

A Note from the Author

In 2020, I'm going to write a poem every day, all beginning with the same word.
That's how it started.

Composing “a year of *whens*,” 365 of them, was a New Year's Resolution, a challenging exercise of craft, an alternative meditation practice, a grand folly. I didn't know, of course, that 2020 would be the year of COVID, of massive social justice uprisings, of democracy on the brink. I didn't know 2020 would be *The Year of When*. . .

There was plenty to write about.

After several fits of uncertainty and doubt, I started feeling like maybe I'd stumbled into something special – exactly what I couldn't say, but *something*. Part historical document, part performance art, the poetry project got bigger (and better?) every day, and I set aside the novel I was working on contemporaneously, putting full concentration on my accidental obsession. I wrote the 365th poem on December 30, forgetting that 2020 was a leap year. The extra day – the 366th – was devoted to this note, a brilliant foreword penned by a careful reader, and other associated ephemera. I thought I was finished.

Throughout 2020, many of the individual poems were published in literary journals and anthologies (see “Acknowledgments” for the full list), and the entire collection was shortlisted for an international prize. But unless your name is Emily Dickinson or Robert Frost, a 365-page book of poetry is a hard sell. Indeed, dozens of publishers returned the manuscript with dozens of polite and mildly encouraging rejections. Realizing *The Year of When* would probably never be a traditional bound book, I started imagining alternative ways of presenting the project. Maybe it could be a daily Twitter thread; a digital NFT; a day-long live reading? Maybe it could be its own thing.

In 2021, I'm going to make a work of art every day, all incorporating one of the poems. That's how it continued.

I love to paint and sculpt and collage – but I also knew without help it would take me several years to complete. So I invited artist friends from around the world to collaborate, including New York-based Ethan Christy, a multi-talented filmmaker, writer, and video producer, whose expertise in Photoshop married my words with imagery. We worked together daily, starting from the premise that anything was possible: photos, videos, drawings, graffiti, whatever. Eventually – I don't remember the precise moment – we started thinking of each discrete work of art as a tile in a larger mosaic. Eventually we started thinking of *The Year of When* as a modern illuminated manuscript, a living book. Eventually we started thinking of it as an interactive experience. Eventually we decided it could be all those things.

With the assistance of our technology collaborator Todd Brown, we made what you're seeing today.

In 2022, I'm going to share two years of creative work with the world. That's how it's ending.

Or just beginning.

– MK Punky, Los Angeles