

WRITER'S EYE 2023



Self-Guided Tour

Welcome to Writer's Eye 2023

We invite you to participate in Writer's Eye 2023, the 37th 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 three decades, Writer's Eye has become the museum's flagship educational program, inspiring generations of writers as a mainstay of school curricula throughout central Virginia.

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 *Illiad* 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 Selections

This year, we have selected seven works from The Fralin's permanent collection and one local mural. As The Fralin responds to the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, tours will continue to be conducted virtually and in-person this year. Participants can also engage asynchronously through online resources including our Spotlight Talk videos on YouTube.

About the Competition

Compositions for Writer's Eye 2023 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. This year, our high school and adult entries will be judged by Writer's Eye Fellows, Caroline Erickson and Mack Gregg, Graduate students in the UVA Creative Writing MFA Program. Winners are honored in the spring, and five winning entries from each category will be published in the annual Writer's Eye anthology. To learn more about the competition, please visit our website at: <https://uvafralinartmuseum.virginia.edu/program/writers-eye-2023>

Restructuring the Winner Selections

Perhaps the most important part of what we do here at the museum involves the constant evaluation and re-evaluation of the way we do things. We continue to learn and work toward making the museum and all of its programs more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible. In that spirit of learning and growth, we've decided this year to experiment with a new way of selecting winning entries. Whereas in the past we have selected 1st, 2nd, 3rd place, and honorable mentions in each category, this year we are stepping away from the hierarchical ranking system and instead selecting 5 winning entries in each category to be printed in the anthology. All winners will be awarded an honorarium of \$100.

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!



Melvin Edwards, American, born 1937.
Deni Malick from the series **Lynch Fragments**, 1999.
 Welded steel, 12 x 10 x 9 inches (30.5 x 25.4 x 22.9 cm).
 Collection of The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia.
 Museum purchase with support from the FUNd, 2001.8.
 © 2023 Melvin Edwards / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Melvin Edwards (b. 1937) is an American artist known for his metal sculptures. He started his artistic career in Los Angeles in the 1960s at the height of the Civil Rights movement, and has since moved around the country and the world, living and working in New York City, Los Angeles, Senegal, Zimbabwe, and more. Named after a farm in Senegal where Edwards has a studio, this sculpture highlights Edwards' skillful manipulation of 'familiar form' objects: often industrial and agricultural tools. Edwards exhibits the sculptures in the *Lynch Fragments* series roughly at eye-level.

- How might the placement, and sizing (similar in size to a human head) humanize the object? How might your experience of the work change if it were on a pedestal?
- Think about the sculpture's components. Make a list of possible uses. What do you notice? What connections do you have to these objects?
- Look carefully. What do you notice about Edwards' welding process? How might these familiar objects take on new meaning together?

George Inness (1825-1894) was a New England painter renowned for his poetic, living landscapes. This Hudson River Valley landscape shows a lone figure and horse on the edge of a wild, deep green forest, with an old mill in vibrant yellow to the right. Inness believed certain colors to be directly linked to elements of his faith and spirituality - green is grounded in the natural world, blue represents the spiritual realm, and yellow joins the two. The vibrant color and highly gestural style of this painting shows Inness's confidence in his own unique vision - as you look, notice the movement in this painting, from the splash in the foreground, to the rush of the water on the mill.

- What feelings do the colors in Inness's painting evoke for you?
- Does this landscape remind you of anywhere you've been before?
- Inness said that no great artist ever finished a painting. What might be 'unfinished' about this work? What effect does the level (or lack) of painted finish have on the overall scene?



George Inness, American, 1825-1894.
Old Mill, Marlborough-on-the-Hudson, 1882.
 Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 inches (55.88 x 71.12 cm).
 From the promised collection of W. Heywood Fralin and Cynthia Kerr Fralin.



Patrick Nagatani, American, 1945-2017, and **Andrée Tracey**, American, born 1945.

Sioux City, Iowa from the series **Radioactive Inactives**, 1987-1988. Chromogenic print, 20 in x 16 inches (50.8 x 40.6 cm). Collection of The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia.

Gift of the artists through the courtesy of Ray A. Graham III, 1989.21.11.

© Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracey

Sioux City, Iowa is part of the series, *Radioactive Inactives* by photographer **Patrick Nagatani** (1945-2017) and painter **Andrée Tracey** (b. 1948). This series, created in the 1980's, explores the looming threats of nuclear war through playful, ominous photographs. Nagatani was born to Japanese parents in Chicago, ten days after the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed over 100,000 Japanese civilians. The Cold War followed, and the ever-present possibility of atomic war existed at the center of American life and culture. It is from this fascination with the world-altering power of atomic technology that Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracey's prolific collaboration was born. Together, the two artists collected props, hired actors, and constructed elaborate sets for the photographs in this series.

- The threat of nuclear war was an ongoing concern during both Nagatani and Tracey's formative years. What are some of the global issues of your generation? How have they shaped how you view the world?
- What do you think this photograph communicates about the individual in this photograph? What are we supposed to think about them?
- This image is full of small details, but there is one thing we cannot see: the TV screen. What do you think might be playing?

Juan Manuel Echavarría (b. 1947) is a Colombian photographer who was born in Medellín in 1947. He began his career as a fiction author, inspired by the transportive power of the written word. As he neared fifty, however, he grew stagnant in his own writing and decided to trade in his pen for a camera. "It was like jumping over a precipice," says Echavarría of his shift to photography. For his *Silencios* series, which he began in 2010, Echavarría embarked on a quest to document abandoned schoolhouses throughout Los Montes de María, a mountainous area in northeastern Colombia that has been impacted heavily by the ongoing civil war. The local population was largely displaced by the conflict, leaving many of its buildings desolate, never to return to their former states of use.

- What might this space have been like before it was abandoned? What might it have meant to the people who once occupied it?
- How can an empty place tell a story on its own, without people or characters present?



Juan Manuel Echavarría, Colombian, born 1947.

Silencio con Rayo from the series **Silencios**, 2011. Chromogenic print mounted on aluminum, artist's proof 3/3, 15 3/4 x 24 inches (40 x 61 cm).

Collection of The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia.

Gift of the artist, 2022.2.24.

© Juan Manuel Echavarría



Sam Gilliam, American, 1933-2022.

Alphabet I, II, and III, 1968.

Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 90 inches (177.8 x 228.6 cm).

Collection of The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia.

Gift of Janice and Henry Peskin, 2022.12.1.a-c.

© 2023 Sam Gilliam / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Sam Gilliam (1933-2022) was most active in Washington, D.C., as part of the Washington Color School. Gilliam was interested in experimenting with color and created large-scale installations that played with the relationship between color and form. He would often paint directly on un-stretched canvas, then stretch and shape it into forms that responded to the space around the work in creative and innovative ways. In *Alphabet I, II, and III*, Gilliam folded the canvases before the paint was dry, creating the layered colors and textures we see here. The scale of the paintings and their presence as a group brings special attention to the space and the viewer. Gilliam appreciated the possibilities that art opens up for its audiences, he once said, "Art is contained in the various ways that things call attention, it gets you standing still... and gets you coming back."

- How do you feel when you observe *Alphabet I, II, and III*? Do certain colors evoke certain emotions for you?
- As you're looking, consider Gilliam's process. Can you imagine the sensation of pouring and folding thick acrylic paint? What about stretching the canvas onto a frame? Where else do you see evidence of Gilliam's process?

Sheila Isham (b. 1927) created *Huan Dispersion Wind with Water* in a warehouse with a large canvas hung up on a wall. Wearing a gas mask, she spray painted wispy forms onto the canvas using found objects like sea grass. This painting was created while Isham was immersed in studies of Eastern philosophy and meditations in Hong Kong. The specific philosophy referenced by the painting's title is that of an ancient Chinese text, called the I Ching. The I Ching is a set of 64 hexagrams, six line figures which detail one of 64 states of change. This philosophy emphasizes the importance of change in obtaining a deeper understanding of the universe. Isham has said of her process, "Painting to me is being open to what's around me, to what's happening, and being receptive to what's within and being willing to change..."

- Many visitors compare the colors and shapes in this painting to clouds or fog. Does this painting remind you of an experience in nature?
- Imagine entering the world of the painting. What do you hear? See? Taste? Smell? Write down a few descriptive words or phrases that come to mind.
- How might you begin a story about a journey through the painting?



Sheila Isham, American, born 1927.

Huan Dispersion Wind with Water, 1973.

Acrylic on canvas, 87 1/4 x 128 inches (221.6 x 325.1 cm).

Collection of The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Jager, 1976.28.

© 2023 Sheila Isham / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Unrecorded Artist (possibly Baule),
Côte d'Ivoire.
**Hand-painted Sign Illustrating
Hairstyles for Men**, early 1990s.
Paint on particle board, 16 1/4 x 31
1/4 x 7/8 inches (41.3 x 79.4 x 2.2 cm).
Collection of The Fralin Museum of
Art at the University of Virginia.
Gift of Gilbert and Jean Jackson,
2022.16.3.

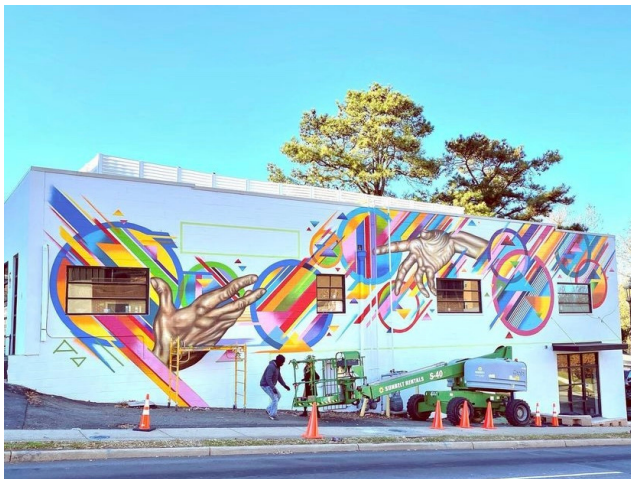
These two signs are examples of a genre of painted hairstyle signs used throughout West Africa in countries such as Cameroon, Senegal, the Central African Republic, Togo, Benin, Ghana as well as Ivory Coast. While we don't know the identity of these two artists, we know that signs such as these can be created by a sign artist, or even painted by shop owners themselves. The hairstyles can vary from traditional styles with cultural and historical meanings to trendy, contemporary cuts inspired by popular figures. Nigerian photographer, Andrew Esiebo, traveled throughout West Africa studying barbershops, describing them as "public intimate spaces" where people share knowledge and stories.

- As you look at these paintings, consider your own experiences in hairstyling spaces. What connections can you make between your experiences and these paintings?
- Can you find examples of hairstyles worn by celebrities that have become popular fashion trends?
- How do the men's hairstyles and women's hairstyles paintings differ?



Unrecorded Artist (possibly Baule),
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Paint on particle board, 16 1/4 x 31
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Gift of Gilbert and Jean Jackson,
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Art in the Community



Hamilton Glass, American, born 1981
and **Jae Johnson**, American, born 1987
10th and West Main Street Hands, 2021
20 x 90 ft (6.1 x 27.4 m)
Charlottesville Mural Project
Used with permission of the artists
© Hamilton Glass and Jae Johnson

This mural at 10th and Main Street in Charlottesville, is a collaboration between Richmond artist, **Hamilton Glass**, and Charlottesville artist, **Jae Johnson**. The partnership began when the artists were approached by the Charlottesville Mural Project to collaborate on a mural for the Starbucks at 10th and Main. According to Johnson, it was important to both of the artists to represent the historically Black community of the 10th and Page neighborhood by using darker skin-tones for the hands, or "the hands of Black folks," as he describes them. The vibrant colors that make up the geometric lines and shapes, Johnson said, were the result of in-the moment color choices between the two artists. As you can see in this photograph, the artists used scaffolding and a lift to create this large scale mural.

- What do you notice about the hands in this mural?
What might their movement communicate?
- What do the bright colors and shapes remind you of?

Scan the code to watch the
interview with Jae Johnson:

