



**THE FRALIN**  
MUSEUM OF ART

— AT THE —  
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

# **Writer's Eye 2021**

## **Self-Guided Tour**

# Welcome to Writer's Eye 2021

We invite you to participate in *Writer's Eye 2021*, the 35<sup>th</sup> 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 program 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 offering 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 *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 2021* 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, and first, second, and third-place winning entries are honored in anthology of their works. More information is available at: <https://uvafralinartmuseum.virginia.edu/>.

## About the selections

This year we have selected one artwork located in the community, five art works from The Fralin's permanent collection, and three objects on loan. As The Fralin responds to the continued challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, tours will be conducted virtually and in-person this year. We are pleased to continue to supply you with on-line resources to support your creative writing process.

**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!**



**Valentine Green**

British, 1739–1813

***A Philosopher Shewing an Experiment on the Air Pump*, 1769**

After Joseph Wright of Derby, British, 1734-1797  
 Mezzotint on laid paper, 18¼ x 22½ in (46.4 x 57.2 cm)  
 Promised gift of James Langhorne, EL.2019.9.54  
 The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia

1. **Valentine Green** (1739-1813) created this mezzotint a year after the Enlightenment-era painter Joseph Wright of Derby completed the original painting, now in the National Gallery, London. Wright was famous for candle-lit scenes in his paintings. In this image, we see a bird struggling to breathe in the vacuum of an air pump, and a group of onlookers gathered to observe. The rich tones and the subtle gradation of light in the original painting translate well into mezzotint. In mezzotint printmaking, the artist roughens the plate with a tool called a rocker, and then scrapes and polishes away the roughened parts to create the lighter areas of the print.

- What do you notice about the use of light in this image?
- Look carefully at the body language and facial expressions of the people depicted. What stands out to you?
- What might you infer about the feelings and emotions of the people depicted based on their reactions to the experiment?



**Nathan Jackson**

Tlingit, b.1938, Alaska

***Bentwood Box*, 1988**

Cedar, pigment,  
 17¼ x 12½ x 12½ in (43.8 x 31.8 x 31.8 cm)  
 Gift of Melissa L. Wilhelm and Christina Wilhelm Owens, in  
 memory of their parents, Dr. and Mrs. Morton C. Wilhelm 2018.1  
 The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia  
 © **Nathan Jackson**

2. **Nathan Jackson** (born in 1938) is a Tlingit master artist based in Ketchikan, Alaska. He is one of the most prominent living Tlingit artists of his generation, known for monumental carving projects and for educating younger generations in classical Tlingit art. This bentwood box demonstrates Jackson’s skill in the craft as well as basic principles of Tlingit design. To make this bentwood box, Jackson steamed and then bent three of the corners of a cedar board to form the sides, so that only the fourth corner is joined. He carved and painted figures of an eagle and a bear; each is seen in right and left profiles that meet at one corner. Looking at that corner straight on will also show each figure in frontal view.

- Notice how the black lines outline the primary features of the figure of the eagle. Can you find the head with eyes and beak; the wings folded forward; and the tail feathers?
- Look carefully. The details of the eagle like the claws, tongue and ears are shown in red.
- If you are in the gallery, look on the other side for the features of the bear.



**Robert Reed**

United States, 1938–2014

***Scanch Branch*, 2000**

Acrylic with oil markers and metal fasteners on paper, 30 x 40 in (76.2 x 101.6 cm)

Gift of David A. and Diana H. Kent, 2001.7

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia

© **Courtesy of the Robert Reed Estate**

3. Artist **Robert Reed** (1938-2014) drew inspiration from the sights and sounds of his childhood growing up in the Charlottesville Black community. Reed lived on 10½ Street NW, played at Washington Park, and attended First Baptist Church on West Main Street. Reed said he “organize[d] fragments, paths, cultural, and universal signs and symbols, remembered childhood images, and places into a pictorial stew.” In *Scanch Branch*, Reed connects spherical forms with colorful pathways comprised of his school colors: red and black for Jefferson School; green and gold for Jackson P. Burley High School; blue and orange for Morgan State University; and blue and white for Yale University, where Reed was a tenured professor of studio art for 45 years. The autobiographical composition also reflects Reed’s interest in constellations, gravity, and as he describes, “weights, balances, and tension.”

- What might Reed’s shapes and forms remind you of?
- Consider Reed’s idea of school colors. What colors comprise your palette?
- How might you create a work of art that abstracts scenes from your life?



**Sally Mann**

American, b. 1951

***Virginia, Untitled (Virginia Kudzu)*, 1996**

Tea-toned gelatin silver print, 40 x 50 in (101.6 x 127 cm) (unframed)

Museum purchase with funds donated in honor of Nancy Drysdale, 2003.9.2

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia

© **Sally Mann. Courtesy Gagolian**

4. Photographer **Sally Mann** was born in 1951 in Lexington, Virginia, where she currently lives and works. She is known for using antique photographic technology to capture scenes of intimate family life and the natural environment of the American South. *Virginia, Untitled (Virginia Kudzu)* is a black-and-white photograph documenting a forest landscape. Dominated by strong vertical shapes, layers of leaves stack on top of each other to create columns of foliage. The relative brightness and smooth texture of the two bare tree trunks at the center of the composition stand out in sharp contrast with the dark, leafy canopy behind them. At the bottom left of the composition, the forest floor rises to meet the dense forest canopy of invasive kudzu. Branches and vines at the right of the image stand out from the background, hanging like curtains to obscure what lays behind them.

- Mann calls her landscape photographs “unpeopled portraits.” How might this image be similar to a portrait?
- What mood or feeling might you experience if you were in this place?
- Imagine this is the setting of a story, what events might unfold?





**Jaune Quick-to-See Smith**

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation,  
b. 1940, Montana

***Censorship*, 1989**

Pastel on paper, 31½ x 48 in (80 x 121.9 cm)  
Gift of Jason Steinbaum (CLAS 1988), 2011.16  
The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia  
© **Jaune Quick-to-See Smith**

5. **Jaune Quick-to-See Smith** (born 1940) is a world-renowned artist, teacher, curator, and activist born in 1940 on reservation in Montana. She has a specific visual language that communicates complex ideas about her personal identity and political engagement, and connects to her upbringing on the Flathead reservation and issues faced by Native Americans. Smith's works often include imagery and objects from everyday life, past and present, and challenge received notions and cultural signs referencing Native Americans. Smith said, “Part of what I do in my work is using my work as a platform for my beliefs. Can I tell a story? Can I make it a good story? Can I add some humor to it? Can I get your attention?”

- How does Jaune Quick-to-See Smith get our attention? What might her shapes, forms, and marks communicate about the idea of censorship?
- Look carefully at the image. What might the story be in *Censorship*?



**William Wylie**

American, b. 1957  
*Untitled [00-220] from the series Stillwater*, 2000  
Gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 in (50.8 x 61 cm)  
Gift of the artist, 2003.2  
The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia  
© **William Wylie**

6. **William Wylie** (born 1957) is a photographer and UVA professor whose work considers what is hidden beneath the surface of a landscapes and sites. This concrete form emerging from the Cache la Poudre River in Colorado reminded Wylie of a Giorgio Sommer (1834-1914) photograph of a mushroom-shaped rock formation near Capri, Italy. Like Sommer, Wylie used a long exposure to blur the water and bring clarity to the form in the center. Wylie said his goal is to investigate “spatial practice” which he describes as “our consumption of space as well as our movement through it.”

- Notice areas of light and shadow. What language might you use to describe the setting of this photograph? What mood or feeling might it evoke?
- Notice the ambiguity of scale. Is the form in the center of the photograph huge? Or tiny? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Consider the idea of place. What might be hidden beneath the surface of this landscape?



**Paul T. Frankl**

American (born Austria), 1886–1958

***Skyscraper chair*, c. 1927**

Lacquer and silver leaf on wood,  
26 x 20 x 18 in (66.04 x 50.8 x 45.72 cm)  
Minneapolis Institute of Art

7. **Paul Frankl** (1886-1958) worked as a furniture designer, architect, painter, and gallerist. His exploration of architecture, painting, furniture and product design led to his well-known “Skyscraper” line in the mid 1920s, establishing him as one of the first modern designers of American decorative arts. Inspired by the New York skyline, the “Skyscraper” furniture was characterized by sharp lines and corners, and often featured stacked box-like forms towering upwards. This red “Skyscraper” chair from 1927 is made from wood with red lacquer and silver leaf.

- What adjectives would you use to describe this chair?
- What details of its shape and form stand out most to you?
- What might it be like to sit in this chair? Begin to tell a story about the experience. What might you say and do?



**Childe Hassam**

American, 1859–1935

***Skyscraper Window*, 1934**

Oil on canvas, 59 ¼ x 47 ¼ in (150.5 x 120 cm)  
Courtesy of the Peabody College Collection, Collection of  
Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery, 1979.0228

8. American painter **Childe Hassam** (1859-1935) famously depicted scenes of Boston, New York, and Paris in an Impressionist style. His work addresses themes surrounding the harmony between people and nature, with a particular emphasis on the changing seasons, precipitation and its visual effects, and exploring the visual impact of different weather conditions on city life. In *Skyscraper Window*, a woman gazes at the city from behind a table crowded with objects. The painting exhibits strong characteristics of Hassam’s work in the use of pure color: stark whites add brightness, while greys emphasize form. Additionally, the composition is balanced by vibrant, richly layered reds, blues, and yellows.

- Imagine this is a film still. What might have happened that led to this moment? What might happen next in the story?
- Consider the sensory experience of this painting, what might it sound like to enter this scene? What might it feel like to pick up and hold the objects on the table?



### **Federico Cuatlacuatl**

Mexican, b. 1991

*Senyelistli*, 2019

Exterior paint on metal surface,

15 x 40 feet (4.57 x 12.2 m)

© Federico Cuatlacuatl

Image credit: The Charlottesville Mural Project

Located at 1801 Broadway Street, Charlottesville, Virginia

9. **Federico Cuatlacuatl** (born 1991) is a Mexican Indigenous artist based in Charlottesville, Virginia. His artistic practice addresses topics such as Latinx immigration and cultural sustainability, especially through community outreach and collaboration. He works in a variety of mediums including illustration, animation, painting, and installation. Cuatlacuatl's mural *Senyelistli* means "family" in Náhuatl, an Indigenous language of central Mexico. Commissioned by the Sun Tribe solar energy company, Cuatlacuatl completed *Senyelistli* in collaboration with teens from the Albemarle High School Latinx Club. The mural touches on the symbiosis between technology and nature, and the relationships between the natural and artificial, the biological and technological, and the digital and organic.

- According to the artist, the relationships between the central figures signifies interconnectedness, a gesture towards Indigenous communities. Observe details in the figures. How might they be connected to each other?
- Imagine this mural captures a paused scene in a cartoon. Press play. How might the landscape change? What might the characters say and do?