

# That was 2023

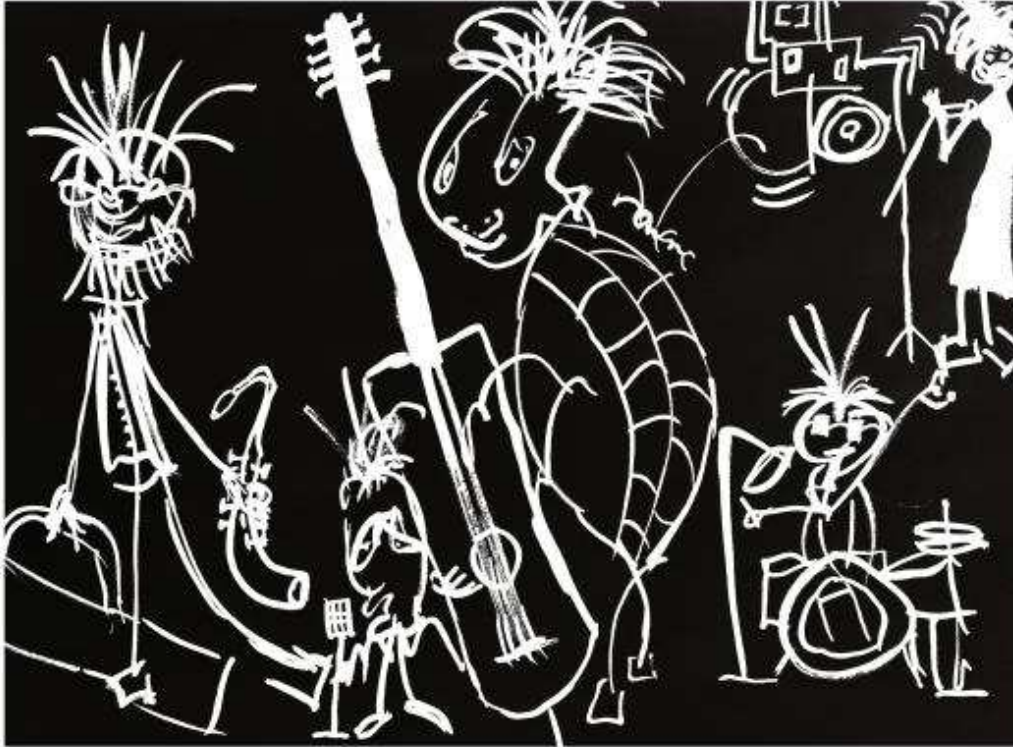


**James Knight**

Dec 13



2023 was dominated by two big projects: publication of a huge anthology, and intensive work on a sprawling collection of visual poems. It has been the most productive year of my life, in terms of volume of work created.



## January

The year started with the long-awaited publication through Steel Incisors of [handsfree](#), by Martin Wakefield and Bob Modem (aka Paul Hawkins). The book reimagines Part 1 of *Les Main libres*, a collaboration between two of the big names of French surrealism, Man Ray and Paul Eluard, in a series of elegant new translations of Eluard's poems, incorporated into vibrant paintings. The plan had been to publish about six months earlier, but my protracted negotiations through Editions Gallimard with Eluard's estate ended in an impasse, and we were not granted the necessary rights. However, Eluard died in 1952, so under French copyright law his oeuvre passed into the public domain after 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, meaning I was free to publish Martin and Bob's book on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023. When the book finally emerged it was an instant hit, and at the time of writing there is just one copy left.

## February

Tentacular published a visual poetry diptych entitled [MechaMaddona™ Consumes the Blood of the Poet](#). This was made as part six of *21 Blank Spaces*, a cycle that lost

momentum around number 12 and remains unfinished. We'll see if it picks up again one day. Meanwhile, the now-defunct Anamorphoseis published a visual poem from my Sweat Drenched Press project, *Frozen Meat*.

## March and April

I spent March and April working on a project with the working title *Cells* (later to become *Lacunae*). For these visual poems I restricted my colour palette to black, white, red and blue, and wrote for each one an accompanying critical-biographical commentary, imagining the poems had been made by a recently-deceased artist, and parodying the strenuously poetic/portentous tone of that form of writing. Great fun.

At the end of April I took part in the European Poetry Festival (masterminded by the exceptionally energetic and wonderful SJ Fowler), collaborating with sound poet Eduard Escoffet in an evening celebrating contemporary Catalan poetry. It was an honour to work with such a gifted, critically acclaimed artist. You can see our performance here:



## May

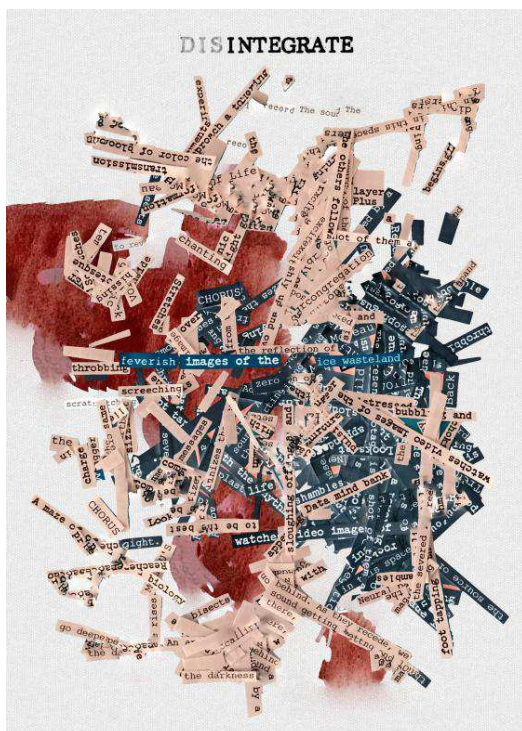
The always-inspiring Ice Floe Press published [two pieces from Cells](#).

## June

June was a quiet month, but one in which I started making plans for the visual poetry project that has since dominated my work. I have long been fascinated by hybridity, from

the starkly contrasting textual borrowings of *The Waste Land* to visual poetry's synthesis of art forms, and I wanted to explore that fascination through a series of pieces interrogating what it is to be human. Human bodies and cultures are constructed from heterogeneous materials, and the distinction between human and animal is of course wholly artificial. So the question, *What is a human?* is difficult to answer and therefore rich in artistic potential. The horror genre has often implicitly posed the question, through its presentation of the human body as an unknowable mass of cells, subject to violent metamorphoses beyond our control. Novels and movies like *The Island of Dr Moreau*, *The Thing* and *The Fly* revel in our squeamish fixation on the body and its automatic processes, its growth and growths, its animality. These texts, along with others that seem to me to follow similar lines of enquiry whilst also offering huge stylistic contrasts to modern horror (including Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the early poems of Gottfried Benn) became the stimulus materials for what was since grown into a sprawling collection of 280 visual poems (and counting!).

In the spirit of rampant hybridity and organic flux, my methodology has become freer. Where once a project's processes were rigorously uniform, a visual poem now might have a number of potential starting points – a bit of cut-up, an experiment in acrylic paint, a glitch of a previous piece. And I've abandoned the exclusively technological approaches that have characterised most of my work for several years, in favour of a blend of materiality and digital manipulation.



Visual poems from my new project



The month kicked off with a slot in a Poem Brut event organised by SJ Fowler at Hundred Years Gallery in London, in which I performed "Mastering Vocabulary" from [Cosmic Horror](#), destroying a copy of [Void Voices](#) in the process. You can see the performance here:



Later in the month, with the new visual poetry project well under way, three pieces with a strong connection to *The Thing* were published at [Psycho Holosuite](#). Meanwhile, Turkish literary magazine [Buzdokuz](#) included two recent visual poems in their new issue, and [3AM Magazine](#) published my notes towards my European Poetry Festival collaboration with Eduard Escoffet.

## **August**

Paper View Books, who had published *The Murderer Threatened* nearly two years before, published [Lacunae](#) in a handsomely glossy format.

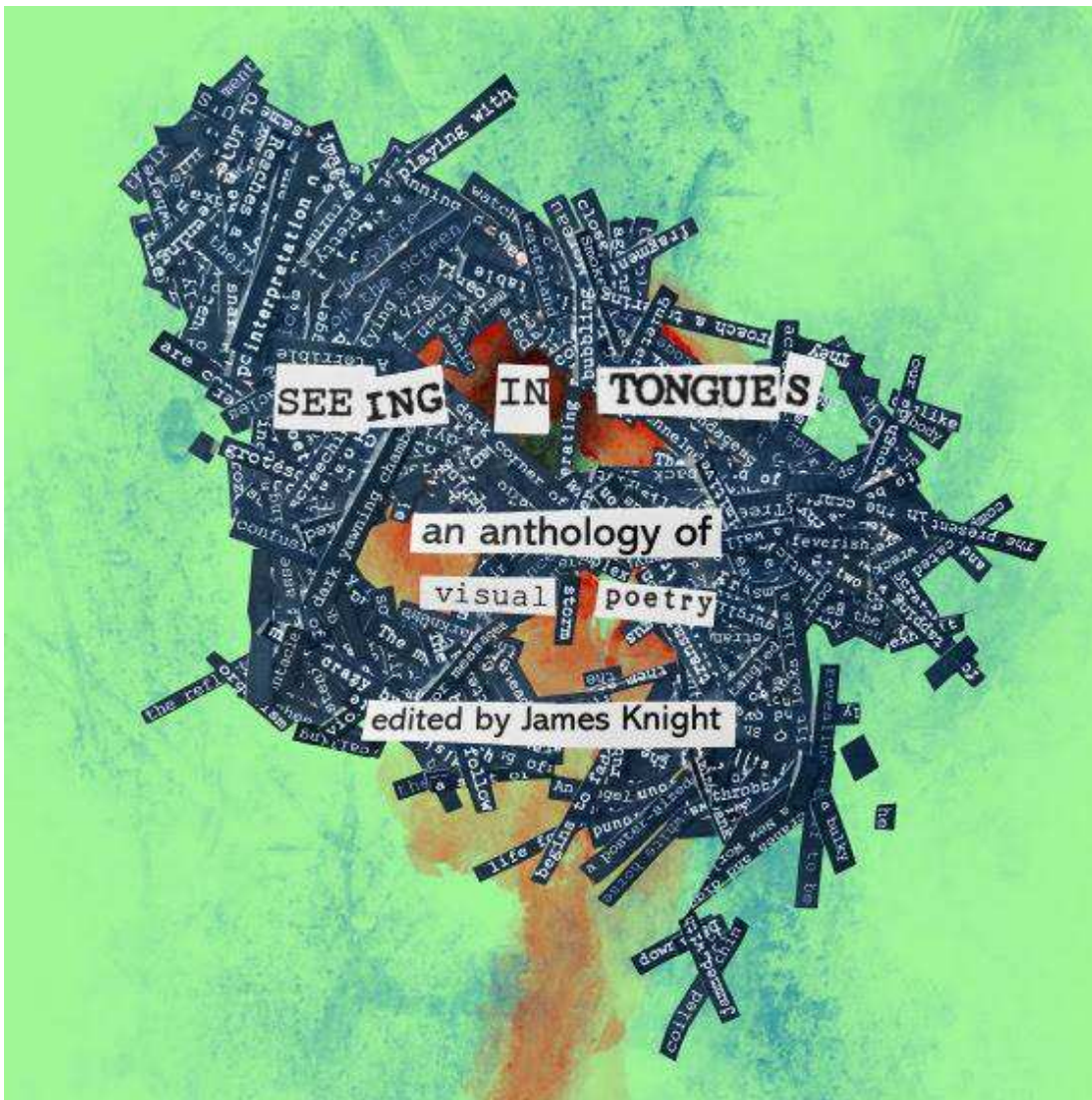


## September

I published [The Annotated Daniel](#), a book of poetry by James Roome accompanied by my visual poems, through Steel Incisors. Richard Capener kindly provided a blurb, from which this excerpt gives a good flavour of the book: "This project overloads data to the point of decay, incorporates archival language and has bloodied organisms littering texts across pages."

Readers may have spotted some similarities in style between the *Daniel vispos* and [Bloods Dream](#), my Beir Bua Press book of 2021. I actually made the Daniel pieces first, and when I started work on *Bloods Dream* I was still experimenting with freehand biomorphs based loosely on the human form (drawn with a stylus on a tablet), so there is more stylistic continuity between those two projects than is usual in my work.





The main event that month was publication of a mammoth anthology of contemporary visual poetry entitled [Seeing in Tongues](#), through Steel Incisors. When compiling the book, my intention was simply to showcase work I consider powerful, exciting and in some way provocative. As I said in my interview with Marian, a lot of visual poetry is quite anodyne, and I wanted *Seeing in Tongues* to be an antidote to that. The anthology runs to 352 pages and contains work by over 55 artists from across the world. You can find out more about it [here](#).

Tying in with publication of *Seeing in Tongues*, SJ Fowler invited me and some of the contributors to perform at a Poem Brut event in Kingston University, along with several of his frighteningly talented students!





## December

As the year hobbled to a close, more visual poems from my current project saw light of day, this time in [Always Crashing](#) and [Pamenar Press](#).