

Buk Scene #1

The Birth of a Literary Magazine

An interview with Jocelyne Desforges & Jan Hallers

The authors are the founders of a new international magazine on Bukowski and related poets. Here they talk about their experiences creating that magazine.

Hello Jocelyne and Jan, you're from very different countries, Canada and the Netherlands. Still you both have gathered to start a magazine together. A magazine about Bukowski. You called it 'BUK-SCENE' and it hit a lot of ground.

Would you please talk a bit about the project? How the idea appeared, how it came to life and what happened afterwards . . .

Jocelyne: What is interesting to me is that the fans of Bukowski are so numerous, with different lifestyles, from different parts of the world, different languages, ages, and yet, we instantly feel a certain connection.

You get Bukowski or you simply don't. Jan, in the Netherlands, had been reading Bukowski for more than 25 years, selling his books online and was thinking of sharing his find with Dutch readers.

Me, In Canada, I had been introduced to Bukowski in the seventies, but I really got him much later after inheriting 20 of his books of poetry, letters and novels. I read everything I had within a few months. Then I was looking to express my enthusiasm through paintings, by introducing some of his lines in my artwork.

Jan: What brought Jocelyne and I together was www.bukowski.net, a website created by Michael Phillips. Michael is a poet, writer and a computer expert from Los Angeles. This website, created in January 2006, is devoted to Bukowski. It is in the form of a blog that has attracted writers, readers, collectors, publishers, artists and people like us who were mostly surprised to realize that the site had a strong pulse.

Jocelyne: I think that it is growing everyday, attracting new viewers and new members. The beautiful thing about such a website is that all information is quite accurate and discussed by knowledgeable members. It holds everything that has ever been published, a timeline, his artwork, photos, a search option.

Bukowski appears to most as a tenacious, courageous, bluntly honest wild man. He was a blue collar worker, drinker and appeared to some as a womanizer, who becomes successful after years of down and out living. I suppose that most of us are excited by such an ending to such a life. It is like justice prevails, someone's efforts are rewarded. At least, that's how I see it.

Writing from the underground, as an underfed underdog who emerges as a giant, breaking all the literary rules, upsetting the academics, and being so prolific that no one could argue his talent.

Anyhow, Jan was dreaming of publishing a newsletter, (half Dutch, half English), noticed the paintings that I had posted on the Bukowski website and contacted me through a private message on bukowski.net.

He asked me if I would contribute pictures of my paintings for the front cover of the publication, or the back cover. He had offered to pay me for it, and I replied that he could use anything I had for free, since I was happy to share my appreciation of Bukowski and that it also gave a meaning to what I had been doing on my own, for myself, a lesson I had learned from Bukowski.

I need to say that I thought that Jan was a Dutch woman, with strong opinions, and I felt very comfortable, doing something about Bukowski with a woman, knowing that most members seemed to be men. So, we kept in touch by e-mail for a few months.

I sent him a CD with a couple of pictures. One was 'Hollywood', another was titled 'How do you make it , baby?', and a third one ' The last night of the earth poems'. These paintings were not portraits, but paintings inspired by the poetry and the novels I had read. She (he) asked me if I could paint a portrait of Bukowski. I did paint a first portrait of Bukowski.

That painting was done from a Michael Montfort b/w photo, which appeared on the cover of 'Tales of Ordinary Madness'.

I was to go to Paris for my birthday and Jan offered to meet me in Paris, and sent me a picture of himself, (for my birthday.) I had to know what he looked like coming off the train. I was shocked to discover that he was a man. Not wanting to be stuck with a stranger in Paris, I suggested to meet in Amsterdam. I took the train, spent a day visiting the Van Gogh museum and he agreed to meet me there the following day, although he lived 100 miles away from Amsterdam.

It was somewhat of a business meeting. I was curious to meet a Bukowski fan from Holland. After hours of talking and drinking in an old bar which was built 1606, De Karpershoek, we decided to stay the night in Amsterdam, and Jan invited me to visit him again, which happened 4 months later.

Jan: We fell in love, right?

Jocelyne: Yes, I guess that's what happened.

Jan: Ok.



Jan Hallers and Jocelyne Desforges

Jocelyne: We talked about publishing the magazine in an A4 format, instead of the newsletter, all of it in English, no more Dutch. English, being a second language for both of us, was quite a challenge. My English was just a little stronger than his.

Jan had thought of the name 'Drink' for the newsletter. I did not like it so much. Then he suggested Buk Scene, inspired by the British publication 'Beat Scene', Kevin Ring's magazine. It was all new to me. Over the months, I went on reading more about the different publications, but I had a certain aversion towards looking at other magazines, because it disturbs me to know how things are done in general. I wanted to stay myself and didn't like to follow a model. It would feel more like a job than a creation.

Jan: I started to contact several poets and writers on bukowski.net, bought tons of mags on Bukowski, researched them, searched the net for over a year and I came to the conclusion that some magazines were pretty cool but most of them didn't last long. We needed a good concept.

I thought: Kevin Ring has Kerouac, the other Beat writers and 'Neo-Beats', but we would have Bukowski as well as his fellow contemporary poets such as A.D. Winans, Buk's ex-girlfriend Linda King, Steve Richmond, David Barker and the younger generation of talented poets and writers who are NOT Bukowski wannabees. To name a few: Hosho McCreesh, Justin Hyde, Christopher Cunningham, Stephen Hines and Justin Barrett.

Jocelyne: We kept asking for submissions, since there were several poets and writers who were members of bukowski.net. Some of them had already posted links to their own website where it was possible to read their poetry.

Jan would send them to me by email, and then we would discuss the content on Skype, how we felt about what we were reading, sometimes several times making sure that we were understanding the meaning of the poetry and that we were reading the same thing.

We then chose a name for a press. We went with Purple Glow Press, after a beautiful Bukowski poem, which appeared in the posthumous poetry book 'People Look Like Flowers At Last'.

Jan: We finally made a selection which contained unpublished essays on Bukowski, several great poems dedicated to Bukowski, a critical column on the American Small Press, a lot of real good poetry of older and younger writers and a memorial to Buk's personal German photographer, Michael Montfort, who died when we were in the middle of the making of Buk Scene.

Jocelyne: In the meantime I had painted a second Bukowski portrait, from a black and white photo by Joan Gannij, taken in 1976, I believe. The photo showed a friend of Pamela Miller, Georgia Peckham, standing with Bukowski, in front of a fridge. I may have found it on the internet.

Since I had posted the photo of the painting of Georgia on bukowski.net, Jan suggested that I'd paint a new one for the magazine. I chose to paint Tina Darby and Bukowski, that I picked out of the Buk Book by Jim Christy. The photo is by Claude Powell. I liked the photo because it was provocative and reflected the persona of Bukowski, which was so dear to his readers.

Jan did not like the painting very much because the guy fondling Tina was not resembling Bukowski, according to him. I was convinced that it would be a good cover and went on with it. You know, these fucking artists!!!

Jan: Yes, I know!

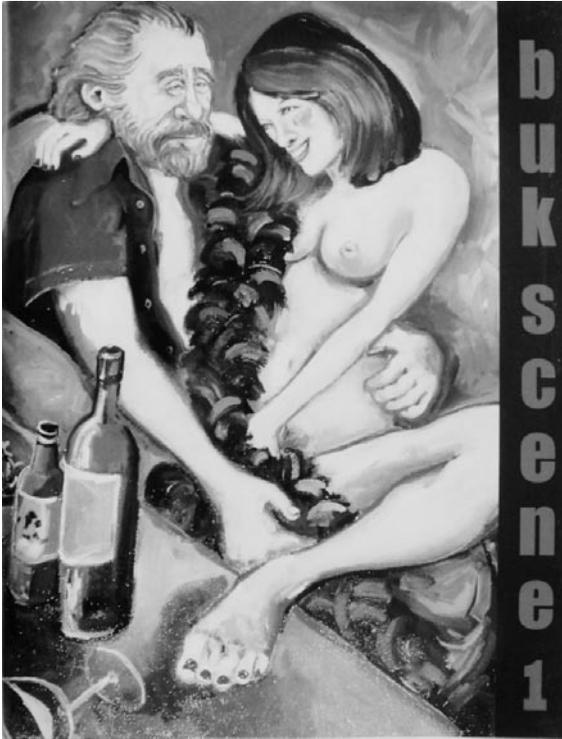
Jocelyne: What do you mean, exactly?....

Actually, I do not like to paint portraits, probably because it does not allow for interpretation, although I liked painting Bukowski, his face being so unusual.

Jan: We thought; okay, now we finally have the content of Buk Scene. A few days later a new member appeared on bukowski.net.

It was Mike Daily and his first post was long, very long, mainly about Buk's friend, the poet Steve Richmond, who is also the author of a great personal memoir on Buk which is called 'Spining Off Bukowski'.

I approached Mike Daily the same day, who had been busy with Steve Richmond for years. He had already published the magazine 'Stove-piper' in 1994, which had a focus on Steve's poetry.



The cover of BUK SCENE #1

Daily agreed to write a short essay on Richmond, 8 to 10 pages more or less. 10 pages became 16 pages, then Mike asked me, 'how about 24 pages?' Jocelyne and I discussed it and we thought, what the hell, this is a unique opportunity, a chance to publish the first mini-biography on Steve Richmond. The American Arthur Rimbaud.

Both Jocelyne and I loved Richmond's guts and originality, and thought that he deserved a spotlight, since Bukowski had befriended Steve Richmond and even written an introduction for 'Hitler Painted Roses', one of Richmond's best work.

The article which was more of a journalistic paper, turned out to be 32 pages of biography, poetry and photographs! Some that Mike had taken when he had met Richmond 15 years before.

After we received Daily's submission, Buk Scene was ready for publication. Now, it was only a matter of doing the lay-out and getting the thing printed, right Jocelyne?

Jocelyne: Yeah, and that was hell, a real hell!

The first problem that emerged was that we had no idea how to layout the big body of text that had been collected. We didn't have the required program to do it, except Word.

Jan: It was October, and we had planned to print the magazine for December. We still needed a back cover.

We contacted Lawrence Robbin who agreed to send us a beautiful photograph of Richmond, taken in 1976. He is standing outside his cave with his famous publication 'FUCK HATE', and another great photograph of Bukowski and Linda Lee Beighle, which was matched with the David Barker's recollection, 'A Visit To The Dew Drop Inn'.

Jocelyne: We had collected 112 pages. We would do it page by page. Jan had chosen to place the text a little too much to the left, at least to my liking. So I started scribbling sketches directly on the printed pages, to the right, in order to balance the weight of the page. Those sketches needed to reflect the spirit of each poem.

So then, the result was that if we'd made a typo or any kind of mistake, we would have to re-print the page and I'd re-do the drawing over and over again. 10 times in some cases. I have kept most of these pages where you can see the slow metamorphosis of the original sketches.

By then, Jan had to go back to Holland.

Jan: Jocelyne had to finish the job. We had the back and front cover, everything going in between but no foreword, no table of content, some pages left to fill, which we did with last minute decisions. I collected the short biographies of all contributors.

Those 112 pages were now in a pile at the printer's shop and they needed to be scanned, organized as a pdf in order to get printed. I could only wait and drink my wine in Europe.

Jocelyne: We had to pay our printer for all the extra time and patience, because we were still finding typos in the last hour. He needed to assist me for the final touches and color test. Although I thought that the cover picture was hazy and over exposed, I didn't ask anything more from that man.

Jan: Buk Scene Number One was now really ready to fly. We had a run of 200 numbered copies, 26 lettered and 26 numbered as a special black & white edition with red highlights.

Buk Scene was a success and it easily sold out, however, we kept a box of copies to sell at a later point in time.

However we wanted to produce Buk Scene 2 right after the first issue, since March 2009, we've decided to spend more time together, seven months in total, here in Holland.

Last August, we were also invited by The German Bukowski Society to Andernach, the birthplace of Bukowski, where we got to introduce our magazine.

That was quite an experience. At least, that's what Jocelyne told me...

We spent a lot of money on Buk Scene, didn't we?

Jocelyne: Yes we did.

Jan: Do you regret it?

Jocelyne: Not at all.

Jan: Me neither.

