Poet and filmmaker Joshua Marie Wilkinson discusses his influences, writing and poets he loves
By Simon A. Thalmann
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Seattle-bred poet and filmmaker Joshua Marie Wilkinson, 32, is the author of five books, most recently “Selenography” (Sidebrow Books, 2010). He also has edited two anthologies for University of Iowa Press, including “Poets on Teaching: A Sourcebook,” which was released in August. His tour documentary “Made a Machine by Describing the Landscape,” about the band Califone, is forthcoming this fall. He currently lives in Chicago, where he is an assistant professor of English at Loyola University Chicago. We caught up with Wilkinson by e-mail to ask him about his work.

MLive: How did you begin writing poetry and why did you stick with it?

JMW: I started in middle school when a friend of mine was killed in a car accident and writing verse seemed like the only way to articulate something coherent through new grief.

ML: Who or what are the major influences on your work?

JMW: My major influences are Emily Dickinson, Andrew Marvell, Lorine Niedecker, the film “Killer of Sheep” and the song “Kansas City” by singer Damien Jurado.

ML: What is your process for writing poetry like? Do your write fast or slow? Are you more of a stream-of-consciousness writer or are you more methodical?

JMW: I write sporadically. Now quick, now painstakingly slow. Every time I think I have a set method or process it shifts markedly.

ML: What kinds of poetic structure do you find common in your poetry and why do you think you gravitate toward those particular forms? Is it a conscious or unconscious decision to use them when you use them?

JMW: Each book for me demands its own form. Sometimes I recognize it immediately; other times it takes years for the form to emerge.

ML: What kinds of themes or images do you gravitate toward in your poetry? Why? Do you use them consciously or do they appear unconsciously?

JMW: I write about desire, death, the imagined world of children, wilderness, violence, loss and pleasure. Conscious and unconscious both.

ML: What do you think is your best work and why?

JMW: I’m finishing a pentalogy of interconnected books called “No Volta.” That’s what I’m most excited by.
ML: Which writers or books do you think people should be reading now?