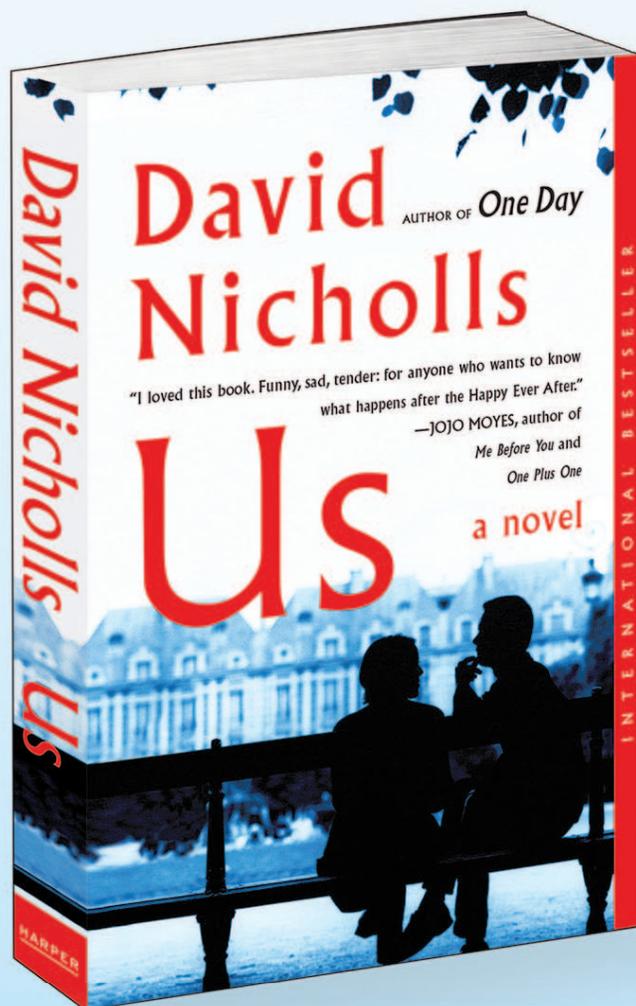


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 **Open Book** / JOHN WILLIAMS



Ronna Lebo's "Red Cabinet"; Katherine Bradford's "Horses and Piano."

Canvas and Verse

When the writer Claudia La Rocco asked several visual artists if they also wrote poetry, Don Voisine told her: “I don’t poem.” That cheeky response ultimately became the title of a book La Rocco edited featuring painters’ work alongside their verse. Its contributors include Voisine, who, it turns out, does, at least on occasion, poem.

La Rocco, a freelance critic for *The Times*, described herself in an email interview as a writer “deeply influenced by other art forms (chiefly dance and visual art)” who is “drawn to the connections and disconnects between different disciplines.”

A few of the artists La Rocco enlisted had writing at the ready, but most of the poems were “created, or reimagined, specifically for this book.” Unsurprisingly, painting and painters are a theme. A part of James Biederman’s poem goes: “paintings are usually mistakes / if i try to do some thing it never works / some thing like love.” And Ben La Rocco, Claudia’s brother, begins his: “What we call color is a delusion. / If you ask me, / There’s more color in Atget / Than in all Matisse / Or Monet.”

The artists involved were simultaneously enthusiastic and a bit reluctant, La Rocco said. “Those that don’t have any sort of public or sustained writing practice were concerned that they not be misrepresented,” she said, “which I understand completely. They wanted to be framed in a way that reflects the integrity of their visual art and doesn’t claim literary territory that feels foreign to them, but also presents their writing as serious. I hope the book does that. I find their use — and misuse! — of language beautiful throughout.”

‘I had to imagine what a great person would do in certain situations. I would have to pretend I was nicer than I actually am.’

— JAMI ATTENBERG, DISCUSSING THE REAL-LIFE WOMAN WHO INSPIRED HER NOVEL “SAINT MAZIE,” IN AN INTERVIEW WITH JEZEBEL

Robert Channels Ruth

The work of Robert Seydel, who died in 2011 at 50, combined poetry and visual art, filtered through fictional personas. Recently, the Los Angeles-based Siglio Press published several of Seydel’s books, including “Book of Ruth” and “A Picture Is Always a Book,” both of which explore the writings and collages of Ruth Greisman, an alter ego of Seydel’s named for his aunt.

“It can get confusing. I’ll be looking through my notebooks and have to figure out if something I’ve written is Ruth’s or if it’s something else,” Seydel said in a 2010 interview. “She’s so taken over part of my art-making function that I don’t really question her authenticity anymore. I thought originally I wanted to inhabit another person; now she inhabits me.”

The exhibition “Robert Seydel: The Eye in Matter” opens at the Queens Museum of Art on July 17.

IMAGES, FROM “I DON’T POEM”: LEFT, COURTESY OF RONNA LEBBO; RIGHT, PRIVATE COLLECTION