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The Poet

—on the occasion of the first interbreeding between disparate ancient species of hominids

Alex Johns

Before words were, as such,
and gestures developed together with grunts
in the ritual toolkit

to communicate
among members
of the band of

Neanderthals,

one manward ape awoke

in the cave where
he'd studied the sound of his own voice,
a single, repeated note
bouncing off the wall,

the god made of himself
calling back in there in
the earth's womb where

he'd eventually paint the hunt,
his hope's highest moment.

He had dreamed of
a field of butterflies
burying themselves
in the dirt. Then
the shape of her face,
that strange and wonderful shape,
that Day he

wandered off to a meadow,
collected all the yellow flowers
his hairy, opposable-thumb
hands could carry

and wove them
around a pyramid of branches:

a fire
of color and fragrance,

a cover of comfort
and safety, the

opposite of decay. He
carried her
away from the

shared kill
up the hill

to the chapel
with no name.



Alex Johns is an Associate Professor of English at the University of North Georgia, where he teaches creative writing and American literature. He is the recipient of the 2013 Pavement Saw Press Chapbook Prize for “Robot Cosmetics,” and his poems have appeared in *Town Creek Poetry*, *Stray Dog Almanac*, *Chaffin Journal*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *Red River Review*, *Two Drops of Ink*, *Kota Press*, *Scrivener’s Pen*, and *Bellemeade Books*, and other publications and were featured in the *No Small Measure* Georgia Broad­sides project. Alex is the managing director of Athens Word of Mouth, a monthly reading series bringing together nationally known and local writers. He can be reached at Alex.Johns@ung.edu