



## 2026 EKPHRASTIC POETRY WINNERS – THE BRISCOE WESTERN ART MUSEUM

Artwork: *Canyon Princess*, Gerald Balciar

### Adult Winning Poems (in no particular order)

#### The way she sits

elevated and balanced, I marvel at the way  
she looks for lone pairs of horns or antlers

that pierce a pink horizon. I also wince, thinking  
of how easily rock can roll under steady paws,

how some cats have only one life. And  
how the layered steeple on which she

perches to prey is the steepest she's ever  
made her own, so steep she nearly turns

herself into two—hind paws kissing uneven  
incline, front almost perpendicular to the rest,

as if forelimbs, chest, shoulders, and head  
could walk off as one. Claw to tail, she is tall.

Without standing, she is standing, without  
yowling, commanding a canyon.

And doing so on an unkind slope.

*Jonathan Fletcher*

## **At ten, my favorite animal was a mountain lion**

Once, at Busch Gardens,  
In my matching shorts and tie front top,  
I ran my palm over her bronze fur —  
Her muscles still and softened  
Her countenance demure

Now, she prowls the canyon pockets  
And I do not dare touch  
Those cold thick haunches  
Captured in her dialed eyes,  
I am cautious and I am halted

Cast me in bronze  
Cast me then, at ten,  
Feral and lionhearted  
Cast me strong and  
Cast me princess too

*Allyson Boyd*

## **Law of the Desert**

The best kind of beauty is that which kills you,  
soft to the touch and sharp in the teeth.  
Regal, sly and keen.  
Sharp-eyed and sure-footed  
on steep walls where others would stumble,  
in deep valleys where others would bleed.

Sleek, refined and controlled.  
Power-hungry and muscle-bound,  
on slopes no hunter would brave,  
with prowess no predator would challenge.  
Gorgeous in your desert conquest,  
preparing for an endless ambush  
as you slink down, down into the action  
with enough might to make the whole world prey.

*Erika Howlett*

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## Youth Winning Poems (in no particular order; age 13 and older)

### **Come to Me**

Gunpowder clung to the air,  
Red soaked into the earth under me,  
Clouds of dust followed them as they rode, their laughter  
Echoing along the canyon walls.

I tried to move, to yell, to breathe,  
But my body did not  
Heed my commands.  
So I stayed. And  
So did she.

She waited until the sky surrendered its  
Color, and slinked her way down the rocky slope.  
Her eyes trained on me,  
My eyes trained on her.  
I called for her to finish it.

*Lily Clark*

### **Monument to What Followed**

Something broke here  
before I was dropped into it.

This fragment was once whole  
You can see it in the wound.

They poured me in the fire and  
set my heart in bronze

I climb because the ground  
will not close its mouth.

My tail is not pride—  
it is a signal flare  
for anything still breathing.

The stone keeps its silence.  
I keep my balance.

Between us  
is what happened.

*Alazaih*

## Youth Winning Poems (age 12 and under)

### Eternal Silence

The thumb of the sculptor, shaping a moment.

A carefully carved ridge, back arched,  
claws out. No sign of fear, no sign of doubt.

Twilight surrenders as dawn arrives.

There she stays, hidden inside.

Her muscles tense, they all stare.

But her gaze cuts through time,

completely aware.

So she lies, waiting.

Not for the skitter

of a squirrel or the creak of a quiet deer.

Instead at peace in the weight

of the mountain's own bone.

Atlas a white marble dream,

that is never alone.

*Alysandra Acevedo*