

Renee Gladman

Love of Houses

Arts and Letters

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*for Arakawa and Madeline Gins:
The Poetic Jump*

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Arakawa and Madeline Gins: The Poetic Jump is on view at the American Academy of Arts and Letters from September 26, 2026, to February 7, 2027.

This reader is part of a series of interdisciplinary texts commissioned by Arts and Letters to accompany its gallery program. *Love of Houses* is a fictional text Renee Gladman wrote that inhabits Arakawa and Gins's *Bioscleave House (Lifespan Extending Villa)* (2008).

preceding spread Arakawa and Madeline Gins in the dug-out foundation of *Bioscleave House (Lifespan Extending Villa)* (2008).
Reversible Destiny Archives, Photography Collection

Love of Houses

Renee Gladman

For a while now, in my plans, in my dreams, I have been pushing my buildings toward invisibility. I have wanted the architecture of invisibility to direct my living. I have wanted to use time to think about time, to learn from time how to build in time, but I have always struggled with the foundational element of time, which is its invisibility; and to be invisible, I have learned, to be architecturally invisible. . . . Well, that is what many of us have been thinking about for decades. We have understood that to speak properly of the houses here, we must be keenly aware of their differences: There are houses reinforced by an arrangement of walls that take pride in their solidity and houses whose walls are reinforced but only in being illegible to those that occupy them, thus not exactly succeeding as walls. There are semipermanent visible houses and permanently visible houses (those with the fortified walls) that migrate short distances across the city, eventually appearing in places you wouldn't suspect, needing to be searched for. There are houses permanently invisible that open

and unfurl through breath and memory, as well as permanently invisible houses, which are only situationally so, situationally invisible to ensure that other things aren't. There are houses that flicker where they stand but have never moved, those that move but only in the pages of novels; and, finally, there are houses that sit in an overlap of breathing, at intervening known and unknown coordinates. Invisible houses breathe, some visible houses breathe, and time is at the center of this. Color, believe it or not, is at the center of invisibility. I have said many times that we are a radiant darkness, that space is cut to something flowing, and that building is the holding of something moving in a kind of lapse of time.

Time needs us breathing and building needs time and we need time to breathe and figure out what we are seeing and with whom we're seeing it. There are tools for breathing and for building and those are sentences. When we are building, we are walking through sentences. I have tried to say this. I have stopped short of saying, *we are ... when we are ...* trying not to be too demanding, trying to build not knowing completely how to build, starting from a gaping hole in the ground, a mound of dirt at an inverse height, so deep there is salt water in it, us breathing. I have never not said *we are*. I have never not built with you.

When we are building, when we are staring at our want for structure, a structure capable of elongating time beyond this sentence and these maths, when

we have finished the excavation, one of us remembers we want the building only partially, only partially erected at this site. The rest we wish to place here, invisibly, and at corresponding coordinates of here, reaching into a glowing dark, the inverse of location at the very center of our names—your name and my name and names of those we admire while we draw up plans; people whose names need to be said if you want your building to glow and move and ring invisibly, if you want that door to do more than ... that frame to contain more than. . . . Sometimes you can't resist saying *Helen Keller* when you are working. Sometimes you say *Emma Kunz* or *Vera Rubin*. Sometimes I am drawing and Luswage Amini is on my mind. I move through Joan Mitchell; I move through Marcel Duchamp. Sometimes you write a line and it writes back at you; Arakawa. *Gins*, it speaks from the mesh of a drawing. We want a Gins and Arakawa reversible destiny, *come back from where you've gone*. Sometimes you're moving through your days and you see something that halts everything; sometimes it's a person who wants to build a bridge to future time (one person made of two persons); sometimes it's someone kneeling in a concentricity of plants; sometimes a person drawing circles only and always. I woke one day and found I was folded in time. I had a person; I had a plan to build a home for time using color. I counted orange. I counted green. I wrote of something being seen as green, held as pink or light blue. I said we were building living,

following spread Bioscleave House (Lifespan Extending Villa)
(interior), 2008



looking into the concave earth. The ground held our future in its cool, wet hollow. It was going to start here and extend out from the lot assigned to it, down the street, past many streets, to the shoreline, then kind of glimmer at the edge there, asking time for time. You were yellow when you asked for time, you were a very dark brown. You were orange, then navy blue. There were so many colors for our counting. I counted green, red, yellow in one instance of curving. I counted pink, pink (dark, darker), blue, and yellow along a flat. I put the curving to a flat as a question, a making of a portal.

And at the center of all these colors was the problem of which kind of house we needed to construct to have an ongoing reversibility. To bring each other back from any kind of ending. I asked her to write a book about it. I asked Amini to be our greatest novelist. I stood at a threshold of should I write or should I build, should I draw, should I make a new math using the biorhythms of flowers, should I ask Bello to make music from my math. I wanted to inhabit a work that thought of everything at once, but I also wanted everything hidden. It was hard to fill the space we'd excavated; it didn't make sense. Digging things to fill things. I wanted to place the windows between planes of living, such that when they were opened the wood performed a splitting-consoling sound, a wobble of beauty. A momentary rift that would heal and help you navigate the next part of the day. Warming the cups for cover, laying

out the books, lining up pencils and watercolors. Projects for paper and time. But building brought us to our knees.

I said we were building living when I answered those interview questions. We were gaping at an expansive hole in the earth and wanting. Time was almost graspable when you stood over dirt. It was strange and enchanting. You stood with your mouth open for hours, saying extraordinary things, things that didn't line up in the world where you put your houses, yet someone was beside you making a record. I have your passages here; I have your drawings. So, we built this home. It was invisible and awash in color—bisected, multiverse, subterranean. It expanded where we least expected; it gave itself to time not where we asked or hoped. The house curved; it lifted when it rained. It went up and out and back through a crevice. It went down and around and up through a haunting. It was a sentence when we wanted it to be an essay; it was a poem when we were . . . just wanting to invisibly hang together . . . just wanting to be without our senses. It was a house when we were dying but didn't want to die and didn't understand death and thought death should be pulled out of time. Time should be all motion and an alive stillness and alternating color and slopes and curves and dirt. Time should be all our birthdays happening on the same day, and our houses being how we celebrate.

I was definitely born June 27, 1971, invisibly, or it may have been June 27, 1880, or was it actually June 27,

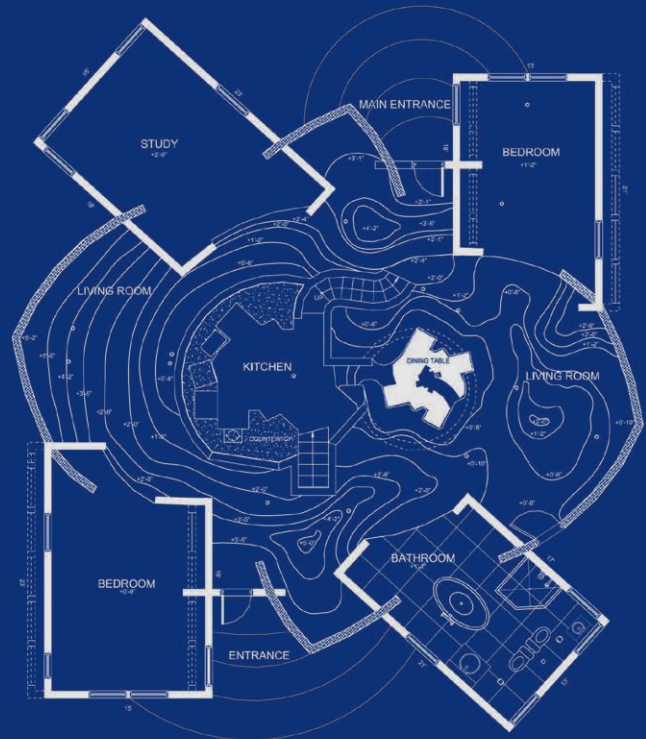
1936, or could my point of entry have been July 6,
1936, or July 11, 1982, all these summer days. Was
I born in July looking for November? Was this where
I was on November 7, 1941, in semipermanence? Was
a 6 also a 7? Were we all living at the same time in a
coordination of points? A conference of paragraphs.
We were in the same place in an overlay, each building
a house. I counted an island, a field, a stone wall.
You counted stone, clay, and mountain laurel. We
made our windows uneven; we opened a circle where
soon we'll be eating. Somebody came over to read
poems. What you wanted was to meet someone who
was always already in their breathing, who could
go from structure to structure glowing edges and blurring
afterwords. They'd talk all day about the invisibility
of trying. You making plans within their plans.
And, I'd go on like this, conducting interviews, digging
up holes, asking Danielle to lean against my chest,
marveling at the two weeks, eleven years, where
your points and my points more than intervened
—orange dawning yellow—more than gravitated.

WALL-CONFIGURATIONS

(INTERSECTING AND SYMMETRICALLY PAIRED)



NOT SIMPLY ABUTTING
AT THEIR ENDPOINTS
BUT INTERSECTING
ONE ANOTHER
AT VARIOUS POINTS ALONG
THEIR LENGTHS,
WALL-CONFIGURATIONS
HAVE THE SAME SEPARATE
AND DISTINCT CHARACTER
IN THE BUILT WORK
THAT THEY HAVE IN PLAN.



COMPLETE SET OF SHAPE-DEFINING ELEMENTS

BIOSCLEAVE HOUSE

Renee Gladman is a writer and artist. Her essays and visual work have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Granta*, and *Harper's*, among other publications. She is the author of numerous books, including *Theory for Moving Houses* (2026), *My Lesbian Novel* (2024), and a cycle of novels about the city-state Ravicka and its inhabitants.

Published by the American Academy of Arts and Letters
for *Arakawa and Madeline Gins: The Poetic Jump*, September 26,
2026–February 7, 2027.

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This publication is made possible by A.E. Benenson. Special
thanks to the Reversible Destiny Foundation. Major support
for contemporary exhibitions at Arts and Letters is provided
by Patrick Collins. Arts and Letters exhibitions are also made
possible by the Childe Hassam Fund, the Eugene Speicher
Fund, the Huntington Exhibition and Museum Fund, the
Wolf Kahn Foundation, and members of Arts and Letters.

Arts and Letters Reader No. 012
Series edited by Jenny Jaskey and Noa Wesley
Edited by Dan Fox
Proofread by Julia Powers
Exhibition curated by Noa Wesley
Designed by Studio Mathias Clottu
Printed by Pureprint, UK

American Academy of Arts and Letters
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New York, New York 10032
artsandletters.org

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