

2022 NPMSA Winning Ekphrastic Poems – The Briscoe Western Art Museum

YOUTH WINNER:

The Rising Sun

By Katherine Porter

As I look down the barrel of my Winchester, I see the rising sun
I wear my boots and leggings and spurs, but the battle is far from won
 The cattle are behind us, against a rising sun
As I look out across the field, my mind goes to that day
 When I rode up with my pa, to see the rising sun
The rain had stopped and stayed away, scared to show its face
 The cattle were hungry but we knew what to do
So, we prayed and prayed, but the sweet smell I knew never came
 The day we rounded up to sell, there in the wind it blew
 The beautiful smell of rain hit my nose
As we rode up that day, so then, I started to say
The rain has come to save us pa, he stopped me dead and said
 No, son God gave us one more day
 One more day to thank him, one more day to see
 The backs of our precious cattle, against his rising sun

ADULT WINNERS:

Prairie Madness

By Jonathan Fletcher

A sickness persists in the Plains, spins the clouds like cotton candy, stains them dark gray and purple, swallows the pink-tinged wedge of light, sometimes a cowboy or two. Not these tough cowhands, though, who look on yet refuse to flinch or flee as the puffy pall approaches. So, too, their equally hardy horses: a stoic Appaloosa, a partially obscured chestnut. In such harsh conditions, biped and quadruped must act alike. Still, there are those who assume these cowboys, each stirruped yet unstirred, are not brave but reckless, maybe even mad. Yet do ill or careless cowhands wear Western shirts and weathered chaps, cowhide cuffs and rawhide gloves? Or bring and don their dusters? Perhaps the coreopsis that gently bends with the tallgrass knows: such wear, though thick and ruff, isn't meant for more than the body. It's instead the cowboys who toughen themselves. A Resistol protects the head, not the mind.

These Old Bones

By Diane Gonzales Bertrand

feel the storm before I open my eyes,
twisting in my backbone,
cracking in my knees.

Tell the boy over coffee
we wear our canvas long-coats today.
He pulls aside the checkered curtain
squints at the sun, laughs.

With his coat shoved under his saddle,
he rides beside me, admiring his own shadow.
As we reach the herd nuzzling yellow weeds,
the clouds distill as purple mist,
steady drops rap against our hats.
Rolling thunder muffles his cursing
at these old bones he refuses to trust.

2022 NPMSA Winning Ekphrastic Poems – The McNay Art Museum

YOUTH WINNERS:

Footprints of Knowing

By Theo Crump

Let me settle into the soles of your shoes
and taste where the bottoms have touched,
drink where your mind
has made a home of the ground

Let me caress your stilettos,
and peel off the remains of the hearts
you've made a footprint

Let me pick the birdseed and pain
from the divots in your soles
and show me how they build your consciousness

The Cabinet by the Door

By Catherine Day

Her memories are stacked by the door,
Piled and heaped, scuffed and worn.
Nicotine-stained, chunky-heeled visions of adolescence,
Sharp, polished images of professionalism,
Quiet slips, soft nicks of self-reflection.
They wonder after her, and the life she's given them—
Which of them will she wear today?
The ones she is most comfortable in?
What about the secluded ones,
hidden away for the day she truly needs them?
And what of the ones consigned
To a life of being forsaken, not forgotten?

Waste

By Catherine Day

Thump thump thump

They drop like stones
One after another, down they go,
Into a form of wrinkled brown patent leather skin,
and crippled pink polyester heart,
and unused, disfigured plastic soul.

Th-thump, th-thump, th-thump

Here's another, another not wanted, not needed
Because there's millions—no, billions—
Of whole, perfect specimens right above

Ba-bump, ba-bump, ba-bump

So all hail the rejects, the non-perfects,
As they mold a solemn, lonely figure
Forever wondering why they weren't good enough
To make it off the assembly line.

ADULT WINNERS:

6:37 PM

By Amy Lewis

This is the gravity of the day.
Melting in place between lock and dinner.
A self,
solidifying, sliding in shoes too large,
body and space a loose skin refilling with a hiss.
Night is for melting back into shape.
And tomorrow you will wake, recognize your own reflection, and there will be the meditation of
standing up,
of doing quiet tasks while the coffee brews or teapot rattles,
so many things contentedly bubbling.
There will follow the meditation of closing doors, of key clack.
And soon the contortions and shrinking
again.

Sole Sitter I

By Bett Butler

In these women's shoes, creased and scuffed,
patent leather turns to bronze patina;
shins take shape from chunky heels
of platforms and stilettos worn by disco divas,
drag queens. Young girls teeter, falling, ankles sprained,
spines misaligned by the tyranny of fashion.

Denied the podium and rostrum,
are these the only platforms they're allowed?

Kicks

By W. A. "Bill" Coggins

Acrobatic shoes, walking hands
Leather treks cross, stiletto sands,
Nigeria, Ethiopia, in high heels,
Eyes kick around, rubber soul field.
Frozen bronze blues, clogs in green sky,
Spirits of Africa, answers to why -
Mary Janes stumble, futures begin
The ghost of a smile, the upside of a grin.

2022 NPMSA Winning Ekphrastic Poems – Ruby City

YOUTH WINNER:

Hub, 3rd Floor, Union Wharf, 23 Wenlock Road, London N1 7ST, UK

By Aarav Gedala

Open holes, open doors, open wounds, yet no salvation can pass through
And reality ceases not as the walls him and the air breathes away
As people pass by and the sun raises and falls like the breath in my chest slipping away
And eventually the sun and the moon look the same through this purple lens
And as I watch death at my front door
I can't escape to salvage what's left of the world
And I can't go back to when maybe I didn't keep myself in this cage
And even after tracing ever single crevice or this building
I still can't find the will to hold on to that last breath
And as the air slips away from me
I cant find the will to leave, the will to live
as the air slips away from me
I don't bother making a step outside the third floor of the hub on 23 Wenlock Road
Because I no longer hold possession, I hold no more love, and what I cared for doesn't care for me

ADULT WINNERS:

Pop-Pop's Hallway

By Robert J. Cavazos

A purple haze outline forms
three access points to memory.
Sans the RAM of lived experience,
what's sculpted crumples like fabric.

Memory only has some steel to it.
Once, I envisaged each transition
as sharp, vertical—brilliant, bright lines.
For each entry and exit, a translucent corridor.

This is how we maintain memory.
Thread it through an empty passageway—
a tall hallway where my grandfather had laughed
as my wife and I danced and he felt young again.

Genius loca

By Pablo Miguel Martinez

No shiplap walls, no posts or closets, only *négligée*'d frame,
see-all construct I call soul. Some boast they know
my diaphanous chambers, but oafishly mistake translucence
for weakness. Shameless! they excoriate. All because I am gauzy
and prefer the ethereal, a suggestion of heaven. Easy to pin,
this filmy part of me. Every night they come, spewing unveiled threats,
armed with shears, jagged words, and spite. My sisters, glass frog
and immortal jellyfish, remind me: Our joy and salvation—
the phobics' disgust and desire—puzzle the conventional.
Where does the sea end and integument begin?
Where does the truth begin and the great lie end? See for yourself—
I've nothing to hide. My life an exquisite exhibition, monumental.
Laud this not-cathedral, mother's lavendered breath, this not-pavilion.
Prize this pervious house of mine—sheer and plain and beautiful.

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2022 NPMSA Winning Ekphrastic Poems – San Antonio Museum of Art

YOUTH WINNERS:

Ever-Changing

By Ariana Chaudhary

All they could see from their frigid, raven-feathered boats,
Were the silken strands of shaded water, and their eyes dusted
With the milky breeze carrying(them softly, a mother to child.
Children of the earth, children of the sun, she sang. Welcome home.
Though towering over their curious figures, she reached out a hand—
Slender fingers with chipped nails, rough yet warm with autumn’s sun-faded embers.
They created a rain-kissed stream of houses, one with summer’s golden-flaked wind—
They passed through the gentle-eyed giants, following the fluted harmonies
To a hidden palace, pampered with spring’s persimmons and fermenting wild rice.
But now as seasons rise and wane, perhaps the giants don’t stand as tall—
Perhaps the musk wind carries her leaves in a new direction—
Perhaps the children’s hearts have changed—

Yet if all remained static, when could the buds of life ever bloom?

Landscape Of The Four Seasons

By Isabel Brown

When dawn has arisen,
The lively bark whisper
And the leaves
Huddle me with grace.

With luck, we move forward-
With disharmony
Come streams of tears
The fish swim along
And the boats graze across.

Memory

By Pia Nathani

Waiting on the dock
No place to call home
Just my travels and I
All alone

The clouds in the sky
The wind in my hair
I look at the village
And just stare

Relaxed with the breeze
And the mountains so tall
The boats coming in
A memory I can't recall

ADULT WINNERS:

Haiku for Landscape of Four Seasons

By Veronica Morrison

We are waiting out
the unrelenting greyness
of a somber year.

After Unkoku Tōgan's *Landscape of Four Seasons*

By Mark Heinlein

High above the village in the depths of the depthless mountain range, spring
Has been swallowed up. And the handful of days fisted in our pockets scatters
Like the last oak leaves as stiff gusts tear through their naked branches.
Deep in unseen crevices, the nightingale sings its spring song but can barely
Be heard. And the dirt-colored swallows that feed at the bird feeder scare
When the cardinals come. (Are they my dead parents come from far away?)
Death and war are the junket and vessel of calamitous governments.
How many suffer, collapse from the heat and drouth of the shifting
Season? Blameless, innocents cross the borders helpless with crumpled maps
Of their old lives. O illimitable hope, O unseen wonder, come back, guide us
Through the steep mountain pass safely. On the other side, breathless
From the tenuous riprap winding into the clouds, there will be time to rest.
Looking back, I had no idea the journey would be so brief. Looking back,

how small the world is below.

2022 NPMSA Winning Ekphrastic Poems – The Witte Museum

ADULT WINNERS:

Abuelo's First Job

By Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Along that dusty Mexico trail,
we ate the burro to stay alive.
Papa and Rogelio pushed the carreta
as Sergio and Rosalinda crossed
the leather harness between them
pulling like two skinny ponies.
Catching rain in empty horns,
we shared sips of water,
the river still many days away.
My job was to stay alive
inside Mama's rebozo.

A Wheelwright

By Milton Jordan

Your grandfather strapped metal rims to wood,
Emiliano, replaced spokes, greased hubs
and took care of repair like an order
for four new wheels. On temporary axles
he watched every turn and knew the bow
he wanted in each spoke above the metal
rim as it flattened a bit on hard ground.
I took reluctant lessons on lumber
in that shop where Tate's Garage is now,
took most of them to my first sawmill job
when no one needed repaired wagon wheels.