from brittle stock, and the three-dimensional substrate of the page with its flexible bends in curving space. These are thus poems in part about their own modes of production. They are beautiful products of a self-aware and intelligent process.'

— Craig Dworkin, author of  
*Radium of the Word: A Poetics of Materiality*



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'The striking compositions you'll find in *Surface Tension* are being presented sequentially in book form, yet that they wouldn't be out of place hanging on the wall goes without saying. Beaulieu swerves Gomerling when writing that "Readability is the key: like a logo, a poem should be instantly recognizable..." yet, to this reader, these works merit sustained and enthusiastic viewing precisely because they teeter on the edge of legibility. The kinetic, glitchy quality of their "alphabetic strangeness" keeps them unrecognizable as poems and, here, "that is poetry as I need it," to quote Cage. Think of them as anti-advertisings selling you nothing but bountiful manifestations of the irreducible plasticity of numbers, punctuation marks, and letter forms. No logos.'

— Mónica de la Torre, Madelon Leventhal Rand Endowed Chair  
in Literature, Brooklyn College; co-editor of  
*Women in Concrete Poetry 1959–1979*



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'Not words, letters; not letters, shapes; not shapes, figures; not figures, ciphers; not ciphers, ornaments; not ornaments, decoration; not decoration, semiotics; not semiotics, communicative possibilities; not vagrant potential, slowly forming inflection; not melting deflection, language as dance: in, out, upside down, flapping, flipping, all ways round.'

— Charles Bernstein, recipient of the  
2019 Bollingen Prize for American Poetry



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'"When most of the language we consume is non-poetic, should poetry not attempt to poetically intervene within these spaces that are not traditionally poetic?" The answer to Derek Beaulieu's question, put forward in his beautiful essay, is surely yes: the ten brilliantly adventurous visual poems in his *Surface Tension* make a startling case for his fascinating Letraset/photocopier inventions. Beaulieu's compositions originate in a place of clean design and logical narrative; soon, as in a dream, they open up, ushering in what he calls "a poetry of difference, chance, eruption." Marcel Duchamp would have called it the poetry of the infrathin: watch "Simple Symmetry" or "Dendrochronology" open up and come alive in their minutely evolving new spaces. This is quite simply an enchanting book – a book producing new pleasures with each turn of the page.'

— Marjorie Perloff, Sadie Dernham Patek Professor of  
Humanities, Emerita, Stanford University



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