

Virtual Drawn to Poetry with Cynthia Neely - April 28, 2020



“Tinder of August” – oil & cold wax – Cynthia Neely

Flashpoint by Cynthia Neely

Through the gag and cloy
of spring ceanothus – so-called snowbrush,
for her white blossoms –
gasoline bush, for her inclination
to leap to flame at the first lick
and flicker –

I walk, watch the buzzards tilt and tip.

Spring – for now – but the earth is turning
to dust, the balsamroot and lupine,
phlox and paintbrush, all seeking
what moisture they can before the last wilt of June
becomes the tinder of August.

No one I know knows
the point at which there will be sufficient vapor
to ignite in air,

the vultures’ creviced ground nest vulnerable,
the coyotes’ den expendable.

One day I’ll have to leave this place,
this place of our careful making, front door ajar,
food on the counter. Save the dogs, leave the rest. Run
the well dry. Run.

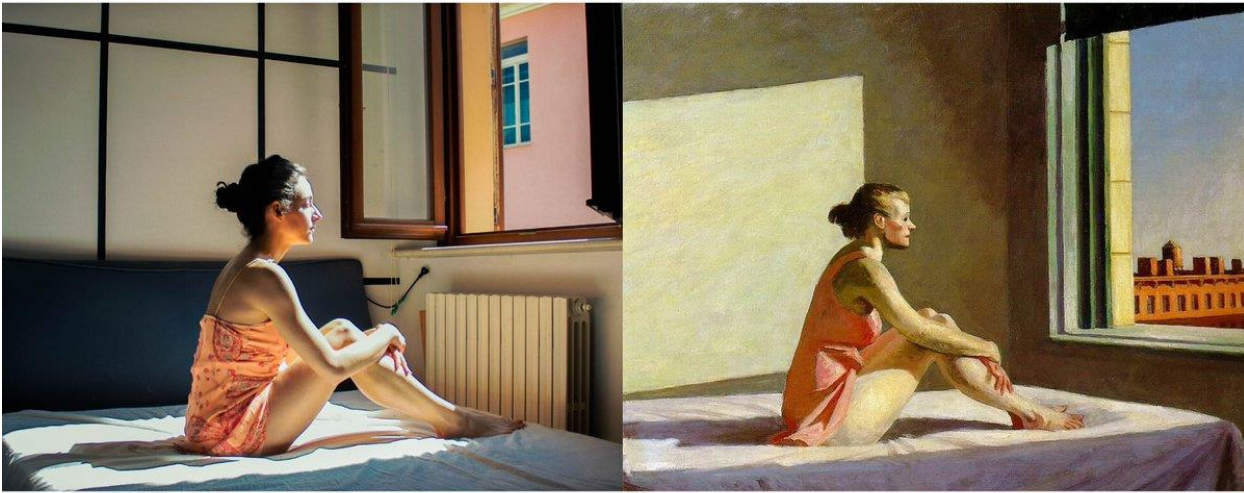
One day fire will reclaim its lover,
ceanothus, waiting with arms raised
and open, unashamed and unafraid.
Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir.
It will love them too, to their end.

No one I love knows
how much I love them.
Not in the sense of spark and flame,
of all-in conflagration,
no survivors.

Many of you have seen the latest online movement where people are reenacting/re-posing famous paintings. It's another form of Ekphrastic in my opinion.

The original painting is Edward Hopper's "Morning Sun"

Following this is my poem, Love in the Time of Coronavirus.



Love in the Time of Coronavirus

– Cynthia Neely

*They were together in silence like an old married couple wary of life,
beyond the pitfalls of passion, beyond the brutal mockery of hope and the
phantoms of disillusion: beyond love. — Gabriel García Márquez, Love
in the Time of Cholera*

What is this,
love, that keeps us

distant and alone,
keeps us together

but apart, you sleeping
in the other room?

We both still gaze
into each other's

Facebook faces,
newsfeeds, status

updates. On the news
the pictures waver,

grim reports, masked
and unmasked, hidden

and in plain sight.
What is this

that feeds the solitary
soul so well

the chest tightens?
Let's make new

pacts, fresh instigations
before our human tissues

tense, our lungs refuse
to fill. I will dress myself

in wilderness and you
will learn to dance.

Drawn to Poetry – Cynthia Neely

Thanks for joining this virtual Ekphrastic Poetry Workshop

I am sure some of you are familiar with ekphrastic poetry but for the benefit of those that might not be, I'll go ahead and try to define it.

In ancient Greece, the term *ekphrasis* was applied to the skill of describing a thing with vivid detail.

These days, Ekphrastic poetry has come to be defined as poems written about or in response to works of visual art (paintings, sculpture, photography etc).

Poetry and art are not that dissimilar for me. Both speak to our imaginations through the power of images

Ultimately in this workshop we are going to write a poem that responds to an image.

Above are two poems and corresponding artwork (including one of my paintings to potentially “spark” your writing.)

As you read the poems, please mark or write down one line from each that resonates with you.

Please choose one of the images to write/respond to – or if you have an image of an artwork you have been moved by, and wish to write about instead, go ahead.

If you need a place to start, begin your poem with *a line you liked* from one of the poems you read. You'll also find a list of “word prompts” below – use 10 or more (all if you dare) of these words in your poem. You may use the exact word or a form of that word – for instance “watch” could be a noun (like wristwatch) or a verb and you could use watching, watched, watches etc. Leaves could also be a verb or a noun. Pretend could be changed to pretender or pretending. You get the picture.

you'll also want to use in your poem the *name of a place or the name of a person or both*

you'll use in the poem at least *one animal, bird, or living thing other than human,*

and *a plant.*

be specific. Not a cat but a striped tabby for instance, not just the word bird but a specific bird, say varied thrush, Wilson's warbler, not a weed but burdock (for example) Specificity

mention *a color*

ask at least *one question* (you don't have to answer it) It can be rhetorical.

repeat a word, or phrase or line (or variation of that line) in your poem at LEAST once.

Your goal is to write for at least 20-40 minutes (please use a timer for the time you want to spend – when the timer sounds quickly finish the last line of your poem)

then take the last line you wrote, and put it as the first line of your poem.

Please then let it sit overnight and come back to it to see where you might want to make small changes in the morning. Don't change too much yet

And then please share your poems (Heather will let you know how we will facilitate that). You may also wish to do a drawing that responds to your poem! Please feel to share any or all of it.

And thanks for joining me in this Drawn to Poetry virtual workshop.

watch	call
love	krill
rust	string
hawk	kettle
dissipate	trumpet
finesse	fallow
sorrow	flicker
tranquil	coast
disease	quiver
sworn	distance
facility	trigger
reason	
fickle	
proud	
pretend	
tandem	
swallow	
window	
scuffle	
leaves	
cost	
crust	
compel	
shoulder	

There are number of “conventions” of or approaches to ekphrasis, here are a few of the more common ones: Sorry, this part is a little dry, but should show you that there are many ways to approach the writing of an ekphrastic. If you do not care to know more about how to approach the writing of an ekphrastic poem, skip this section.

Describe the scene itself - through careful recreation of the visual art through language, such as detailed description, use of sensory information, imagery, etc...

Describe the actions of the artist: Sometimes an ekphrastic poem will describe the actions of the visual artist concentrating on the act of the creation of the work and may describe how the subject is organized or presented by the artist, may even describe brush strokes etc

Praise: in which the poet celebrates an art object, (Ode on a Grecian Urn) lavishes praise for the mastery of the visual artist and/or his work. In this the poet often expresses an awareness of observing the work of art and often describes how the work has affected him or her.

Speaking out: giving voice to the object or subject in the artwork

Emotional response: The poet is drawn to the artwork through a deeply moving visual experience that triggers a latent or unresolved emotional vulnerability. (Stendhal syndrome – being overcome by a work of great beauty or significance)

Sympathetic: The poet demonstrates a kind of sympathy for the position of the subject in the painting, which might include giving the subject voice

Imagining the story behind the imagery – sometimes goes hand in hand with sympathy

Direct Address – The poem speaks directly to the subject in the work or even directly to the artist.

Many ekphrastic poems use several of these approaches.

Ekphrastic is Literally from the Greek, ek – for “out” and phrasis for “speak”, or to “speak out”.

In fact, many poets employ ekphrastic poetry to reveal some perspective they’ve wanted to express, a chance to “speak out.”

In such poems, “description” of the original work is only partial, or missing altogether, but the author draws from their own experience—facts, reflections, and feelings that surface during the observation of the visual artwork.

Most modern ekphrastic poems have generally done away with the need for elaborate, embellished description, and instead try to interpret, confront, speak to, and even inhabit their subjects.

And like the persona poem, ekphrastic can offer a way to write from the “subject” of the painting’s perspective

or even from the artist’s perspective, allowing the writer to say, feel, think, and imagine things outside of their own personal experience.

We all get trapped in our own stories, habits, and beliefs. Ekphrasis can have the benefit of helping us break free of our own trappings, which will in turn, hopefully, free up the poem.

Have fun!!!

Drawn to Poetry – Cynthia Neely

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