



THE FRALIN
MUSEUM OF ART

— AT THE —
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Writer's Eye 2017

Self-Guided Tour

Welcome to Writer's Eye 2017

We invite you to participate in *Writer's Eye 2017*, the 31st annual literary competition organized by The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia. Introduced by docents Carole Armstrong and Valerie Morris in 1986, this annual ekphrastic writing competition challenges writers of all ages to create original poetry and prose inspired by works of art. Over the past three decades, *Writer's Eye* has become the Museum's flagship educational program.

What is ekphrasis?

Both visual art and creative writing are forms of expression that give voice to the human experience, and poets have used visual art as inspiration for centuries. The word ekphrasis is a direct transcription from the Greek *ek*, "out of," and *phrasis*, meaning "speech" or "expression," and originally applied to verbal description of the visual aspects of a real or imagined object or work of art. Homer's description of Achilles' shield in Book 18 of the *Iliad* is the earliest recorded example of ekphrastic writing. Over time the concept of ekphrasis evolved from simple description of an artwork to any poetic expression or narrative inspired by a work of art. Published in 1820, John Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is one of the most famous examples of ekphrastic writing. More recently, poet Jan Greenberg has talked about her belief in "the power of art to inspire language," and author and educator Georgia Heard calls language "the poet's paint." Thus, ekphrastic writing is an ancient tradition that continues to inspire writers today!

About the competition

Compositions for *Writer's Eye 2016* can be submitted in the categories of Prose or Poetry, for grades 3–5, 6–8, 9–12, and University/Adult. Entries for grades 3-8 are judged anonymously by panels of local teachers and writing professionals. Each year two published writers from Virginia are invited to judge the high school and university/adult entries. This year the Distinguished Judge for Poetry is award-winning poet and author Jeffery Renard Allen, and the Distinguished Judge for Prose will be novelist and editor, Domnica Radulescu. Winners are honored at a ceremony in the spring, and first, second, and third-place winning entries are published in the annual *Writer's Eye* anthology. More information is available at: www.virginia.edu/artmuseum/edu.

About the selections

Art selections for *Writer's Eye 2017* have been drawn from the special exhibition, *Dealer's Choice: The Samuel Kootz Gallery 1945-1966*, as well as many works from the Museum's permanent collection. We are also pleased to include an installation by renowned contemporary artist Mark Dion, located beside the Culbreth Theatre on the Betsy and John Casteen Arts Grounds Commons.

**We hope this self-guided tour of this year's
Writer's Eye selections inspires you to make your own contribution
to the longstanding tradition of ekphrastic writing!**



Isamu Noguchi
American, 1904-1988
Lunar, 1943-1944

Magnesite with light bulb socket and wiring,
27 x 11½ x 10¾ in (68.6 x 29.2 x 27.3 cm)

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
Bequest of Buzz Miller. The Alan Groh-Buzz Miller
Collection, 1999.12.64 © 2017 The Isamu Noguchi
Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New York

1. **Isamu Noguchi** (1904-1988) was a Japanese-American sculptor who spent seven months as a detainee in an Arizona internment camp during World War II. He began making *Lunars*, as he called them, in the mid-1940s, and this body of work exemplifies his work across disciplines as well as his attention to craft. Noguchi utilized cement-like magnesite to create white, undulating surfaces on both interior ceilings and sculptures. This sculpture contains hidden electric lights that create an interplay of light and shadow on the biomorphic forms of the sculpture, and integrate internal rather than external light as an essential element of his design.

- Observe the sculpture from multiple vantage points. What adjectives can you use to describe it?
- Noguchi once designed stage-sets for theater productions. If this sculpture was a stage for a play, what would happen in that play? Who are the main characters?
- Do you think that Noguchi's detainment in the Arizona desert influenced this sculpture? What do you see that makes you say that?



Frank Stella
American, b. 1936
Jerdon's Courser, 1976

Lacquer, inks, oil sticks, and ground glass on
corrugated cardboard and aluminum,
99¼ x 126½ x 27 in (252.1 x 321.3 x 68.6 cm)

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
Museum purchase with funds from an anonymous donor,
1976.20 © 2017 Frank Stella / Artist Rights Society
(ARS), New York

2. American artist **Frank Stella** (born 1936) created *Jerdon's Courser* in the 1970s as part of a series of large non-representational paintings dominated by three-dimensional shapes known in mechanical drawing as "irregular curves." These shapes, which are generally hand-held metal or plastic templates, are often employed by marine and railroad engineers to plan routes. Stella experimented with the small templates by arranging them on graph paper, before having them produced in large scale and decorating them with paint and ground glass for the final works. In contrast with Stella's earlier monochromatic works, this series exhibits a playful improvisation and visual ambiguity of a spatial order that the artist described as "a kind of florid excitement."

- As a young man, Frank Stella painted houses with his father and cites "the house painter's tools and techniques" as influential to his work. What evidence do you see of this influence?
- Imagine participating in Stella's process of creating this painting. How would the painting be different if you changed the composition the colors, or the size of the shapes?



Pieter van den Bosch

Dutch, ca. 1613 – ca. 1663

An Artist in His Studio, 17th century

Oil on panel, 21³/₄ x 28 in (55.2 x 71.1 cm)

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia Museum purchase with Volunteer Board Endowment and the Curriculum Support Fund, 1994.2

3. This painting by Dutch artist **Peter van den Bosch** (ca. 1613 – ca. 1663) captures an interior scene of an artist at work. In the right foreground is an arrangement of objects—a large gourd-like vegetable, a head of cabbage and its fanning leaves, wooden rain barrels and a metal jug—perhaps the makings of a still-life painting. In the background, almost indecipherable, are the details of the room—a large door, a wooden chair, a bed with hanging linens. On the left side of the painting, we see the artist, his face seemingly illuminated by the canvas, his gaze and facial expression equally indecipherable. The image he creates is hidden from the viewer, who is left to speculate how far along he might be in his process.

- Look carefully. What details do you notice about the room, and about the artist depicted?
- Imagine you are the artist in this painting. How far along might you be in your process? What might be difficult or challenging about creating this painting?
- While the details of the artwork within the painting are hidden from us, the details of *this* painting are in full view. How would you characterize this painting? Is it perhaps a portrait or a self-portrait? Is it a scene from everyday life or a still life?



Francesco Caucig

Slovene, 1755-1828

Queen Esther Before King Ahasuerus, ca. 1815

Oil on canvas,
64¹³/₁₆ x 90³/₈ in (164.6 x 229.6 cm)

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia Museum purchase, 1976.19

4. In the painting *Queen Esther Before King Ahasuerus*, the neo-classical artist **Francesco Caucig** (1755-1828) depicts a moment of heightened drama in the biblical story of Queen Esther. Esther, a young Jewish woman raised by her Uncle Mordecai, is chosen by the Persian King Ahasuerus to be his queen. Ahasuerus—also known as King Xerxes—has signed a decree written by his advisor Haman that calls for the destruction of all the Jewish people in the empire. Alerted to this by her uncle, Queen Esther presents herself to King Ahasuerus to plead for her people. However, it is a capital crime to appear before the King unsummoned, and Esther risks her life to make the request. As a result of her bravery, Haman’s plans are revealed, the Jewish people are saved, and Mordecai replaces Haman as an advisor to the King.

- Imagine this is a scene from a play or a film. What do you see that creates a heightened sense of drama?
- Describe the interaction of the two main figures. What do you want to know about them?
- Empathize with Esther. What would you do in this situation?



Attributed to Artus Wolfaerts
 Flemish, 1581-1641
The Binding of Samson, ca. 1615-1620

Oil on canvas,
 77¹/₈ x 97¹/₂ in (195.9 x 247.7 cm)

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
 Museum purchase with the aid of the 1984 Bayly
 Auction, 1984.39

5. Baroque art of the 17th century is characterized by dynamic movement and intense emotion, as well as the physical and spiritual connotations of dramatic light. *The Binding of Samson*, attributed to the Flemish painter **Artus Wolfaerts** (1581-1641), captures a dramatic moment from the biblical story of Samson through a dense tangle of bodies. In the Old Testament, Samson was a legendary Israelite warrior renowned for prodigious strength derived from his uncut hair. Betrayed by Delilah after revealing the secret to his superhuman strength, Samson is attacked and bound by a host of enemies—a soldier in metallic armor, men with ropes and swords, and a snarling dog. In this painting, the strong diagonals of arms and bodies in torsion and richly detailed facial expressions contribute to the heightened drama and action in the painting.

- What shapes and angles show the tension of the story?
- Describe the emotions expressed by each person in the painting. What might they be thinking?
- If you could question one of these people to learn more about what is happening, who would you interrogate and what would you ask them?



David Plowden
 American, b. 1932
Gotebo, Oklahoma, 1969

Gelatin silver print,
 11 x 14 in (27.9 x 35.6 cm)

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
 Gift of the artist, 1997.24.51
 © David Plowden

6. **David Plowden** (b. 1932) is a documentary photographer of urban and rural America. His black and white images capture a country of changing technologies and vanishing landscapes. Plowden has said, “I have been beset with a sense of urgency to record those parts of our heritage which seem to be receding as quickly as the view from the rear of a speeding train.” This 1969 photograph taken in *Gotebo, Oklahoma* has a strong composition of shapes, lines, and textures. In the foreground, on a dusty dirt surface, is a parked car backed against the dilapidated exterior of a building. The façade of the building offers a variety of shapes and textures: the metallic edges of an air conditioner, the wooden planks and solid brick of the walls, and a Coca-Cola logo contrasting with hand-painted lettering on the a horizontal metal sign. The car occupies an almost-flattened area of space, visually connected to the background by horizontal and vertical lines.

- Look carefully. Describe the details of this place and sounds you might hear if you were there.
- Who might drive this car, and how would that person spend their day?
- Imagine you are the photographer. What interests you about this image?



Arshile Gorky
 American, 1904–1948
Making the Calendar, 1947

Oil on canvas,
 40¹/₈ x 47¹/₈ in (101.9 x 119.7 cm)

Edward W. Root Bequest, Munson-Williams-Proctor
 Arts Institute, Museum of Art, Utica, NY, 57.153
 © 2017 The Arshile Gorky Foundation / Artists Rights
 Society (ARS), New York

7. **Arshile Gorky** (1904-1948) was born in Khorkom, Armenia and moved to the US in 1918 after the death of his mother. Although Gorky attended the National Academy of Design and the Grand Central School of Art, he was primarily self-taught, learning from art he saw in museums and galleries, art books and magazines. Gorky’s work was represented in the *Intersubjectives* exhibition at the Samuel Kootz Gallery. In his catalogue for the show Kootz wrote, “the intersubjective artist invents from personal experience, creates from an internal world rather than an external one...he deals instead with inward emotions.” *Making the Calendar* is a part of an intensely personal series Gorky started towards the end of his career. In talking about his work, Gorky said, “*Abstraction allows man to see with his mind what he cannot see physically with his eyes.*”

- Representative color was very important to Gorky. What might the colors represent to you?
- Why might Gorky have left areas of canvas bare?
- Gorky claimed that he created his titles by using free association and wordplay. If you were naming this painting, what would you call it?



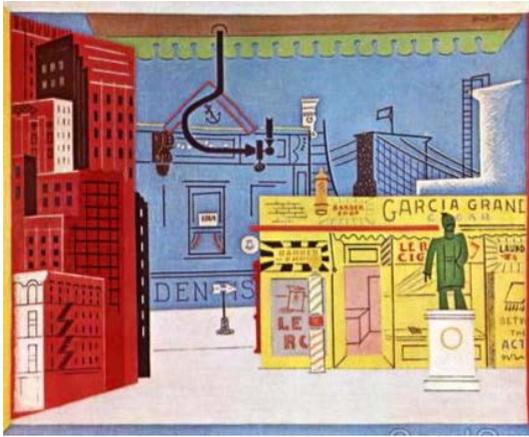
Morris Graves
 American, 1910-2001
Joyous Young Pine, 1944

Watercolor and gouache on paper on
 fabric, 53⁵/₈ x 27 in (136.2 x 68.6 cm)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
 Purchase (by exchange), 138.1945
 © Morris Graves Foundation; Courtesy of Michael
 Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY

8. **Morris Graves** (1910-2001) was born in Fox Valley, Oregon. A self-taught artist, his work was profoundly influenced by the Pacific Northwest, where he lived and worked. As a young man, he took formative trips to East Asia, where he developed a strong interest in Eastern religions, including Buddhism, Daoism, and Zen. As a result of these trips and the tenets of Zen Buddhism, nature and spirituality became central themes in Graves’ art. In *Joyous Young Pine*, Graves used watercolor and gouache on paper which was then mounted to fabric. Greens and yellows are used throughout the work and light, wispy brushstrokes create the pine tree. Part of his calligraphic style, the delicate use of white lines against a darker background add a sense of motion to the work.

- Describe the sounds and smells you might experience in the presence of this tree.
- A pacifist, Graves was jailed as a conscientious objector when he refused to enlist during World War II. This painting was made in 1944. Does this information change how you see this painting?
- What emotions or feelings does the pine tree evoke for you? What might it have represented for Graves?



Stuart Davis

American, 1892-1964

Barber Shop, 1930

Oil on canvas,
35 x 42½ in (88.9 x 108 cm)

Collection Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase
College, State University of New York.
Gift of Roy R. Neuberger, 1974.22.07. Art © Estate
of Stuart Davis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

9. Born in Philadelphia in 1892, **Stuart Davis**' father was art editor of the *Philadelphia Press* and his mother was a sculptor. Davis became a student of Robert Henri at the age of sixteen, and was influenced by other "Ashcan School" artists who were proponents of American Realism. Davis is best known for flattened, Cubist renditions of color and space, and for his modern American subject matter, such as industrialization and urban cityscapes. In *Barber Shop*, Davis juxtaposed buildings of different scales against each other in unexpected ways, and used vivid colors and jutting edges to give the painting a brightness and an improvisational quality. Davis often stated that jazz was the biggest influence on his work, and that he tried to capture the same sense of energy, spontaneity, and vibrancy he found in the music.

- Do you think this painting is referencing a specific place? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Why do you think Davis did not show any people in this painting, and how would it be different if there were people?
- In what ways does this painting incorporate elements of jazz?



Romare Bearden

American, 1911-1988

Now the Dove and the Leopard Wrestle,
1946

Oil on canvas,
23½ x 29¼ in (59.7 x 74.3 cm)

Collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art,
Ann Arbor, Michigan. Transfer from the William L.
Clements Library. Gift of Clarence Wold, February
1997. 2012/1.225. Art © Romare Bearden
Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

10. Although **Romare Bearden** (1911-1988) was born in North Carolina, Bearden's family moved to New York during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Their apartment became a gathering place for well-known black intellectuals, including Langston Hughes and W.E.B. DuBois. A key player in the post-war avant-garde in American art, Bearden used paint and collage to represent memories of the daily experiences of his life, as well as subjects informed by his African American cultural heritage. *Now the Dove and the Leopard Wrestle* is heavily influenced by Cubism, specifically the work of Pablo Picasso. The painting's title references a 1935 poem written by Federico Garcia Lorca, about the violent attack of a bull on a horse during a bullfight.

- Bearden's brightly colored animals are divided into simplified, overlapping shapes. How would you describe the figures' encounter?
- Romare Bearden entitled this painting *Now the Dove and Leopard Wrestle*, a reference to a poem about a bullfight. What do you think about that title? Would you give it a different title?



Byron Browne

American, 1907-1961
The Drummer, 1946

Oil on canvas,
 38 x 30¹/₁₆ in (96.5 x 76.4 cm)

Princeton University Art Museum
 Gift of Matthew W. Stirling, y1986-89
 © Estate of Byron Browne

11. **Byron Browne** (1907-1961), an American artist, was born in Yonkers, New York. He was formally trained in art at the National Academy of Design in New York City, and heavily influenced by European Modernism, specifically Picasso, Braque, and Miró. Like his friend Arshile Gorky, and other artists featured in this exhibition—Stuart Davis, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hoffman—Browne also worked creating murals for the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. In his painting *The Drummer*, Browne used oil on canvas to apply Cubist qualities to the image of a drummer; he flattened shapes onto a single plane and combined them to create a figural formation. The limited color palette unifies the painting, and the curved lines of the arms create a flow of movement and rhythm.

- Who do you think the drummer is performing for, and what music is he playing?
- Why do you think the artist chose these specific colors? What kind of mood do they create?



Adolph Gottlieb

American, 1903-1974
Frozen Sounds II, 1952

Oil on canvas,
 36 x 48 in (91.44 x 121.92 cm)

Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., K1956:5.
 Art © Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

12. **Adolph Gottlieb** (1903-1974) was born in New York City in 1903 to immigrant parents. Forsaking the family stationery business, Gottlieb studied art, both in New York and abroad. During WWII, there was a large influx of European artists in New York. Adolph Gottlieb interacted with several Surrealists, which inspired him to create “archetypal abstractions” that would resonate with the Jungian idea of the “collective unconscious.” In this painting, Gottlieb worked in oil to divide the canvas into two horizontal bands; the sections contrast each other through the use of color and lines. The upper band dominates the canvas with its cloudy white background and geometric shapes. *Frozen Sounds II* is a part of Gottlieb’s *Imaginary Landscapes* series. With a focus on color, layering, and calligraphic lines, Gottlieb moved away from his previous use of symbols and towards total abstraction.

- Why do you think the artist chose these shapes?
- What kind of colors do you notice? How do they affect you?
- How would you describe its sense of space? Is there any depth? Are the objects floating?



13. This mask was created by an unknown African artist in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the early 20th century. Made by the Kuba Peoples in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, this mask was once used in a sacred dance. This dance—which would have been performed at the funeral of a high-ranking individual—acted out the story of a king (Woot Mwaash aMbooy), a queen (Ngady Mwaash aMbooy), and the man (Bwoom) the queen loves. Throughout the dance, Ngady and Bwoom attempt to be together, but the jealous Woot prevails. This mask was worn by Woot. The decoration and shape of the mask allude to wealth and royalty in the Kuba culture. The intricate beadwork is in a kingly pattern; the cowry shells used are a form of currency; and the elephant trunk-like shape on the top of the mask reiterates the strength of the king, as elephants are associated with royal power and the tusks suggest wealth and fertility.

Unknown Congolese Artist

Kuba Peoples,
Democratic Republic of Congo, Africa
Royal Mukenga (Mwaash aMbooy) Mask,
20th century

Beads, raffia, wood, cloth, and cowrie shells,
20³/₄ x 22¹/₂ x 19¹/₂ in (52.7 x 57.2 x 49.5 cm)

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
Gift of Robert Navin, 2010.12

- Imagine wearing this mask. Describe that experience.
- Think of other symbols of wealth and power. What might you wear to feel powerful?



Unknown Indian Artist

Tamil Nadu, India

Shiva Nataraja (Shiva as Lord of the Dance), 17th century

Bronze, 37 x 26 x 15 in (94 x 66 x 38.1 cm)

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia Museum purchase with support from an anonymous donor, Merry Dougherty, Calvert Saunders Moore, Thomas L. Piper III, Steven H. and Frances G. Sheinhouse (by exchange), Edith Warner, Lane Becken, Candace Berlin, Suzanne Berry, Anne Bowen, Margie Burris, Madonna Calender, Melba Campbell, Sara Cary, Claire Casey, Patricia Cooke, Ruth Cross, Susan W. Dallas, Sarah duPont, Blair G. Ege, Daniel Ehnbohm, Rosemary Erdmann, Camilla Fair, Betty L. Fall, Flip Faulconer, Lisa Fingeret, Susan Flury, Barbara Fried, Claire Gargalli, Gunilla Godfrey, Stapleton Gooch, Margaret Hart, Jill Hartz, Bebe Heiner, Mary Howard, Charles Hurt, Allison Innes, Peter Kimball, Mary-Mac Laing, Judith Lesiak, Anne Lindemann, Joan Longley, Dana F. Lynch, Ellen MacColl, Beth Maier, Margaret Marsh, Nancy McIntyre, Amanda Megargel, Betty Middleditch, Sally Nelson, Caroline Nunley, Susan Overstreet, Judy Pace, Gene N. Paterson, Jean F. Patteson, Jennifer Reut, Katrina Reut, Carol Roberts, James Roberts, Sally Roberts, Sineath Roberts, Jan Roden, Jo Rowan, Karen Ryan, Cynthia Schroder, Hunter Smith, Sandra Stamp, Caralyn Stevens, Anne Strickler, Virginia Syer, Helena Taylor, Pat Thomas, and the Curriculum Support Fund, 2004.9

14. This bronze sculpture of the Hindu god Shiva Nataraja comes from Tamil Nadu, a region in southern India. Shiva is a principal god in the polytheistic Hindu religion. Shiva Nataraja presents Shiva's form as the "Lord of the Dance." The sculpture presents the ongoing cycles of creation and destruction. Set within a halo of flames, Shiva dances with a small drum, a *damaru* in his upper right hand, which represents the creation of the universe. The flame in the upper left hand, *agni*, represents its destruction. His left foot is raised in motion, while his right foot trods upon on the back of a small figure, *apasmara pususha*, the personification of ignorance. To Hindus, sculptures of Shiva Nataraja are thought to embody the deity; therefore, when sculptures are taken outside of the temple, more worshippers are able to properly participate in *darshan*, or the obtainment of blessings by beholding the god.

- What do you think the figure is trying to communicate? What does the facial expression and pose tell you?
- How does the artist communicate Shiva's power?
- How does the sculpture's original function change when placed in a museum context? Do you think the god's power is still present?



15. Taking his inspiration from Renaissance cabinets of curiosities, contemporary American artist Mark Dion (b. 1961) is renowned for his installations, which explore and critique collecting practices and systems of archaeological classification. Art critic Michael Harvey wrote, “Dion brings to the viewer a time when an amateurs with vigorous minds and insatiable curiosity could scour the world looking for connections, inferences, and relationships across multiple fields and disciplines.” Dion has said, “I really love the world of stuff,” and his site-specific installations are uniquely connected to the locations where they are installed. Rather than building this structure himself, Dion purchased it from a manufacturer in Virginia, and transported it on a flatbed truck. All of the objects inside *Virginia Curiosity Shop* were gathered from Virginia thrift stores, antique shops, attics, and basements, and are arranged according to the classification systems of some unknown, absent collector.



- Entering the house is not allowed, despite the inviting atmosphere and the alluring number of items inside. What do you think Dion was trying to accomplish by locking people out?
- The items inside are meant to represent what Dion believed to be a bygone rural Virginia. What aspects of the house itself and the items inside represent a bygone past?
- Imagine someone lived in this space. Describe them. What is their life like?
- What would you add to the room if you had the opportunity?

Mark Dion

American, b. 1961

Virginia Curiosity Shop, 2017

Assemblage installation in wood frame structure with metal roof, 120 x 180 x 288 in (304.8 x 457.2 x 731.5 cm)

Courtesy of the Office of the Provost and the Vice Provost for the UVA Arts, The Fralin Museum of Art, and the McIntire Department of Art at the University of Virginia © Mark Dion and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York

