

# COMPASS

Your Guide to Tri-State Arts & Entertainment

ART: CYNTHIA HOCHSWENDER

## Looking for America, For Love, for Innocence

Kenise Barns, director of Kenise Barnes Fine Art in Kent, Conn., describes the inspiration for a show at her gallery until May 1: “The exhibition title is taken from the well-loved Simon and Garfunkel ballad recounting a bus trip across America, and the hours spent looking out the window as the landscapes slide by. The song and the exhibition share a sentiment of longing and searching for meaning. In the wake of the past year, I think we are yearning for the America that we remember in our mind’s eye. “Michigan seems like a dream to me now...”

The show title is “We’ve all gone to look for America,” a line from the almost operatic 1968 song “America,” which captures a time that was more innocent, when a young couple could take off for a trip across the country in a Greyhound bus, sharing love, cigarettes, jokes and insecurities. None of it would (really) be possible today; the jokes they



COURTESY OF KENISE BARNES FINE ART, KENT, CONN.  
**Heat, beach, summer, freedom all glow from the canvas in Sophie Treppendahl’s “Swimming in the Yuba,” featured in the Kenise Barnes Fine Art gallery show in Kent, Conn., called “We’ve all gone to look for America.”**

share and the people they see might not even make sense to a modern generation who don’t know what gabardine is and perhaps don’t realize that bow ties are not meant to be clipped on.

Paintings in the show by Sophie Treppendahl in particular capture the feeling of being in the sun at the beach, in sneakers. No masks. Also in the show is work by David Konigsberg, Thomas Sarrantonio and

Francis Sills.

The gallery is open Thursday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m., and by appointment. To learn more, go to [www.kbfa.com](http://www.kbfa.com).

### A CONCERT TO SUPPORT MUSICIANS

A benefit concert for the New England Musicians Relief Fund will be held online on Sunday, April 18, at 7 p.m.

“Berkshire Sounds: A Bash to Bring Back Music to Western Massachusetts and the Hudson Valley” will be hosted by Signature Sounds and will feature musicians from across western Massachusetts and New York’s Hudson Valley.

Artists performing as part of Berkshire Sounds include Aston Magna, Boston University Tanglewood Institute, Boston Sympho-

ny Orchestra musicians Rebecca Gitter and Julianne Lee, Chris Smither, Felipe Salles, Izy Coffey, Izzy Heltai, John Medeski, Pamela Means, Peter Mulvey, Robin O’Herin, Ruby Mack, Samirah Evans, Todd Reynolds, Adam Rothberg and more. The show will also feature special messages from Arlo Guthrie and Tanglewood Festival Chorus conductor James Burton.

Watch the show at [www.signaturesounds.com/homesessions](http://www.signaturesounds.com/homesessions) as well as the YouTube and Facebook pages of the New England Musicians Relief Fund. There is no cost to view the stream, but donations are encouraged.


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### NATIONAL POETRY MONTH: HELEN KLEIN ROSS

## Poetry That Finds The Beauty in Ordinary Words

Found poetry has always fascinated me. The first poem I published was “Three Pages Found in a Bureau for Auction,” sourced from three pages of stationery I discovered in a bureau I didn’t buy — but I did take the pages, which made me feel guilty, although not enough to keep me from writing the poem.

Two of the pages were typewritten lists: “Daily Schedule” and “Weekly Schedule.” These were daunting instructions to a maid, which included, “Wednesday, Your day off, Straighten up house before you Leave.”

The last page was a heartrending note written in pencil. It began, “Dear Sir, I’m really very sorry but you see that I’m not the right person for the job ...” and ended with, “I could not wait until you got home because you are very sweet people and this is really hard for me. I hope you will find someone real soon. P.S. I also forgot to tell you a very important problem. I sleep walk.”

A few years ago, while scrolling Twitter, I came across “The Traveler’s Vade Mecum; or Instantaneous Letter Writer,” a book of 8,466 numbered telegrams. It was published in 1853 by A. C. Baldwin, a pioneering consumer advocate who sought to save travelers time and expense at the telegraph office by numbering sentences so that a message could be sent by simply telegraphing a number, instead of having to pay by the word.

Baldwin tried to number everything — every single thing — that 19th-century travelers might want to say. Urgent questions like, “Do you know of a person going West soon, who would take a lady under his protection?” (8328).

Or, news: “A Sad Accident Has Happened” (461). Or simple assurance that one is alive:

“We abound in good cheer.” (1508).

If both sender and receiver owned Baldwin’s compendium, “I am on board a steamer ship bound for Paris” could be abbreviated to “45-Paris.” And “4205” would be all it would take to ruin someone’s Grand Tour with, “Your house is at the present moment on fire.”

As soon as I saw the book, I was smitten. My first instinct was to make a found poem out of some of the telegrams myself. My poem didn’t work. It bore nothing of the richness and range contained in the original document and I realized that what was missing was a complexity of language and syntax that could only be achieved through a multiplicity of voices.

I began reaching out to poets via technologies Baldwin never dreamed of, asking them to write a poem using as title a telegram I’d chosen for them. I created an anthology, “The Traveler’s Vade Mecum,” published by Red Hen Press in 2016. It got the attention of New York Times poetry editor Matthew Zapruder, who published one of the poems, by Julie Suarez. Its telegram title is relevant today.

**THERE WAS  
A GREAT WANT  
OF CIVILITY**

All night in the trees,  
the whispering,  
a great disorder, not the way

leaves talk among themselves  
during the day, not the rustle  
of squirrels and birds among them,

but a tossing, shiftless shadow  
weight of darkness, leaf to leaf.

I dared not close my eyes  
for fear it would have its way with me.

How could anyone sleep?  
— Julie Suarez

*Helen Klein Ross is a poet and novelist who lives in Lakeville, Conn., in a house that was built the same year A. C. Baldwin published his compendium.*



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