

## Poetry on Art

*The Struggle in Human Society,  
Reflection on Besieged Fortress Relief  
(742-727 B.C.)*

The men could not stand  
from the top tower;  
they fell down  
with their hands free.  
The stones went after them,  
thrown by the enemies.  
The fight had started.

The carving on sandstone  
with overlapping figures  
and various geometric shapes.

The rough surface  
touches my heart  
by the curving lines  
of men's faces with  
thick, hard edges.

It reminds me about  
the present time –  
the struggle in human society.

Men always want power.  
Men create war and death.  
When can men be  
satisfied to live happy  
in a peaceful life?

I know for sure  
when the desire for power ends,  
when there are no jealousies,  
there will be no choice  
between death and survival.  
I will find a world  
with beautiful flowers and happy faces.

Thao Vuong

Champlin Park High School, grade 11

Những người đàn ông  
trên đỉnh tháp cao,  
họ té xuống khoáng khôn.  
Những viên đá ném vào họ  
bởi kẻ thù hung ác  
Cuộc chiến bắt đầu.  
Bức chạm trên phiến đá  
với nhiều dạng hình  
chồng chát lên nhau  
Bề mặt sần sùi  
và những đường cong  
trên khuôn mặt người  
làm tim tôi thắt lại  
Nó làm tôi liên tưởng  
đến thời hiện tại  
về những đấu tranh  
trong xã hội.  
Con người mong muốn  
quyền lực trong tay.  
Họ gây ra chiến tranh,  
chết chóc đầy vãy.  
Đến khi nào  
con người an phận  
sống trong hòa bình?  
Tôi tin rằng khi  
không còn ham muốn  
không còn ghenhị  
và sẽ không có  
sự lựa chọn  
giữa sự sống và chết.  
Tôi sẽ thấy  
một thế giới  
đầy hoa đẹp và  
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**Thao's Reflection:**

*I am so glad to know that my poem will be published. I have to thank you who gave me a chance to submit my poem and helped me correct it. Thank you very much!*

*As you know, I am not living in America for a long time. I have to work hard to learn English. Sometimes, that makes me not thinking about writing poems or stories. In fact, I love to write so I do some writing in my own language. Luckily, I had one poem published last year, and one poem will be published this year.*

*About the poem I wrote after I went to the Art Institute, when I saw the carving, it caught my attention because the carving was about the war. It made me think about the Vietnam War; the war that made many Vietnamese left their country. That carving was an excellent art work. I could see the feeling that expressed on everyone face.*

## Poetry on Art

*Madonna and Child Enthroned*

Nicola di Maestro Antonio d'Ancona

On a lap of blue and gold  
plays the Child,  
unaware of the duties ahead of him.  
In a short time,  
he will take on the forces of evil in the world,  
but for now it's just play.

Above him, angels gaze through  
red drapes pulled to the side,  
exalting the Madonna and Child,  
with their halos of shimmering gold.

The Madonna seems oblivious  
to the motions of her child,  
as off in a world of amazement  
she ponders her gift,  
the Son of God.

On the floor lies the source  
of the fragrances.  
The sweet smells of red flowers,  
apples, and cucumbers fill the room,  
their bold colors lining the steps  
at the base of a throne.

These steps seem to unfold downwards,  
bringing the holy duet into the foreground.

As I find myself being drawn into the scene,  
I see that everyone is content.  
The Madonna, the Child, the angels, and even  
a small fly at the foot of the steps can be seen,  
all fearing nothing, all hearing nothing,  
but a gentle voice from heaven.

Kevin Gust

Champlin Park High School, grade 11



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## Poetry on Art

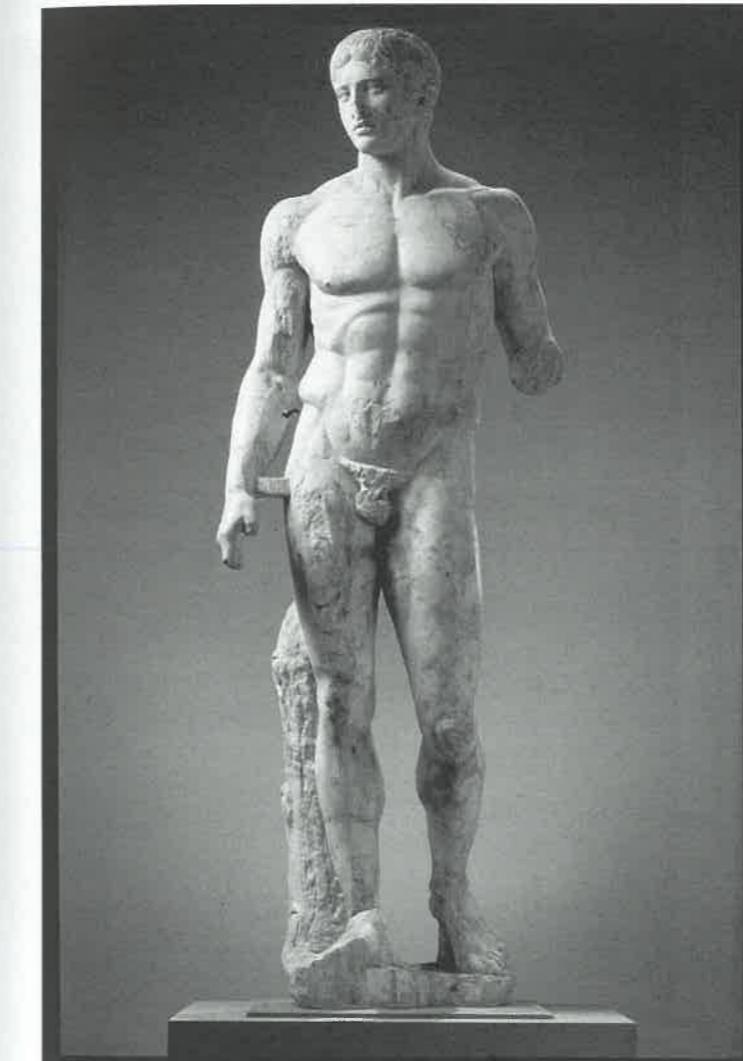
*Doryphoros Stands Alone*

He stands alone,  
strong and beautiful.  
I sit here, alone,  
in awe of him.

He looks away,  
with that look on his face.  
I look at him,  
fixed on his expression.

He's confident in his skills,  
in throwing that spear.  
I think he takes pleasure,  
competing in such fine weather.

He has one throw left,  
to prove he has a gift.  
I think he's capable,  
of out-throwing them all.



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Now, he stands alone,  
strong and beautiful.  
I sit here, alone,  
wondering if he won.

Jessica Featherston

Champlin Park High School, grade 12



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**Ivory Scene**  
*(A reflection on a Diptych with scenes from the life of Christ)*

What are they seeking?  
 As they crawl and struggle,  
 all in white?

What do they see?  
 Faces locked in a  
 final expression.

Why are they standing?  
 So very close and crowded,  
 one to another?

Why do they scream?  
 As they are trampled,  
 one over another?

What do they look for?  
 Pushing and fighting,  
 to be closer to it.

What are they thinking?  
 Whose thoughts do they hold?  
 Whose words on their lips?

Who would they tell?  
 If their thoughts were unhindered?  
 Only I know.

**Ryan Gagnon**  
*Champlin Park High School, grade 11*



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**To Capture the Sorrows of a Virgin**

My Mother embraces me  
 with her pure adoration.  
 We sit in perfect harmony  
 as the breeze calmly carries life past us.  
 Surrounding my presence  
 is a walled garden  
 which captures the sorrows of a virgin.  
 Delicately patterned leaves engage my senses.

The foliage of natural hues  
 are enhanced by the most intricate of flowers  
 each telling its own story.  
 Shadows are cast upon her  
 but yet her humility and righteousness  
 break that binding wall.  
 Alluding to her prestige yet contradictory sorrows  
 is her gown of blood red  
 which reminds me  
 of her bittersweet end to innocence.

**Kelsey A. Dorf**  
*Champlin Park High School, grade 11*



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### *The Worshipped of the Buddhists*

Meditating...  
with his eyes mere slits,  
the calmness of his posture,  
just sitting there so  
simple and still,  
in the quietness of the hall.

This statue is for no ordinary use.  
Buddha is a worshipped piece  
for those who chose  
to believe.

Just a robe draped over  
showing the poverty,  
yet the dignity.  
The earthy brown  
tones of his skin;  
under that dusty white robe.

Traces of gold  
are spread all over,  
emphasizing his importance.  
The slight hint of a grin,  
suggests a knowledge  
only known to him.

**Jaci Greninger**

*Champlin Park High School, grade 11*

# *Writing Poetry from Works of Art*

## *Visual Response Poem*

**Theanna Grivna**

*Osseo High School*

When I have my tenth graders write poetry, I want them to write poems with imagery rather than literal, telling-how-they-feel poems. To encourage imagery, I start by having them write poems inspired by paintings. From the book *Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents*, I've borrowed the term *visual response poem* and the example poem written by an 8th grader in response to Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*.

I've collected several Impressionist calendars and hang the artworks all over the room. First we read the Wyeth example while we view his painting. Then students are told to roam the room, select one work of art, focus on details, and then brainstorm as many phrases as they can to describe the painting. Then they're told to look deeper into the paintings for an emotion or a relationship. We look back at the Wyeth example in which the poet, in the first stanza, describes the ruins and the woman in the painting, and in the second stanza imagines when the farm was new and the woman was a child. I also use Osseo Senior High student examples from the past years in which Monet's ice floes battle against a river for control or in which Pissarro's red roofs are a refuge from a literally and figuratively cold world.

As students stroll through this impromptu art gallery, there are a lot of spontaneous conversations about the art works, the images, and their reactions to the pictures. These discussions often serve as prewriting as students clarify their ideas or are inspired by the insights of another student. Then students draft their poems.

Any paintings would likely work. I put up paintings with and without people in them. I think more successful poems have been written on nature paintings, but students like both choices.

## Works cited

Tsujimoto, Joseph I. *Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse & NCTE, 1988.

## *Ekphrastic Poetry*

**Sandy Hayes**

*Becker Middle School*

I originally wrote a different article for this space about finding artwork to display, but just before publication, there was a discussion thread on NCTE-Talk about writing poetry in response to works of art in which the term *ekphrastic poetry* was used. This paradoxical poetic form is defined by W. J. T. Mitchell as the "verbal representation of a visual representation." Considering the truth behind the aphorism that a picture says a thousand words, it seems an impossible task to capture an artwork in the few words used in a poem. But Rusche also writes of ekphrastic hope -- "the phase when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a 'sense' in which language can do what so many writers have wanted it to do: 'to make us see.'"

In addition to discovering such a scholarly consideration of a poetry activity that, like Theanna Grivna, I have done for several years with 8th graders, I was surprised to find that many poets have written poems based on works of art. A sampling:

W. H. Auden, *Musee des Beaux Arts*  
Walter de la Mare, *Brueghel's Winter*  
Ferlinghetti, [The Wounded Wilderness of Morris Graves]  
Robert Foerster, *Breughel's Harvesters*  
Alan Ginsberg, *Cezanne's Ports*  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Cross of Snow*  
John Stone, *Three for the Mona Lisa*  
John Stone, *American Gothic*  
May Swenson, *The Tall Figures of Giacometti*  
William Carlos Williams, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*  
A more extensive list of poets and poems as well as links to the text of the poems and to the works of art compiled by Harry Rusche of Emory University can be found at  
[www1.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/Paintings%26Poems.original/titlepage.html](http://www1.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/Paintings%26Poems.original/titlepage.html)

## Works cited

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Ekphrasis and the Other*. [www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/mitchell.html](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/mitchell.html)  
NCTE-Talk. To subscribe to this discussion list, go to [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org)

*Monet's Waterlilies*

Lilies lie  
On the bold, blue water  
Trying  
Unsuccessfully  
To escape  
The tightening  
Solitude



A tree limb hanging above  
Shades a corner  
of the lily patch  
From the  
Outside world  
The lilies stand alone

**Brett Bellin**

*Osseo High School, grade 10*

*Salvador Dali's  
The Persistence of Memory*

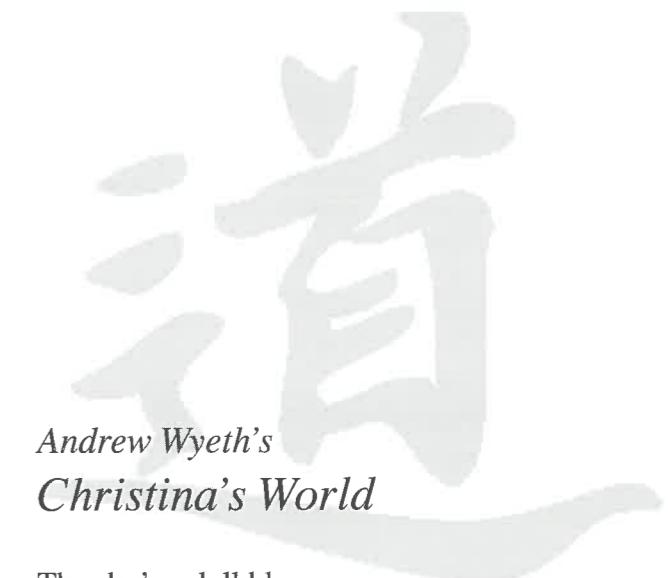
Upon a distant shore  
denizens of the earth  
feasting  
devouring.  
Day becomes night  
years pass as moments  
clock lay tortured  
contorted.  
The landscape remains unchanged  
unscathed by the passing eons  
the ocean's surface frozen in mid-tide.

**Josh Salisbury**

*Becker Middle School, grade 8*

*Claude Monet's  
Gare Saint Lazare*

Gray November  
Trains rattle down tracks.  
Conductors yell.  
The clanking  
of cold metal,  
smells of coal  
and the coming  
winter creep through  
the station.  
A woman,  
in a dark blue dress  
sits waiting,  
wrapped in  
her loneliness,  
monotony.  
Oblivious  
to the child  
standing  
at her side.

*Andrew Wyeth's  
Christina's World*

The sky's a dull blue  
The grass is whittling away.  
Still with my little hands  
I search for my mother.  
The pain that I feel  
The thought of being lonely for the rest of my life.  
My mother left me,  
Left me to die in the grass.  
Why did she leave me?  
Why did she leave me to die in the dead grass?  
For I'll fade away,  
And no one would ever have known. . .  
I existed.

**Kandace Green**

*Becker Middle School, grade 8*