

David Nelson & Micah Schippa-Wildfong

You Can Read Me Anything

June 22 — July 20, 2025

Opening Reception Sunday June 22, 2025, 6-8PM

28 Varick Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11237

...it could be a long time ago or rather recently when I heard them say I am homeless.

I remember being young and bored in the apartment I grew up in. Perhaps the first home? There was nothing to do after school, and I spent endless hours watching and tracing the movement of snails climbing up and down the plants in the neighborhood garden. Those tiny critters carry their homes with them everywhere. The shell, being part of a snail's body, grows bigger as the snail ages. I think it's quite wonderful to have a home always nearby that also expands in a spiral over time. It's like having a pair of shoes that always fits. Where are the snails going? Maybe having a home makes one want to stay restless, trailing behind. Most land snails live around moist habitats, which allow them to easily replenish the water lost through evaporation and dragging their slimy mucus around. Sometimes when the above-ground gets hot and dry, they burrow their way through black molds, wet logs and damp rocks, into the underground. I wonder what it's like to constantly move based on survival instinct with the one and only home one would ever know. If I were a snail escaping from the sun, I think I would bring a postcard with a picture of the desert on it, as a reminder of my destiny.

How do snails navigate sand dunes in the desert? What if one goes the wrong direction towards the murderous heat? Maybe the snails are homing. They tirelessly maneuver through the X-Y-Z axes via all kinds of terrain while drying themselves up. The end goal must be to permanently park their homes somewhere, right? The snails do not belong in the desert. Here is the resting place of Ramses and the Sphinx whose hand holds the desert down. Could it ever be that, if the Sphinx lifts an arm up in the sky, the sand held in his palm would flow down like a glistening waterfall, from which colonies of ants and snails fall out and float in the air, like confetti and garlands at a Homecoming? I wonder how the snails experience time, and what would be their standard unit of increment and measure. The Egyptians made beautiful sundials, shadow clocks and water clocks to read the passing of what we now call "hours", but they never bothered to index minutes or seconds. Every new month is marked by the disappearance of the last waning moon. I wonder if the Sphinx feels lonely at home in the desert, without a companion reporting on what time it is, on whether or not it's time to take a break from the world. Could the Sphinx just hop on a getaway train and take off, leaving all his sparkles behind?

It feels like I'm writing closer and closer towards a mirage, but now I'm remembering something. No one called me homeless. It was you, curled up in my arms, asking me if I believed I had a home. Did I tell you that I didn't? I wish I had said something else. When I'm next to you I feel like nothing more than a negative casting shadows away from your direction. I turn into a sundial. I fall apart into grains of sand. I hold no resolution. I no longer keep time. I couldn't tell you any stories because, I was not here within myself, I was with you.

I wish I showed you my shell and told you that, in fact, I do have a nice home. I wish I said that it could have been that morning when I would have told you that without realizing it, perhaps, I loved you. I might have also told you that once that morning had passed, it would have been too late for me to tell you this: that I loved you, and forever. I wish I had joked and told you David's limerick: "if Ida knowd I coulda rode I woulda went but if ida seedja as I driv by Ida flung out my arm and wave at cha". I wish I read you Pessoa: "If, after I die, they should want to write my biography, There's nothing simpler. I've just two dates - of my birth, and of my death. In between the one thing and the other, all the days are mine". I wish I told you that I was homeless, but I have an empty shell, and that we could burrow ourselves into a hole somewhere really beautiful, but I didn't. I was holding you tight. I was twirling your hair into a spiral.

I want to hold you in my arms again. Would you tell me something this time? Tell me anything? Or please let me read the lines in your palm, against every grain of sand in this desert.

David Nelson (1960-2013) was an interdisciplinary artist working across photography, drawing, sculpture, and painting. Rigorous and precise, Nelson engaged process, time, chance and a finely tuned attention to the natural world. Nelson's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including solo exhibitions at Petersburg Gallery, Debs & Co, and Barbara Gladstone in NYC, at Tracy Williams in Paris, as well as many group exhibitions, which include Artists Space, The Drawing Center, Boston Center for the Arts, and the Academy of Arts and Letters. A posthumous survey exhibition at 80WSE Gallery was curated by Jonathan Berger and Nancy Brooks Brody in 2015, with an accompanying catalogue. Originally from California, Nelson moved to NYC and began making art in the mid 1970's. By the 1980's he had a studio on East 14th street and became friends with the artists Robert Bordo, Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Tony Feher, Zoe Leonard, Angela Muriel, Nicolas Rule, Rafael Sanchez, and Carrie Yamaoka. This peer group's formative years coincided with the onset of the AIDS crisis, which deepened their camaraderie, with many of them becoming involved with ACT UP (The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1985 Nelson met the artist David Knudsvig, who remained his life partner up until Knudsvig's death from AIDS in 1993.

Micah Schippa-Wildfong is a Chicago based interdisciplinary artist who has recently presented performances and exhibitions with Triangolo, Pech, The Gray Center for Arts & Inquiry, Mickey, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Their work eagerly awaits the total emancipation of the human.

Benny's Video is a nomadic curatorial project conceived and operated by Craig Jun Li since March 2025. The inaugural season of programming is generously hosted in the studio space of artist Grant Mooney.

BV would also like to thank Barry Paddock, Joy Episalla, Carrie Yamaoka, Nick Debs, Noa Wesley, Jonathan Berger, and Kyle Croft for their indispensable support in realizing this project.

This exhibition is dedicated to the everlasting love and magic felt among the preservation of and the care for David Nelson's estate, and in particular, to Nancy Brooks Brody (1962-2023), to David Nelson (1960-2013), David Knudsvig (1947-1993), Tony Feher (1956-2016), and Jennifer Bartlett (1941-2022).

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