

ART *lines*² Poetry Competition Award Winners



Thursday, April 23, 2015, 6:30 p.m.

Presented by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Public Poetry

ART *lines* ²

Welcome

Jay Heuman, Participatory Programs Specialist, MFAH

Introduction

Fran Sanders, Founder & Director, Public Poetry

About Ekphrastic Poetry

David M. Parsons, 2011 Texas Poet Laureate

ADULT WINNING POEMS

Introduction

Lelia Rodgers, Public Poetry, Board President

About the Artwork

*Anna Tahinci, Ph.D., Head of Art History,
Glassell School of Art, MFAH*

*Roman, Sarcophagus Depicting a Battle between Soldiers and Amazons
(Warrior Women), 140–170 A.D., marble, the Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston, Museum purchase funded by the Agnes Cullen Arnold
Endowment Fund in memory of Peter C. Marzio.*



Four Days After the Viewing

You can tell a true war story by the way it never seems to end. Not then. Not ever.
Tim O'Brien, from *The Things They Carried*

Poem by Christa Forster

*Read by Tamarie Cooper,
Actress/Director, Catastrophic
Theater*



Four days after viewing *Sarcophagus Depicting a Battle between Soldiers and Amazons* (c 140 - 170 AD), I'm still depressed. At first, I figure *hormones*, but this is not the time for that. *Holidays?* Xmas, New Year, all this taxing jazz -- but I'm a teacher with weeks of vacation -- why should I be blue? I muse upon a former love who just revealed his newest lover: I'm not happy for him. I wish

I could be kinder. But he is not it either -- my melancholy's cause. Doubtful these are Amazons; they're women, sure, I see their breasts. Who can't? The "light, tightfitting tunics" they wear, called *himations*, cast their breasts into relief, which makes them suspect Amazons: that word is Greek for "without breasts" -- "a" (without); "mazos" (breasts). The fabled warriors maimed themselves for their arrows

to shoot truer. These fully-formed astride, those cornered four abased before their victors, affirm that men desire women on their knees but not dismembered. And whose minced words are these? "Their fallen sisters lie on the ground"? *Get real!* they're being trampled! The female comrades drive their horses over heads of their own dead. Call a double-headed axe a double-headed axe. For once. The sarcophagus' base

ART *lines*²

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Theater*

design resembles the menudo tripe my father used to eat on Sundays or the fused vertebrae in my husband's spine. And now, out of the blue, the gods have sent a mansplainer, a high school boy the age I teach, wearing a heather-gray Abercrombie & Fitch wifebeater, the words "YES! #thatswhatshesaid" stamped in black across his chest. A girl beside him, navy hoodie zipped up tight, hugs her clipboard, listens when he says,

"Theirs was a military culture, the Romans'. Note the style, how it's like the arc de triomphe." She looks, stays silent. They turn and walk away.



About the Artwork

*Anna Tahinci, Ph.D., Head of Art History,
Glassell School of Art, MFAH*

Thomas Gainsborough, *Coastal Scene with Shipping and Cattle*,
c. 1781–82, oil on canvas, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston.



ART *lines*²

Poem by Carolyn Dahl

*Read by Tamarie Cooper,
Actress/Director, Catastrophic
Theater*



Art Preserves What Can't be Saved

(Coastal Scene with Shipping and Cattle by Thomas Gainsborough)

One cow separates herself from the herd,
stretches her neck, too far if you grew up
hugging cows. She stands on a cliff,
which our timid, clumsy animals would
never do, and points her horns toward
incoming ships. This is a fictional cow,
artifice from a painter's brush, yet the way
she lifts her head, smells the sea air, seems
real, as if she thinks she's come to the end
of fences, senses a reward of salt.

Once I sailed away on the broad back of a pet cow
brown as this one. We were unpartable shadows,
inventing our shapes in the summer creek,
splashing through ripples of tadpoles, pushing
against the current, believing we were going
somewhere, but eventually flowing back home,
happy and wet as the newly-hatched frogs
singing from the tip of her dripping tail.

ART *lines*²

Poem by Carolyn Dahl

*Read by Tamarie Cooper,
Actress/Director, Catastrophic
Theater*



Under the museum lights, the cow vanishes
in the glare of varnish as if its thinly painted
body needed to escape from the intensity
of eyes. My cow never returned from the dark
barn of profit. How I miss the weight of her
on our land. I thought she would always be there
like a childhood dress I imagine I can still wear.

I left the calm mythology of farms, never expected
to see her again, safe in a gold frame. Other people
pass by quickly. It's only a painting of a cow
and clouds, nothing they need to reclaim. I should
move on too. The guard is growing uneasy. He
doesn't know this is my memory pinned to the wall,
that I am riding the warm back of a sweet cow,
coaxing her down the dangerous cliff to the edge
of the painting where we jump the frame's fence.

ART *lines*²

About the Artwork

*Anna Tahinci, Ph.D., Head of Art History,
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Akan, Linguist Staff (whole and detail), 19th–20th century, wood and gold leaf, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Alfred C. Glassell, Jr.

ART *lines*²

Poem by Marie Chambers

*Read by Tamarie Cooper,
Actress/Director, Catastrophic
Theater*



Natural Born Linguist

the ears of the elephant ache
might be the altitude
as the tip top dog
on the talking stick
or the he who twists
his tongue to shape
ambitions born in the biggest hut
near the great green plain
where the earth
bleeds diamonds
rivers ooze gold
cocoa trees sway
sweet crude oil
sings a noisy lullaby
floods hammocks
with money
picked from the paws
of 20th century drug lords
and if there's any cure in talking
you can thank your mother
her blood's to blame
her magic
how the sound of her

ART *lines*²

Poem by Marie Chambers

*Read by Tamarie Cooper,
Actress/Director, Catastrophic
Theater*



extracted venom from tantrums
diagnosed truth
when tears
festered
in your eyes
baby boy
oh yes all hail the chief
whose legacy
existed in your voice
but lives on in your golden cane
in the glass case of a museum
disenfranchised
without you
its shadow isn't talking
as only a true listener
can speak freely

ART *lines*²

About the Artwork

*Anna Tahinci, Ph.D., Head of Art History,
Glassell School of Art, MFAH*

Gustave Caillebotte, *Mademoiselle Boissière Knitting*, 1877, oil on canvas,
the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Mrs. Audrey Jones Beck.



ART *lines*²

Poem by Deborah Bennett

*Read by Tamarie Cooper,
Actress/Director, Catastrophic
Theater*



Knotted: Impression

Interior. *Mademoiselle à tricoter*, black--clad, cheeks a mirror of marquetry. Jutted lip, dropped stitch. Wool, virgin, plates the lap. Cinched stitches seize whale

bone needles. Busy work, woman's work. No longer in demand by queen or bishop. No silk hosiery or liturgical gloves. Craft, not art.

Nomadic the craft. Artifacts, water logged, surfaced in fields. Fishgarth, diamond knot of twig and stick, damming Northern waters gave way to braided rope,

pine tar slick. *Nålbinding*, short--shrift yarn, wool stitches looped over thumb. Viking victors dispersed knotted nets upon shore after shore.

Parallel path of knot and stitch, double needle, the true knit, born in the purled silt of the Nile. Fertile crescent of cotton and silk. Stockings fine gauged. What is

known: the hands that wielded needles also grasped split reeds dipped in carbon, tracing hieroglyphs, sacred writing, knitted as the script goes—right, left, right, left.

Coriolis of craft: A Maghreb sweep of delta, desert, mountain. Conscripted Copts, pressed to service. Sixty stitches to the palm, maze of indigo in bone white socks. *Khufic*

blessings circled the ankles of Berbers tailed by trade winds, threading the strait. Al--Andalus, road to ecclesia. *Baraka* gave way. *Bendiciones* for the reign.

ART *lines*²

Poem by Deborah Bennett

*Read by Tamarie Cooper,
Actress/Director, Catastrophic
Theater*



Dragnet of history—caliphates, crusades. The gyre of goods and craft, carried from coast to coast as Zeus once carried Europa on his back. In the shadow

of Roman ruin, Knitting Madonnas graced the altars. Knitting in the round, haloed, hallowed as the attendant babe. Leaves gold laid, in--laid, domestic deity.

In the hull, furrows formed, stitches coalesced. Portable craft at sea. Men's work. Oscillating pattern of wave and stitch. Knit, purl, knit, purl. Washed up on

dry land. Guilds flooded the continent. Cottage industry preceded mechanized industry. Finally, master knitters at court bowed down to Victorian ladies, parlor art.

Interior. *La tricoteuse* framed by chintz paper, spattered with flowers, in miniature. Pattern descended from India by way of Persia. Caillebotte's delight: textiles, low

drama, alloy of style. Canvas daubed in swift strokes, impression. No dancer backstage, blue--hued flowers *en scène*. Subject quotidian, leisure, not trade.

Swirl of paint, not quite still life. Old Norse, German, Middle English. Words mutate. Arabesque of stitch and stroke. *Cnyttan, knytja, knütten*, knot.

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Jim Love, *Area Code*, 1962, steel, cast iron and lead, courtesy of the Alley Theatre, gift of The Brown Foundation, Inc., Houston, TX.
© The Estate of Jim Love

ART *lines*²

Can't Help but See

after Jim Love's *Area Code*

Poem by Daryl E. Scroggins

*Read by Tamarie Cooper,
Actress/Director, Catastrophic
Theater*



In Houston, a long way from the ranch, Daddy follows Mama like everywhere we go might be church. I say nothing, but to keep me quiet they buy me a box of wood blocks with rubber designs on one side that you press on an ink pad and then on paper. In the hotel I set to work in a sound. Somewhere lots of things are not stopping even for a minute. I fill a whole pad of paper with cows and chickens and windmills, and then move on to newspaper edges. Soon the ink makes only ghosts, but I can see shapes on any blank wall.

We go to a theater and stand for a long time—not even to see a movie. There is art by the stairs and Daddy won't look at Mama. But when she smiles he says “No hanger-hoops on that gate.”

And then we are driving back to where Texas dips into the top of Mexico. I see a pump-jack and whisper to Mama that it looks like it's sewing. She looks, and I see the side of her face when she leans her forehead against the glass. “Everything made of wind and metal,” she says.

I get sick after looking up close at everything moving too fast, but at last we are home where the stars live. Mama puts a cool cloth on my forehead. “Try to sleep,” she says. “Just close your eyes and imagine an open window. Pretty soon a dream will show up in it.” I think about that. For a long time I see only what I already know is there. After a while, though, it's the same but in a different way, because I know how to sleep.

ART *lines*²

TEEN WINNING POEMS

Introduction

Long Chu, Associate Director, Writers in the Schools (WITS)

ART *lines*²

Poem by Stephanie Casio

*Read by Lily Bowman, WITS
Student*



Sarcophagus

Against the red charcoal embers of dawn
shadowed silhouettes of enemy soldiers
march to the River Styx together.

On hunched backs,
they carry their comrades,
their friends and champions.

Their armor is draped
in heavy capes of blood.
The sulfur flames of Hades sting fresh wounds
and give the living trembling knees,
while the entranced dead
shuffle forward.

The Romans and the Amazons take the cold hands
of the almost bygone –
their tanned skin fading,
skeletal joints filling the void in-between.

Coins were slipped through blue lips
like pomegranate seeds
and green torches guided their path
to the mouth of hell.

In wistful voices
of a haunting lyre tune
the soldiers mourned:
“May you rest in Elysium –”

“ – brave brethren.”
“ – selfless sisters.”

ART *lines*²

Poem by Lindsay Emi

*Read by Lily Bowman, WITS
Student*



Sketch of a Dreamscape *(After Coastal Scene)*

It came to me like an old dream;
you and I, swift and leading the cattle
first to the edge of the sea, then to
a boat carved from a rib. There was
no stumbling. And overhead, the clouds
were big enough to swallow, white enough
to touch. Maybe we had walked the desert
to get here, trusting the sturdiness of the animal.
Maybe we'd scraped the cows from the grass
of a farm bright and red as the day. Or if not,
then you'd yoked them to my waist. By chance
I dragged the flock to harbor, smelling of
silver and salt. I strained with you. I remember
all the lightness--wind, sail, water. These things
I wanted, even in visions. But the cattle,
the earth, the oil--those were light too. The life
and the beating heart. What kept me from waking.

ART *lines*²

Poem by Michelle Glans

*Read by Lily Bowman, WITS
Student*



Golden Tusks

Ghana builds this wooden staff,
glazed with gold
and coated with tradition.

A linguist grasps
the golden elephant's trunk;
the chief is waiting.

His eyes drip like ivory
and he presses his ear to the town.

"Akyeame."

The elephant speaks in a whisper,
as if afraid to wake Africa.

ART *lines*²

Poem by Sarah Harder

*Read by Lily Bowman, WITS
Student*



The Wallpaper

Oil lighting casts shadows
over pastel roses, crawling up the walls.

They stand watch over a Grandmother
with puckered lips and raised eyebrows,

knotting white yarn together
with twin needles, into apple blossoms.

She never notices them,
or their swaying dance,

thorn with thorn,
petal interlaced with petal,

blown together by a sun-tinged breeze
from the touch of a paint brush.

ART *lines*²

Poem by Jemma Fisher

Read by Lily Bowman, WITS student



WEATHERING

(area code)

we are made of rust,
bone, flowers,
the last drips from the leaky faucet
the low sounds
of the cattle
late at night.

our blood rushes up
like slick black oil
through steel pipe veins.

we collect years
like rings on a tree stump,
nicks in a saw blade,
road signs along a solitary highway.

in our hands we carry paint cans,
umbrellas, bed frames,
hatchets, regrets,
patience, tobacco tins.

we last through dry spells,
through rainy weather
when the nights are long.
our words seep into the soil.
we wait for the flowers to come up in the spring.

ART *lines*²

On Judging the Adult Competition

Roberto Tejada, Poet and Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Professor of English and Creative Writing, University of Houston

ANNOUNCEMENT OF
ART *lines*²
GRAND PRIZE WINNER
\$1000 goes to...
Carolyn Dahl!

Congratulations to the poets!



Thank you to the audience!