Theodore Jones, alias Ted Joans
Jazz Poet, Musician, Painter and Cartoonist

4th July 1928 – 25th April 2003

The phrase *Jazz is my religion and surrealism is my point of view* written by Ted Joans resumes him well, but we shall see that these are not his only artistic dimensions.

Passing away two months before his 75th birthday Ted Joans had lived several lives:

- He was born in 1928 on American Independence Day, on a boat where his father was an entertainer, and had lived in several towns, notably New York during 10 years, between 1951 and 1960.
- He exiled himself to Europe, particularly to Paris where he resided for quite some time.
- In parallel he travelled in Africa, his point of attachment being Mali where he kept a house at Timbuktu, more or less up to his death.
- He also travelled punctually in Central America, and Mexico was not unknown to him.
- He died in Canada.

Teenager his first emotions as a young reader were surrealist, then upon his arrival in France he wrote to André Breton, who opened wide the doors to his movement. Previously Ted Joans had also invested in the Beat movement: amongst others he knew Jack Kerouac in New York and he frequented the famous Beat Hotel, situated at 9, rue Gît-le Cœur in Paris with William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg.

In music Ted Joans was rarely mistaken, he admired and knew (some very closely) all the greatest jazzmen, from Louis Armstrong to Albert Ayler, Duke Ellington to John Coltrane, Charlie Parker to Archie Shepp, in passing Charlie Mingus. He had in some way crossed the whole history of jazz.

But Ted Joans was one of the first Jazz Poets after the most important promoter of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes, 30 years his elder. It was in this gender that he excelled: his jazzastic slams, we say today, opened up the way for The Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron in the 70’s and Saul Williams from 2000.

Let's take a closer look at some of the most striking episodes in his life.

So, it's on July 4th, 1928 that Theodore Jones saw the light of day, on a boat, where his parents worked. From his birth the passion of travel would inhabit him.

You will have noticed that, if Ted is the diminutive of Theodore, he changed his name from Jones to Joans. This change was said to have intervened following one of his many marriages, one of which was to a woman called Joan.

In an article for *Jazz Hot*, he said he had started to play the flugelhorn at five, but it seems more likely at 12 or 13, as he later told other journalists.

Around the age of 14, his aunt, who worked as a domestic for intellectuals returned from Europe, bringing him surrealist books, this was a revelation: he literally fell into this movement, as I did 40 years later.

In 1951 at 23, newly graduated in Fine Arts from the University of Indiana, Ted Joans left for New York to continue his studies. It was in this town that he made his most important musical encounters, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Fats Navarro and above all Charlie Parker. The bop revolution was in full swing, he was at the forefront!

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1 In *JAZZ HOT #252. Le griot surréaliste.* (p.21-25).
2 I remember when I was in 3rd grade my French professor read us a poem by Paul Eluard, the first stanza, eponym being *La terre est bleue comme une orange* [The earth is blue like an orange]: I was rather at ease in maths but here! It was the second verse that struck me: *Jamais, les mots ne mentent* [words never lie]. This it seems contradicts the precedent...
He was even one of the actors: in 1954, **Ted Joans** had organized a *dada-surreal party* and **Charlie Parker** was one of the guests! A famous photograph of **Bird**, taken by **Arthur Fellig**, better known under the pseudonym of **Weegee**, showed him disguised as **Mau Mau**. This evening also saw a lecture of **André Breton** and **Benjamin Péret**'s poems.

I found **five** photographs of this evening:

- **three** in **Weegee** « *The Village* » *Da Capo* (USA 1989). This book without page numbers and captions was published some 20 years after the death of the photographer in 1968,
- **another two** in *Jazz Magazine* #216 from November 1973 (p44). These two pictures are credited to a mysterious a.a.a.a.a.

In **Weegee**'s pictures **Ted Joans** is wearing a white garment, on which is marked his name, his face is divided in two: one side white, the other not painted. **Charlie Parker** is the only person crouching in the group picture. I’m not allowed to publish this picture, only if I’m ready to pay an unreasonable amount of money³.

On a Turkish website⁴ I found one of the copies of **Bird's Lives!**, a graffiti by **Ted Joans** (or one of his friends who accompanied him) with which he covered the walls of New York the day after **Charlie Parker**'s death.

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³ It's the same agency that manages the copyright to the *Beat*, before **Ted Joans** left for Europe, so I am unable to publish **Fred McDarrah**'s photographs.

⁴ [http://surrealistyelmenturkiye.blogspot.fr/2008_06_01_archive.html](http://surrealistyelmenturkiye.blogspot.fr/2008_06_01_archive.html)
Ted Joans wrote 3 pages (p116-118) in the book *Bird: The Book of Charlie Parker*. He goes back to his *dada-surreal party* and publishes a poem *I Love a Big Big Bird*.

In 1959 *Rhino Review* published Ted Joans’s second book *Beat Funky Jazz Poems*. The following photograph is my own one.

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5 Published by *Da Capo* (New York) in 1962.
A year later he left for Paris.

Once in the French capital he immediately wrote to André Breton

« Who am I? I am Afro-American and my name is Ted Joans (...) I was born in 1928, the year of Nadja [André Breton]. Treatise on Style [Louis Aragon] and The Spirit Against The Reason [René Crevel] »

The extract of a letter to the “pope of surrealism” is reproduced in La Brèche #5 which came out in October 1965.

He wrote a poem, Nadja Rendezvous, in memory of André Breton. These verses refer to his different writings (Nadja, Les Champs Magnétiques) and the meeting with Joyce Mansour at the Promenade de Vénus cafe.

I first read his works in June 1942
I met him in June 1960
I last saw him in June 1966
I was going to see him again in 1967 June
But the Glass of Water in the Storm (1713)
of 4-2 rue Fontaine kept an almost forgotten
rendezvous with Nadja in the Magnetic Fields...

As soon as he arrived in Paris Ted Joans also contacted William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, exiled at the famous Beat Hotel, at 9, rue Git-le-Coeur, a hotel managed by Madame Rachou, here there was an intense activity cultural, that France Culture (a public broadcasting company) endeavored to revive:


Here’s an extract of David Brun-Lambert and Guillaume Baldy’s Beat Hôtel (a documentary-fiction programmed 8th April 2010, 55mn)

On the 15th of October 1957, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky turned up at the reception of a nameless hotel, 9 rue Git-le-Coeur, close to the Latin Quarter, they were greeted by Madame Rachou, widowed, she’d lost her husband in a car accident a year earlier, she managed a

6 If this patronymic didn’t exist it would have to be invented!
shabby establishment, known to be infested by rodents. Several months earlier she had welcomed an author Chester Himes, who was in disagreement with the racism in America. William Burroughs newly arrived from Tangiers (he was still marked by his use of heroin) took up residence in room 23 on the 16th January, it was here that he finished The Naked Lunch; at the same time Gregory Corso was writing The Bomb, and Ted Joans was elaborating the fresco The Chick Who feels off a Rhino. As mentioned earlier not only was the hotel a place of important artistic agitation, but also of (distinct or specific) morals, Madame Rachou saw on a daily basis her ragged lodgers write a stage of one of the most feverish artistic adventures of the XXth century.

Ted Joans’s fresco disappeared when the hotel was renovated following Mme Rachou’s retirement in 1963. It was not until 2010 that the following plaque was affixed on the wall, it has since become a luxury hotel, Ted Joans’s name is absent.

In 1965 Jean-Jacques Lebel organized the second edition of the festival de libre expression, called Déchirex. Ted Joans was one of the guests on May 20th.

Several hundred people attended this eight day festival, notably Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Jean-Luc Godard. This was the only time that Ted Joans and Marcel Duchamp met.
There are five photographs in this work, the subject being Ted Joans. Jean-Jacques Lebel points out his taking part (p.28):

*Adept of unorthodox surrealism, mingled with the Harlem Renaissance and negritude, in the image of both the great Césaire (a jazz-poetry fanatic) and Langston Hughes, living in New York, Timbuktu and Paris he takes part, ironically in this evening and improvises on (from) the back seat of a 4CV, with a makeshift companion, a hard version of Love Story.*

In 1966 *Ted Joans* joins Langston Hughes at the *Shakespeare & Compagny* book store, run at the time by the eccentric George Whitman. Here *Ted Joans'* elder insists that he play (?) the trumpet, which he does: it should be pointed out that he had abandoned (given up ?) this instrument when he moved to New York, impressed by Fats Navarro.


*Ted Joans* recorded his *Jazz poems* (*The Truth, Jazz Is My Religion, Faces*) accompanied by Jimmy Garrison. It was a concert with Archie Shepp’s quintet (Beaver Harris on drums and Roswell Rudd and Grachan Moncur III on trombone). It was recorded on an Italian bootleg cd (*Jazz Music Yesterday*) in Paris the 15th December 1967.

The concert was running late, *Ted Joans* was on stage urging the audience to be patient. The two titles of the cd (*Portrait of Robert Thompson* by Archie Shepp, and the three jazz-poems recited by *Ted Joans*) were therefore reversed in relation to the progress of the concert.

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7 Published by Éditions Hazan (Paris, 2009)

8 On the site of the famous English-Speaking bookstore (*Shakespeare & Company*), situated on the left bank near Notre Dame de Paris, the owner revealed, that his only fashion concession was a dirty cashmere jacket that he had worn for years, and no longer in it’s prime, when, *Ted Joans* in 1974 declared that « it had never been washed. ». After the owner’s death his daughter Sylvia took over the store.

9 I make an appeal to obtain it at a reasonable price.
It is more than likely that the poet recited *Jazz Must Be A woman* after the three poems featured on the cd *Freedom*. The latter is the last on the tape *I Giganti del Jazz #96*. He’s accompanied by Jimmy Garrison on the double bass (credited) and joined by Beaver Harris on drums (not credited) Also the recording date (1961) is obviously false: this is quite usual for a bootleg recording.

The following year, 1968 saw Ted Joans’s only exhibition in Paris, it took place at the gallery *Maya*, rue Mazarine, a gallery specializing in African Arts, the preview was on the 23rd April. In *La Rivière Noire* [The Black River]\(^\text{10}\), subtitled *De Harlem à la Seine* [From Harlem to Seine], Michel Fabre we can read the invitation:

« *Ted Joans, griot surréaliste – Afroamerican Fetishes – Invitation au vernissage – Black power, black power, black power...* ».

He also gives us a list of the works on show:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call it</th>
<th>Give me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lumumba naît en Norvège</td>
<td>250 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des cheveux noirs entourant le volcan (continent)</td>
<td>Un trench-coat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soleil noir sur les enfants noirs</td>
<td>1 billet A/R Ostende-Londres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le texte de Malcolm X</td>
<td>250 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oreille et orteil : Jam!</td>
<td><em>L’Afrique fantôme</em> de Michel Leiris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouvre grand tes jambes</td>
<td>Clark’s desert boots. Size 11/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pouvoir noir (easy)</td>
<td>Five pounds of gun-powder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1617</td>
<td>Deux livres : <em>La femme sans têtes,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Une semaine de bonté</em> de Max Ernst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cul noir</td>
<td>500 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demande à ta mère/Ass yo’ mammy</td>
<td>25 push-buttons knives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz est noir</td>
<td>Electric battery phonograph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Mau Mau don’ tol’ me</td>
<td>200 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunillingus to you</td>
<td>One new trumpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soleil noir</td>
<td><em>Le Surréalisme et la peinture</em> par André Breton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP means Bird, Bud, Bessie</td>
<td>100 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timbuctoo rush hour</td>
<td>One mask of the Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure! Real is Him</td>
<td>One 45 Caliber automatic pistol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was a Jew, I’d disown you</td>
<td>500 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1713</td>
<td>1713 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promenade de Vénus</td>
<td>250 F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No surprise! Everything was given away, nothing sold, said Ted Joans.

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\(^{10}\) I thank Pierre Crépon for drawing my attention to this book published in 1985 by Lieu Commun.
Still in 1968, he made a short appearance (less than a minute) in an underground film, *Wheel of Ashes*, filmed in Paris by Peter Emanuel Golman, he plays himself, a poet, probably at the *Shakspeare & Co* book shop.11

A year later, in 1969 we find him in Algiers, taking place in the first panafrican festival of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

![Poster of Algiers festival from 21th to 30th July 1969](image)

Blasé is one of Archie Shepp’s best albums, I must mention, on this album is the exceptional voice of Jeanne Lee. Ted Joans is not on this first cd, but on the second, in the company of an American poet Don Lee. In the midst of all this hullabaloo, created by Archie Shepp’s tenor, and the Algerian or Tuareg musicians we can hear Ted Joans reciting this short poem

“We are still back,
and we have come back. Nous sommes revenus!
Jazz is a Black Power.
Jazz is an African Power.
Jazz is an African music!”

Thanks to Thierry Trombert we again find Ted Joans the 23rd March 1974. He was in the company of Archie Shepp, who was about to play on French radio (ORTF), this time the saxophonist wouldn’t need Ted Joans to occupy the audience.

![Dizzy Gillespie, Ted Joans © Thierry Trombert](image)

Then later, once again, thanks to another of Thierry Trombert’s photographs we find Ted Joans acting as Master of Ceremony at the Antibes Juan-les-Pins festival in 1975, a role he held throughout the festival.

It was 13 years later in 1979 that the second official recording of Ted Joans was released, a tape recorded in West Germany, obviously entitled *JAZZPOEMS*.

The musicians, judging by their names, were German: Uli Espenlaub on keyboards, Ralf Falk on electric guitar, Andreas Leep on bass guitar and Dietrich Rauschenberger on the drums. Note that this is the only recording made under Ted Joans’s name.

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11 We can see, I am sure! Daevid Allen reading his poems at *Shakespeare &Co.*
Twelve poems were included, including seven from *Black Pow-Wow*, four from *Afrodisia* and one from *Vergriffen: oder Blietzlieb Poems*.

Two of these poems, *The Truth* (recited at the beginning of both sets) and *Jazz Is My Religion*, are definitely confirmed as 'must-haves'. In fact they were already part of the improvised repertory on Archie Shepp's quintet album *Freedom*.

Don't stare wide-eyed at the text to the right, here it is:

Jazz is my religion and surrealism my point of view. Jazz is the most democratic art form on the face of earth, it's a surreal music, a surrealism. Surrealism like jazz is not a style, it's not a dogmatic approach to the arts like cubism. Poetically I'm first of all concerned with sound and rhythm. It is not so much the word, but the wording itself because of the way we black people handle words. Duke Ellington said “It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing”. It GOT to swing! I can write a jazzpoem about any subject, and most of my jazzpoems are written about things I love, and things I hate, and things I associate. But jazzpoetry is not lyrics: when you built your poetry on a composition, then you have boxed yourself in, same with rehearsing, 'cos each time I read a poem it will be different. I do not change the words, it will be the sound and the rhythm and the whole atmosphere.

This unsigned text is a perfect example of what jazz is about!

Let's jump ahead five years, where we find Ted Joans in animated conversation¹² with Joseph Jarman, Oliver Johnson and Famoudou Don Moye at the Châtelet Theater.

In 1988 Ted Joans recognizes Thierry Trombert at the Paris Cinematheque, he was taking pictures at the opening night of the film *Bird*.

¹² Lower we can see another of Thierry Trombert's photographs of these four same musicians. This was on the front page of Special edition *Improjazz #4*. 
On a postcard, posted from Marrakech, (where Ted Joans had gone to see Dizzy Gillespie play at the beginning of 1989) he asks Thierry Trombert for some of the photographs he took during the screening of Bird. He takes this opportunity to wish him a Happy New year by a « bonne 1989 anniversaire » and he chose well his postcard, goats in the trees (the so-called Arganiers), and writes on the back, the legend of a worthy « surréaliste »...

In 1996 Ted Joans wrote his autobiography, Je me vois - I see myself, it’s dedicated to Joseph Cornell, the first surrealist I ever met, it represents one of his longest texts (p219-258), but also one of the least known.

In the bibliography (p257-258), mention is made of all his works published to date, and of his participations at Black World, Coda Jazz Magazine (Toronto), Présence Africaine, Jazz Hot and Jazz Magazine (Paris), Dies und Das (single issue of the German surrealist magazine) and Bird : The Legend of Charlie Parker de Robert Reinser.

Note two elements in this autobiography: the seven mammal totems (rhino, okapi, tapir, aardvark, pangolin, echinda and platypus) and the delicious « femmemoiselle » bestowed by Ted Joans upon his last partner Laura Corsiglia.

It’s his love for her that led him to settle in Vancouver, Canada. It’s from here that he held conferences such as those of Seattle, Washington and Palatine, Indiana (see below)

13 Anniversaire is Birthday in French while Année is Year. So, these two French words begin the same.
He also took part in a tribute to Jean-Michel Basquiat, given by the Jérôme de Noirmont gallery in Paris. (see below)

As with Albert Ayler, we will never know the exact date of his death: he died alone in Laura Corsiglia’s flat between the 25th of April (date of his last work) and the 7th of May 2003 (the date his body was discovered). I prefer to choose the date of his last work, and to emphasize the incredible life that he led on earth.

On his death a multitude of events were organized, and the following flyers created.

Reminds us of the inscription Bird Lives!, with which Ted Joans and friends had covered the walls of NYC on the death of Charlie Parker

Of all the numerous written testimonies Nicole Henares’s is the most delightful: someday Amiri Baraka is gonna meet LeRoi Jones and it ain’t gonna be pretty.

Olivier Leduc. 27th of May 2015
Lynn Maillardet : translation

First of all I would like to offer my profound thanks to Laura Corsiglia, who manages Ted Joans’ succession and Susan Grinols, the head of the image and photographic department of the Los Angeles Fine Arts Museum. Both allowed me to publish Ted Joans’ painting (1958). Secondly I would like to heartily thank Thierry Trombert, who, when I told him I was writing an article on Ted Joans immediately opened his archives and developed the five photographs chosen to illustrate this article. Not forgetting Pierre Crépon for his interest, and above all his multiple aids.
SOME OF TED JOANS BOOKS

Out of about the forty books written and sometimes illustrated by Ted Joans, I have retained the following:

- **Propositions pour un manifeste Black Power** edited by Éric Losfeld in 1969.

- **Merveilleux Coup De Foudre** (with Jayne Cortez) edited by *Handshake* in 1982.
  - **Dies Und Das** collective works (West-Berlin) in 1984
    (Ted Joans was the editor of this unique German surreal issue)

TED JOANS VIDEOS

First part of a short film JAZZ & POETRY by Louis van Gasteren, showing Piet Kuiters Modern Jazzgroup with Ted Joans

Piet Kuiters piano
Herman Schoonderwalt alto saxophone
Ruud Jacobs double bass
Cees See drums
Ted Joans poetry

[Image: Piet Kuiters, Ruud Jacobs, Ted Joans, Cees See Amsterdam, 1964]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uc9yodZ29UE

IF YOU HAVE ONLY ONE VIDEO TO WATCH, THIS IS THE ONE

• Ted Joans appears for about 20 seconds, in a bad quality silent video, where he is seen making faces, in the company of the artist Erró and others.
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPNqfHizpP4

• Ted Joans appears for a few seconds at the end of William Klein’s film Festival Panafricain d’Alger made in 1969
  It’s the concert edited by Charly (see above)

[Image: Poster of Festival Panafricain d’Alger by William Klein]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaPLGDSigzU

• THE TRUTH recited by Ted Joans at the
  New York Book Fair in 1987
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhJCNNtoa-c

•
The beginning of *Where Are You* is the recording of *The Truth* (1987), this is the only title on *Ritmebox* assigned to *Ted Joans*.

- David Amram and Ted Joan scat improvisations at the KEROUAC conference. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAoxZXYuZvE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAoxZXYuZvE)

- A film made in 2010 by Tom Knoff and Kurt Hemmer, produced by the Harper College, where Kurt Hemmer taught, traces Ted Joans' life (30 min)

Ted Joans appears during a poem recital organized in 2002 by Kurt Hemmer

**TED JOANS PARTICIPATION IN COLLECTIVE WORKS**

The surrealist magazine *La Brèche* (#5, October 1963) directed by André Breton and edited by Jean-Jacques Pauvert) published texts and a collage (extract from *L’Alphabet Surrealiste*, letter X naturally) by Ted Joans. The texts on two pages (p66-67) are taken from the first letter in *Fragments de lettre à Breton*. 

*La Brèche* #5
Here’s the end of the foreword written by Robert Benayoun (p.2)


Archibras #3 contains a two page text Black Flower, with a photograph taken by Thierry Trombert of Ted Joans and Stockley Carmichael. Included in Revue Noire #5 is one of Ted Joans poems, Anathema of Erection (p57) is part of Double Trouble (p36), edited at the same time.

CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS. AUTOBIOGRAPHY SERIES. Volume 25
Edited by GALE RESEARCH. 1996, Detroit, Michigan, USA.

In this edition there is an autobiography OR ( This edition includes an autobiography, Je me vois – I see myself written by Ted Joans in 1996, and dedicated to Joseph Cornell (the first surrealist I ever met ) [p219-258]

Under the direction of Francis Holstein, four of Ted Joans poems were translated into French by Éric Benveniste (May 2008) including the tribute to Lester Young.

**SOME PICTURES OF TED JOANS**
Two quotes in this special edition of Improjazz:
- in chapter IV (Voix Noires [Black Voices]), a paragraph (3rd) is consecrated to Hart Leroy Bibbs and Ted Joans (p21),
- in the annex III (some bibliographic data), a paragraph on Hart Leroy Bibbs and Ted Joans (p84).

In the center of the magazine a photograph taken by Thierry Trombert of Ted Joans (always on the left) with Oliver Johnson, Don Moye and Joseph Jarman.

IMPROJAZZ #166. June 2010
Photo and text Jacques Bisceglia

Personal memories of Jacques Bisceglia, with a photograph taken the 30th July 1969 in Algiers, Ted Joans between Gracham Moncur and Archie Shepp.

This article was in fact to promote Jacques Bisceglia’s photograph album Reaching into the Unknown published in April 2009 by ROGUEART, included were poems by Steve Dalachinsky, two dedicated to Ted Joans (p328-329). The picture of Ted between Grachan and Archie is taken from the book (p330) with a poem (p331).

IMPROJAZZ. HORS-SÉRIE #4.
LES PHOTOS DE THIERRY TROMBERT. June 2008.

This edition of Improjazz which was entirely devoted to Thierry Trombert contains two photographs of Ted Joans: The cover, Ted Joans is on the extreme left with Oliver Johnson and Joseph Jarman is hiding Don Moye. The other picture (p38) was taken at the Chat Qui Pêche with Jimmy Garrison, Jill Thornton (a British journalist) and Archie Shepp.
THE TRUTH
by Ted Joans

if you should see
a man
walking down a crowded street
talking aloud
to himself
don’t run
in the opposite direction
but run toward him
for he is a POET
you have NOTHING to fear
from the poet
but the TRUTH!

Collage by Steve Dalachinsky and The Truth by Ted Joans © documentation Olivier Ledure