

Ekphrastic poetry

Profession, Poet



Ekphrastic Poetry: Artistic Reflections Word Count: 687 (2 pages) WRITE.

Once you've read & marked these poems, compose a thoughtful reflection on the relationships between the visual and the verbal as explored, revealed, or emphasized in this reading assignment. Each of the paintings presented—as well as the poems that go along with them—drop subtle hints about what is trying to be conveyed. On canvas, the artist portrays an image. But it is the poet in each of these ten poems who attempts to capture the magic of each respective painting, that make the intersection of art and writing so interesting. In the first pairing, we see Peter Bruegel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. W. H. Auden wrote *Musee des Beaux Arts* based on this painting. While it is probably a fine poem—W. H. Auden being a famous writer—the only real reference that caught my attention was in the second line of the poem where he referred overtly to the Dutch masters. Truthfully, *Landscape* wasn't really an attention-grabbing piece of art either in several respects, although the colors were enjoyable. Additionally, even though the allegorical references to Icarus in both the painting and the poem are duly noted, such references were lost on this writer—much as one may adore art and poetry. The second poem was just about as engaging. The most interesting part was in the third stanza when it seemed as though the author was alluding to the fact that one day these men in the picture would be buried in snow at the top of the hill—true, a bit macabre, but it captured the imagination. *Mingus in Shadow* was simply depressing. It's not enough to hear about and see the picture of someone who is dead/dying—but, to hear that they were obese in life and then to talk about the grandiosity of their souls in relation to their body image—seems a bit obtuse and oversimplified

as a metaphor. Rainer Maria Rilke's poem was absolutely brilliant in so many ways. It captured the imagination, saying something to the effect about the statue having a legendary head with eyes like bulging fruit—priceless. One could also hear in the poem overt sexual references, with a call at the end of the poem that one must change. This reference to change was not quite understood in the context of the poem, but it gets points for catching me off-guard. Cathy Song's *Girl Powdering Her Neck* is a fabulous poem, almost equally as fabulous as the painting—speaking about how the woman's hair is the color of seaweed, etc. The poem's imagery is very compelling, and draws one in, doing justice to the painting's magic. *Scream*, as well as the poems that accompany it—are respectively—disturbing, one, and lengthy, two. *Scream* is an unnerving painting—so primal, so deathly frightening and horrible. Additionally, the poems that describe *Scream*—including Monica Youn's description of how *Scream* was stolen—are rather drab, although Youn's poem is much more interesting, not to mention shorter. Merwin's *Voyage to Labrador* is a rather dull painting, but the poem makes up for it a bit—although some of the references about women and blind people were not appreciated. Matisse's painting was excellent, but Snodgrass's poem—although descriptive—detracts somewhat from its beauty and simplicity, trying to parse the meaning of every object in the painting. Some art is just meant to stand alone. Finally, the poem about the museum guard is dead on correct. Sometimes one can't help but wonder if these guards are dead or close to it, and fuming on the inside because they can't go anywhere, having to corral all these people in the gallery. These were some reflections upon the artworks presented. At the same time, reflections upon the

accompanying poems were given. As Abstract Expressionist Robert Motherwell pointed out, " Every intelligent painter carries the whole culture of modern painting in his head. It is his real subject, of which everything he paints is both an homage and a critique." ¹ Although not all of the artwork or poetic references may have been understood, they are still thoroughly appreciated for all of the trouble the creators went through to achieve their pieces. This is both an homage and a critique to those pieces which were displayed for critique in this project. WORKS CITED Goldstein, Carl. Teaching Art. UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.