Excerpt from *Between: The Art of Collaboration*

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When in 2001 I was invited to write a book of poetry to be published in both Italian and English, I chose a kind of double helix of influence, writing “through” the English translations of various Italian poets I had published, along with references to visual images in several collages by Los Angeles artist John Baldessari (himself of Italian ancestry). Several friends, Paul Vangelisti and Marjorie Perloff among them, commented that the work, *Bow Down*, somehow sounded more influenced by the Italian language and landscape than by the American. Yet I was never been able to visit Italy until 2003, when I used money from a grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance to travel to Rome for a week—and where, incidentally, I began this series of cultural memoirs.

In 2000-2001, moreover—the year of that generous grant—I began an even larger work, influenced perhaps by Stein’s several “portraits,” poetic letters intricately related to the particular writing styles and voices of my poet friends. After completing what I felt were “representative” poems, that is poems which, in some small way, captured the concerns and voices of their work, I sent each of the poets a letter explaining:

This is part of an ongoing work, called *Between: Letters to Poet Friends*, in which I’ve written through the works of poet friends, asking them, in turn, to respond to the work I’ve written, either by writing “through” my poetry as a whole, through a single poem or the one I’ve just sent them, or by any other method they might desire to apply.

In writing “through,” I have taken small phrases and words from your poems combining them with personal associations. I am not responding directly to the writing, but allowing your words to create possibilities that move the text forward.