

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH WORDS & IMAGES: EXPLORING WRITING INSPIRED BY FAMOUS ARTWORK

LLC FALL TERM 2024 | SYLLABUS

ABOUT THE COURSE

Have you ever stood in front of a painting and tried to discern the story the artist is depicting? Or read a poem inspired by an artist's work? Perhaps a painting inspires another story of your own creation?

Fortunately, we are the recipients of many such combination of art and writing over the years. Writing inspired by visual art dates to Homer's description of the Shield of Achilles in *The Iliad*. W. H. Auden, John Keats and Anne Sexton are among many poets who have penned poems about artwork—or what is known as “**ekphrastic writing**.”

Become Ecstatic about Ekphrasis

The term “ekphrasis” stems from the Greek description of a work of art and the writing (often poetry) it inspires. As mentioned in the LLC catalog, this is not a course about art history or creative writing. Rather, think of it as having fun as you look closely at a painting and the writing it has inspired. What was it about the work of art that so captivated the writer? And what about the writer's work (along with the work of art) so captivated *you*?

The course will be divided into looking at existing ekphrastic works, and then exploring what art we might find so personally stimulating that we try our own hand in composition.

The coordinators will open the course in *Week 1* with a general overview and modeling some possible approaches to talking about ekphrastic works. The second hour of *Week 1 through Week 4* will be all about studying the pairing of existing paintings (or sculpture) and the written word. With two people each hour discussing a particular ekphrastic work, there will be time (about 25 minutes per slot) for 13 of you to take a turn. You're welcome to do this on your own or to combine forces and “team teach.”

We are aiming for all available time slots (see p. 3) to be filled by Sunday, September 22. You can claim your preferred time and ekphrastic work on a first-come, first-served basis. We will keep you informed periodically as the schedule fills.

For *Week 5*, we will take a class “field trip” to the Providence Art Club to check out this year's Little Picture Show, where literally hundreds of small works will hang in three different galleries. Our expectation as your coordinators is that you will be inspired enough by one work of art to want to write about it. In our last class (*Week 6*), you'll have a chance (purely voluntary) to share a photo of the art you selected and your response to it.

Check out what we regard as a good ekphrastic-writing database at <https://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/titlepage.html>. You can find other examples through your own research. There's even an ekphrastic poetry periodical. Once you find something appealing, let us know that you'd like to cover a spot on the

course calendar (see p.3) to talk about it.

If you want to use technology to lead your session but find it intimidating, we're happy to help you.

Please don't start anguishing about this; everything about the course will be super relaxed and free of judgment. We want you to have some fun!

YOUR ROLE IN CLASS: EKPHRASTIC FANTASTIC!

Unlike most other LLC courses, the presentation burden on you and your classmates should be considerably less in this course than in others. We'd like you to choose a particular ekphrastic pairing to share and discuss. You might research the artist and/or the writer. You might explore some historical context for either work. You might delve into what makes either the artwork or the writing particularly special. In short, there are all kinds of ways to talk about your selection and involve your classmates. The more you can get your classmates to weigh in on your selection, the better the session!

While you are not required to lead a 25-min. session (particularly given that we have one more class member than available slots), most LLCers know that the more you put into the class, the more you get out of it. That includes working with your classmates. If you don't want to present alone, find someone who would like to work with you! Teams might even want to cover one than one slot. We're seeking a level of discussion and interaction where everyone leaves the class exclaiming, "Wow, that was great!"

CLASS MEETINGS

WEEK 1, Thursday, October 31, Temple Beth EI

Hour 1	Hour 2
A (1–1:25) & B (1:25–1:50) Maggie & Nick Miles Introduction and techniques	C (2–2:25) Maggie & Nick Miles Introduction and techniques (cont.)
	D (2:25–2:50) Maggie & Nick Miles Introduction and techniques (cont.)

WEEK 2, Thursday, November 7, Temple Beth EI

Hour 1	Hour 2
A (1–1:25) Celene Healy: Donald Finkel on Hokusai’s “The Great Wave”	C (2–2:25) Katy Gilchrist: Lisel Mueller on Delvaux’s “The Village of the Mermaids”
B (1:25–1:50) Georgia Walsworth: Randall Jarrell on Donatello’s “The Bronze David”	D (2:25–2:50) Maggie Miles: Edward Hirsch on Hopper’s “The House by the Railroad, 1925”

WEEK 3, Thursday, November 14, Temple Beth EI

Hour 1	Hour 2
A (1–1:25) Linda Shamoon: Wislawa Szymborska on Brueghel’s “Two Monkeys”	C (2–2:25) Terry Lassar: Auden and William Carlos Williams on Brueghel’s “Fall of Icarus”
B (1:25–1:50) Lily Traves: W.D. Snodgrass on Matisse’s “The Red Studio”	D (2:25–2:50) Mary Welch: Ted Kooser on a box of pastels owned by Cassatt

WEEK 4, Thursday, November 21, Temple Beth Ed

Hour 1	Hour 2
A (1–1:25) Merle Wolfgang: Browning on Bronzino & Allori’s fresco, “My Last Duchess”	C (2–2:25) Leslie Patterson: U.A. Fanthorpe on Uccello’s “St. George and the Dragon”
B (1:25–1:50) Carolyn Roberts: Mary Hope/Whitehead/Lee on works by Frida Kahlo	D (2:25–2:50) Ira Schaeffer: Personal poem on Jacques-Louis David’s “The Death of Marat”

WEEK 5, Thursday, December 5

Field trip to Providence Art Club, 11 Thomas Street, Providence

WEEK 6, Thursday, December 12, Temple Beth EI

Sharing words inspired by selected works we’ve seen at the Little Picture Show.