

2013 Winter Gallery - Ekphrastic Poetry

This Muses' Gallery features ekphrastic poems and some of the images which inspired the poets. "Ekphrasis (is) the contemporary term for poems based on engagements with visual art," explains Jacqueline Kolosov ("The Ekphrastic Poem: A Grounded Instance of Seeing," *The Writers Chronicle*, October/November 2012). "A Poet interested in ekphrastic writing would therefore do well to ask: why should a reader concern herself with a poem based on a painting (or a sculpture) if she can look at the painting instead? Ultimately, the poem must become an encounter in its own right, one which involves the transmission of a charged experience via the resources of language, form, and prosody."

Enjoy & keep on creating!

Grounding the
Artist

One day, I watercolor myself in
an ocean's wet sand polish,
all soft shell and drifted wood white.

By

Cynthia T. Hahn

The next, I charcoal darken remaining stains,
run rampant swirls in oily blue hues,
red pastel an abstract stripe on old walnut.

In the end, I carve a tree heart in sticky sap,
build my drum of skin feather and grass nest,
walk the lines off my rough edged trunk.



Francisco de Goya, "La Maja Vestida"

Art Lovers

By

Lois Barr

Back then on Sundays, the Prado Museum was free.
Cold, gray, Franco's Madrid; they had no where else to be.
José Luis and Jessie Lee walked through Visigothic frescoes,
paused by Saint Úrsula and her 11,000 virgins, whose faces to Jessie
all looked miraculously alike, past Rubens' "Fall of Man"
and "Three Graces," canvases bigger than many apartments,
upstairs to Velàquez and the golden haired princess so safe
surrounded by parents, mastiff, lady's maids, and Jessie
always admired her dress, and José Luis always said, "Velàquez looks like
me."

On to Goya to stand before Carlos IV's substantial family and laugh
at smart remarks José had for the black splotch on the Queen's face.
Then to Goya's lover on two walls horizontally displayed,

first in white satin, a lace vest, pink sash marking her waist and then completely undressed.
Where else in Spain could you see so much flesh?
They hurried to a spot under the marble stairway, he pressed her against the wall, his warm hands enveloped Jessie Lee.
Then one rainy Sunday, miracle of Úrsula and her 11,000 virgins, they found another place to be.



Edward Hopper, "Four Lane Road"

The Grass Racers

By

James Reiss

In Edward Hopper's paintings
sometimes the grass runs away into darkness.
A man may be standing under a Mobil sign, under enormous gas
pumps, waiting for cars to come down a grass-
lined road that lopes into the dark.

And you know no car will ever brighten that road,
no credit card ever flash in that man's eyes.
He is as alone as you reading this poem.
See, there is a lamp over your shoulder, and somebody
is upstairs typing as you read this, but you are alone.

Just as, summers ago, you were alone in New Hampshire.
Remember, it was a windy evening, and you were calling
your dog in from the grass.
And the grass raced up the dark slope
toward your outstretched hand.

There is a painting like this by Hopper.
I think you will find it at the Whitney Museum
next to the painting of the gas station.
I remember leaving the Whitney once and noticing
how the buildings on 75th St. leaned away from the light.

For a moment it was as if 75th St. were storming
beaches of darkness -- yet it was a breezeless blue day.
Dizzy, I leaned on a wall
and watched the couples heading for Central Park, rushing
into the dark like horses, like grass racers.



detail from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel

La Sistina

By

Gary Davis

In awe the eyes of God look down upon
This rare accomplishment, at what appears
Grandiloquent beyond the senses, for here
A galaxy and nucleus are one.
Here moving human figures flow and stand
Between apocalypse and paradise,
Then spill beyond the flood, beneath the
hand
Commanding dull grey matter into life,
And drawn together fill this holy space
From foot to vault, from groin to oculus,
With wordless poetry of genesis
Through revelation, mankind brought to
grace.
How ancient eyes must run with tears to
see
This rendering in paint and poetry.

November

By

Ellen Bateman

I long for November's sleep
opposite of all that's bright and clear
restful
a fallow field
exhausted
beyond all caring
peacefully healing.



Ellen Bateman, Photographer

Ekphrasis of a Vase of Carnations

By
Khalid Mukhtar

You carnations in foster care
Sit splendid in a dwelling where
Your newfound sibling baby breaths
Come forth to decorate your hair;

Like golden pheasants flocking free
Beneath a mercy cherry tree,
Whose fruit descend the leafy steps
In schools of seahorse company.

But for the pheasants fallen dead,
I'd call these creatures heaven-bred,
For how these walls of glass reflect
The heads of children tucked in bed.



Oil painting by Colonel Azeem Chida, Poet's Uncle



Pamela Larson, Artist

Sliding Scarecrows

By Pamela Larson

Phantom straw
melting into orange
slithering smoke
and spurting hookah draws
of copper lava

Little demons magic wand you
into fairies
of made up purposes
Purple print of lonely
against flailing arms
belly dancing

Wolf and Goat

By

Wilda Morris

Inspired by Fire screen by
Wilhelm Hunt
Diederich, Art Institute of
Chicago

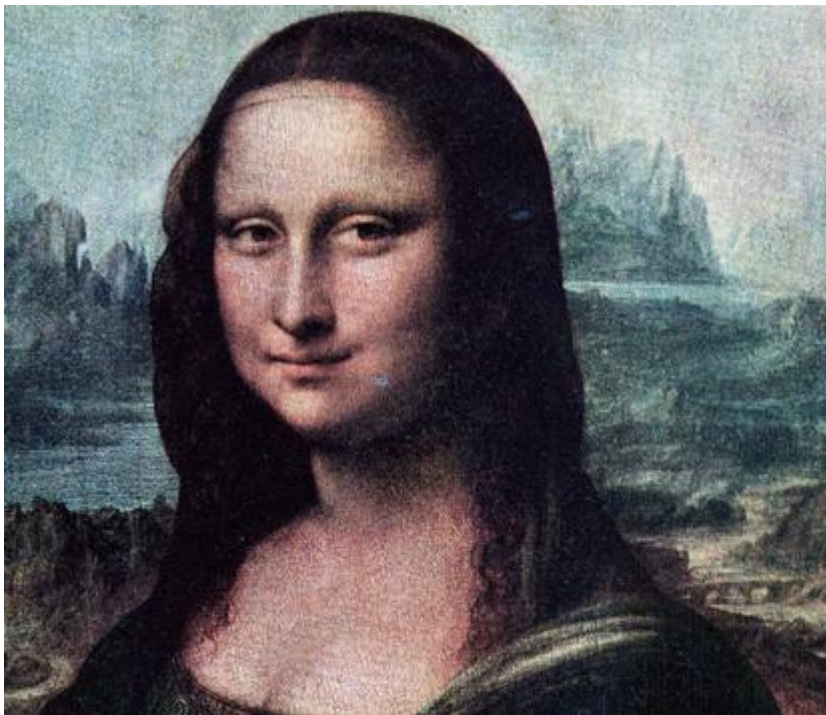
Goat and wolf circle in a dance
of death, touching only tangentially,
but their faces are fierce,
hoofs uplifted, fur ruffled.
Their tails focus fright, describe
determination to win this fight
that's gone on over a century.
In each onslaught, I sense hunger
and thirst, sweat and blood, terror
and rage. They are like two nations
resolved never to forget or forgive.

To Mona

By

Marjorie Rissman

Preserved and protected
alive inside a shell
forever calm yet
seductive and alluring
the lady speaks
to all who listen
the lady sings
to all who praise.
But the mystery remains
within her silent gaze.



Detail from Leonardo Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa"



The Crowd in Chicago's
Grant Park

By

Charlotte Digregorio

Winnetka, Illinois

*Poem was inspired by "Agora" - a sculpture by
Magdalena Abakanowicz - and received first
honorable mention in Poets & Patrons 2012
Chicagoland Poetry Contest in the Chicago Art
category.*

One hundred and six figures loom in the Park,
nameless, headless and armless,
each nine feet tall, eighteen hundred pounds.
We are lost in a wilderness of legs and feet.

Of bark-like mass, thick and wrinkled,
they are frozen in walking movement.
"Agora," the collection of hollow cast-iron,
cumbers and depresses cold earth.

Season after season, we mill around,
follow footprints, furrow and decay.
When winter comes, winds blur
and bury us in snow.



"Agora" by Magdalena Abakanowicz

Monet in Chicago

By

Carol L. Gloor

This poem was inspired by a Monet exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, back in the early 1990's, which brought together many painting which had not been seen together in many years; this was before people took pictures with cell phones so the poet could not provide an image.

The four water lily paintings in a row
for the first time in a hundred years
speak not only of green noon swelling
to yellow three o'clock,

not only of turquoise six fading to gray eight,
but also of the patient eyes watching,
of the body brain at rest, awake under the tree
all afternoon, the only goal: to see.

So may I calm my endless fears and lists,
just sit a quiet day by this great lake
in the city of my birth, see how
the limbs of swimming children

glisten in the shouting afternoon,
how heat breaks and shimmers across concrete,
how littered Coke cans shine treasure in the sand,
how between noon and eight there are at least

twenty-four shades of blue.



At the Outdoor Berlin Holocaust Memorial

By



Hundreds of cement blocks set out like chess pieces
in endless repetitive rows, the passageways between
beckoning the children and adults to wander deep
down the ramps, until the rectangles get bigger
& bigger and eventually block out the sun

Joseph Kuhn Carey



so there's just distant blue sky overhead,
trapped in a huge field of giant cement corn,
nowhere to turn, nowhere to go, just
countless paths and pillars pushing down
on mind, body and soul,
lost, turning corners, hitting wrong spots,
glimpsing colors, fabrics, shadows moving
back and forth between the rows,
children giggle in the midst of hide and seek,
but claustrophobia soon sets in and the blocks
become tombs, each a reminder of what
was stolen during the war and never given back,
life, love, slaps on the back and slow-sipped beer,
everything meaningful in life stripped back
and thrown into deep muddy holes in
a devastated, devastating terrain,
know who they are and what they felt,
imprisoned, lonely, dirty, without hope
and then walk towards the freeing light,
breathe deep, turn soft and glance back at the
far-stretching sea of thick, heavy blocks
and say a prayer for all you see.

Joseph Carey Kuhn, Photographer



Will She Say The Word after Annunciation with Two Saints

By Maureen Tolman Flannery

Gabriel kneels before her with future on his tongue.
He is her muse, her poem preparing.
Wings poised for escape after the delivery,
he carries a branch as peace offering.

Don't blame me, his eyes plead,
I'm only the messenger,
as a dagger of words from his mouth to her ear
pierces the gold-leafed air.

The ribbon of destiny,
hers, ours, the earth's, stretches toward her.
Frown as she may, it will wrap around her,
grab her throat like a shepherd's staff and pull.

This Sienese artist has etched a concave vessel,
the gesture of denial in Mary's torso that pulls away
from the angel's message as she might lean
into a narrow mountain road where solid ground drops off.

Mary has been reading, studying world wisdom.
Another future in mind, she holds a finger at her place,
afraid to look away. As soon as this strange dream ends





Details from Simone Martini's
Annunciation

she intends to take up the book where she left off.

Knowledge, less threatening, does not swell within you,
push your organs aside with its own intent.
The maiden clasps the cloak at her breast with her other hand.
Beyond this moment, nothing will be the same.

Saints Margaret and Ansanus on the sides are no help,
blank eyes staring ahead. They acknowledge nothing,
nor would they prevent this terrible beauty from being born.
Expressions convey relief that they were not asked to bear it.

As she searches soul for her ability of response,
her whole being bends away from the poem that waits to enter.
Above them the dove, a shy suitor sending an emissary before
him,
paces, fluttering.

**Pilsen Mural Icon, Summer
2012**

By

Jenene Ravesloot

Painted Virgin Mary in blue and white
on an abandoned whitewashed building,

painted Virgin, real window box, plastic
flowers: blue ones, yellow ones, red ones--

a festooned arch of miniature lights
above the Virgin Mary's head;

two men who lean against an old car
in stained tee shirts, dirty beige slacks,

their smiles as radiant as this Virgin
Mary at dusk.



Blood and Breath

By Tamara Tabel

*Inspired by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn's Portrait of Christ, c.
1655-57*

He could be anyone's son
brown brooding eyes, beard
tight to skin, innocence just faded

blood and breath

His humanness, a failing
blood that could be spilled, breath
that could be silenced

His humanness, a triumph
to stay the fated path, though betrayed
by brethren, by kings

to die for those same souls
who turned their backs, stilled
their tongues, wove the thistle crown

when perhaps, he wished only
to break coarse bread, share
a simple wine, unknown
and soon forgotten

The Edge of Doom

By

Mark Hudson
Evanston, Illinois

This poem is based on a photo exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago, which contained a series of photographs of New York City from the 1940's.

At the Art Insitute there is a room,
showing photos of the New York of old.
A movie billboard titled, "Edge of Doom,"
reminds me of futures that were foretold.
Hurricane Sandy created a storm,
and these photos show a better time.
People seem happy, hopeful and warm,
others are shown as victims of crime.
Three children with masks are shown,
when children were seen and not heard.
A woman talks to God on his throne,
the passageway is his unerring word.
A woman with milk jugs smiles with glee,
content in her picnic table dress.
Another looks like a pregnant gypsy,
not afraid that her life might have stress.
On Coney Island, buckets of sand,
are dumped into puddles by boys.
Now we wish to see any land
in New York or New Jersey by the buoy.
A Harlem Merchant from 1936,
sells honey and things for five cents each.
Dockworkers smoke forget their fix,
working to life products in reach.
Forklifts of barrels rose to the top,
Standard Oil around even then,
children at muder scenes wait for a cop,
children on fire escapes abandoned by men.
New York was never a perfect place,
No matter what you might assume,
somewhere to shelter the human race,
that's why they call it the edge of doom.

Comments on a Moment of Picasso

By

Clara Berman

A snapshot: color and shadow;
line and curve-
How do we interpret
Picasso's word?

Enthroned, his hands on knees, his eyes express



Pablo Picasso, Artist

Indicated cushions his fingertips caress
Her knees refuse, her hands protest
His expanding belly, her hesitant breast
Distorted roundness of protruding flesh.

His satisfied gaze and curving feet
His eyes consuming the anticipated treat
He is sanguine, she resigned
Shadow and sunlight, not entwined.

He *the* voluptuary--
She of opposing mind.

Colors invite shadows persist,
He pauses, but will not desist;
Her resentment, his display
Dismayed she looks the other way.

He sits at ease and stares, her eyes resist-
Has it really come to this?
Her attitude, a peacock in retreat,
His turbaned head, his satisfied feet
Her toes deny his anticipated feast.

The wind of music swings open a gate.
An arc of hand draws the line and bow,
then a touch to dampen the tympani.
The name of his lover rides to heaven
held high by the hum of violins.
Such is the sigh when flesh unfolds.

The artist outlines chevrons in black,
all the while imagining his lover's face.
There is so much he wants to show him
as horns echo the dance of armies.
Paint a red arrow flying to yellow wings.
One sore heals another.

The New World draws out the old
when he sulks below the lamps of Paris.
A lame warrior from birth, he is one
who gains the hour by a sketch.
Stay away. His lips taste of tobacco.
Forget the jigsaw years, just build a day.

The gray hulls of battleships move
like a brush through murky turpentine.
Gunners sight their shells by eye.
An artist learns to aim at another heart
with the viscous scope of oil.
We are all fishermen who haul up bones.

These mark the confines of his world:
a rocky coast in Maine, the weave of linen,
pallets of mute desire, and a bottomless
draw when men move into shadows.
"If he is part of me, how can he go away?"
All ages are equal by the wound of love.

Time and desire. The itch of melodies.
The other word for loneliness is ice.
To sing when the snow falls is to weep.
He painted a code for their names
and read it like music. The color lingers,
then a blank silence like looking at the sun.

Seeing Again a Painting by Marsden Hartley at the Terra Museum

By Robert Klein Engler



Image of Marsden Hartley painting from The
Terra Museum, Chicago



Pablo Picasso, "The Old Guitarist" (1903)

Guitar Blues

By Judith Tullis

Old Guitarist, Pablo Picasso 1903

Old guitar
Strung up strong
Face distressed
Still sweet the song

Old musician
Blue and blind
Tattered tunic
Flesh resigned

Fluid fingers
Long of bone
Their eloquence
Is all you own

You touch you hear
But cannot see
We're left to view
Your misery

Late Show

By Daniel Cleary

In lustrous black and white, the rookie kid,
Along with others on a mission quest
To save some buddies missing in a gale,
Will, with usual losses, find instead
His shining courage, doing his level best,
And come out feeling hearty, proud and hale.

The villain, too, will have a change of heart
Chastened by the hero, who intrepid
In his strong pursuit, will show how it's done --
Braving the worst, rousing the inert
To greater effort, though he winds up dead
In the end, his face turned towards the sun.

The one who waited faithfully at home
Will find a tearful answer to her prayer:
Lovers will be united once again.
Life will go on, although there will be some
Who'll find themselves much changed from what they were:
Remembering such harrowing loss and pain...

Watching the credits roll we feel renewed
And ready for a thorough good night's sleep:
Problems all solved and put off for a while
Replete with the new wisdom we've accrued.
Whatever's troubling now will surely keep.
We close our eyes and sink back with a smile.

The Babes in the Wood

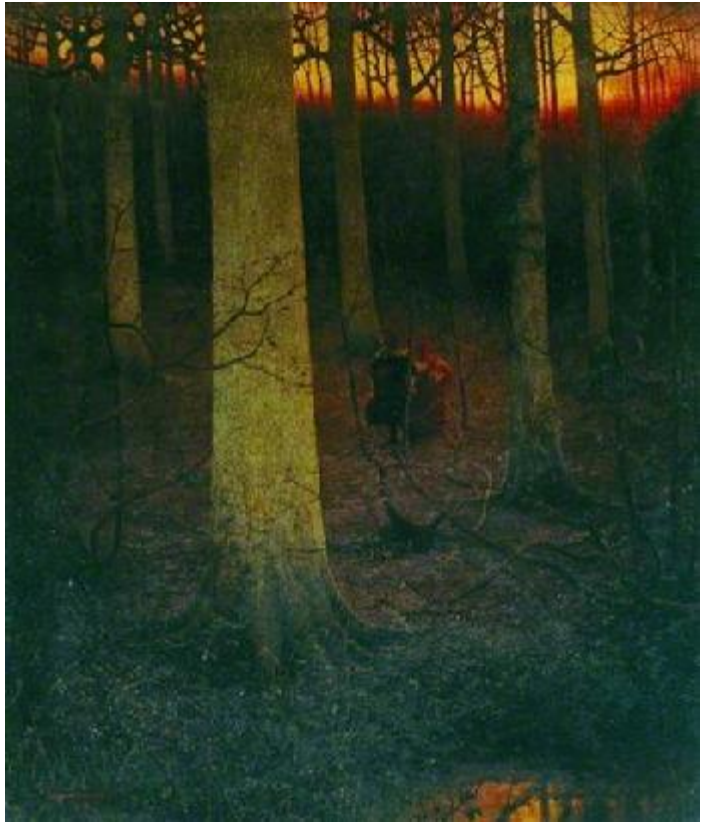
By Sandra Phillips

Painting by Benjamin Haughton, 1898

In defiance of the leafy trees
The moon shone through the wood
And leant a misty ghostly glow
To the clearing where they stood.
A startled deer leapt back in fear
Then into the forest fled
As a somewhat muted
Barn-owl hooted
From a high perch overhead.
And a tiny mouse scurried into his house
To avoid being used as his bread.

The children sank down
On the mossy ground,
Soon sleeping as all babies do.
Until well after dawn
In the bright sunny morn
They awoke all covered in dew.

'Twas with heartfelt joy
We found them there
All praise to G-d we do declare.



Benjamin Haughton, "Babes in the Woods" (1898)

Old Ship

By

Norman Nanstiel



I smell your blood on my fingers,
each dried sliver under nail,
blood and bone logic.
I lick each tinny fleck,
smell blood type.
I can taste each clump of hair

Your name is lost in time's cold shroud
a small voice in a roaring crowd
Still one persistent mast stands proud
witness to some lost heritage

What cargo filled your open hold?
now cloaked with moss as you grow old
Are mem'ries of you warm or cold?
or has time stopped them with the grave
as you will fade with rust and mold

Timbers, planks and rigging rotting
from the lack of crew attending
and the years of weather's pounding
lying in the muck and seaweed
must leave you, old ship, desponding

Left wishing that you could have sunk
instead of being left for junk
by raping salvage to defunct
and vandals to humiliate
then made ot rot in stagnant gunk

Oh! -- to be cracked by vehement squall
or torn by battle's cannon ball
perchance capsized by tidal wall
Plummeted to the mystique deep
Strange legends your name could then recall

But that, old ship, was not to be
You sit and rot in front of me
in shame's decay for all to see
with bleaching sun and warping rain
the tellers of your history

Figure With Meat

By

Andrew Ruzkowski

Painting by Francis Bacon

torn from root.

Less lonely, less thistle-like, less.

I thought of you on the day
your father died.
His heart encased in plaque,
your heart in his,
lit and throbbing, still.

You told me they opened his body,
his I, undone in convulsions;
blood sprawled on the bed,
sliding out numbly,
so literal,
so necessary.

Suppose I, non-existent,
don't believe your methods of travel,
the same midnight,
the same mal-formations,
your same loneliness,
the same less.

I look out my window,
trees wailing children to the beach.
I can only think of the way you light a match,
always bending back like a tongue.

You are water beneath ice,
a fish pinned with leeches,
a body soft.

Suppose you forfeit the body
in thick layers, shining and tumbleweed.

Suppose you watch
something invisible,
all day long,
distanced.

In our different hidden speech
my mouth breathes

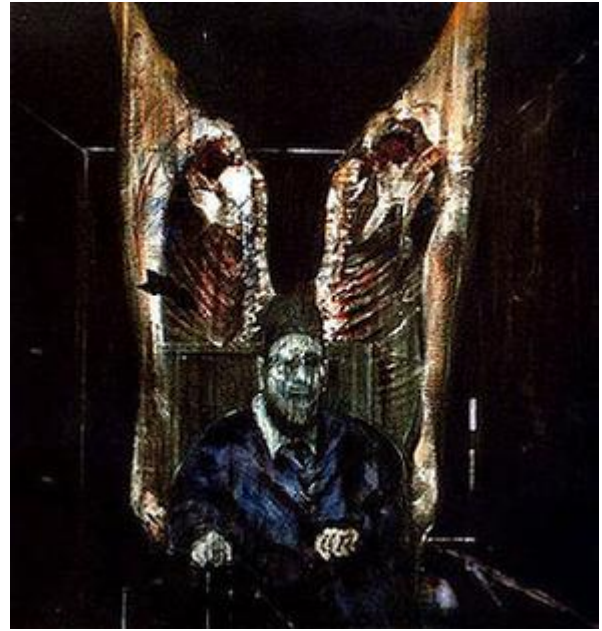
and I want to live longer wearing
each other's clothes.

The Beast By Dan Godston

*This poem was inspired by
Jean Dubuffet's
"Monument with Standing
Beast" sculpture, and it
was part of Jennifer
Karmin's Beast Poem
project (during the
Chicago Calling Arts
Festival).*

The city can be a dot seen from a 747 window
moving away from O'Hare. Zoomed in, morning light
blobular whimsy breaks up mostly right angles in vision field.
The city—a beast among beasts, real & fantastical,
geographic musculature, a lumpy thing surging
in front of the Thompson Center. Is the city a beast
to embrace or eschew, or something to try and cage?

Rush hour traffic wheezes, sputters through concrete arteries.
Grid pulses, another semi squeezes through a capillary.
Serpentine EI roars to stir up transfigured transit, its belly
rattling with half-digested commuters. Foot traffic curves



Francis Bacon, "Figure With Meat" (1954)

a flow around this presence, but look—two cavelike portals beckon. Thick black lines separate its facets.

Sometimes the city's a gazelle moving through Links Hall. Dubuffet's *Monument with Standing Beast* lumbers toward the Chicago Picasso in microscopic lumbers. Stipple a trapezoid. Is Chicago ever a Galápagos tortoise plodding along Carl Sandburg's Whitmanesque lines?

Once the city was naked, swinging its butt around like a horny baboon. Then it sported baggy pants, waist tightened by a Western Ave. belt. The city can be a beast whose lips speak of both connections and alienation. An impasto rides a bicycle to Le Collège de 'Pataphysique with a basket full of paintbrushes, tar & straw. The Beast mixes sand and gravel into paint as the Bean blends Snoopy "drawing extends into space." Is the city a beast whose face changes?

The city can camouflage itself in our moods—ebullient, ornery, lethargic, blasé, ecstatic. The city's a shaker, shape shifter, canvas upon which we paint our fears and ambitions. Curious fiberglass thunks echoes through its hollow body. The Beast's shadow pulls east, Thompson Center's shadow engulfs the sculpture, sun sets on the Loop's glass canyon, street lights on.



A woman poses in a world woven with wishes, whispers and whalebone blades, pines for the spin of century's tilt.

She's split in the skin of two bodies as people pass by inspecting her face for secret codes to the brown black apparition

this solitary woman of color tucked inside emancipation's straddled cellular memories to subdue her "stubborn pride," quilted against

In The Threads of Time By Lorraine Harrell

Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley. (February 1818 – May 1907) was a former slave, turned successful seamstress who is most notably known as being Mary Todd Lincoln's personal dressmaker and confidante, and the author of her autobiography, *Behind the Scenes Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in*

the law's beautiful lies. On alert even *with papers*;
adorned in your elegant sloped shoulder ornate
under sleeves and buttons inverted V-eyes

wide open pressed straight ahead as if a
searchlight panning beyond the mind's surface-
the intricate freeze frame of two worlds branched

underground-crisscrossed arteries clipped at the vein
like a respirator gone rogue. Your fate written before
your birth-subsidies and collides with this new knock of wings.

The mind quivers in its solitary wilderness-
though it is of little matter, there is no room
for mourning the dry bones of restriction.

A craving heart blossoms just before the wild dance
toward broken cages. So she shifts the weight of her
cardiac muscle with its copious vascular system-

alerts the four chambers to release its seashell legend,
to render its song back to the lake of grace. She could outwait
this hollow breath, this vast nature of stars, the clingy

flesh of oceans, the red sweat of sun,
the hungry teeth of poison.
Free women fly with the blood of fire.

I think of you in the repeated nest of all first steps,
stumbling into your map of strength. The swell of desire lingers,
There are some stones worth a swim through.

*the White House. Mrs. Keckley utilized
her intelligence, keen business savvy,
and sewing and design skills to arrange
and ultimately purchase her freedom
for \$1200 in 1855.*



Tapestry "La Dame a la Licorne", Musee de Thermes et de
L'Hotel de Cluny

The Handmaiden's Lament

By

Jennifer Dotson

I hold the chalice for my dame
I humbly do my duty.
Kneeling is tiresome; curtsying same.
All pay homage to her beauty.

The unicorn stands before her.
The proud lion roars his praise.
Everyone must adore her.
On her hem her yippy dog stays.

The weight of the chalice hurts my back;
How I detest my dame's tedious habits.
I wish she would cut me some slack.
Have you ever seen so many rabbits?