



Ekphrastic Poetry Reading

Presented as a part of Last Look

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STUDIO
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Ekphrastic Poetry Reading

In celebration of *Fictions*, The Studio Museum in Harlem and Dr. Joshua Bennett invite five New York-based poets to lyrically engage with the mediums and concepts represented in the exhibition. Just as many of the artists represented in *Fictions* blur the lines between fact and falsehood, these poets complicate and celebrate the centuries old relationship between contemporary poetry and visual art. In newly written ekphrastic poems, Joshua Bennett, Desiree Bailey, Marwa Helal, Chanice Hughes-Greenberg, Aracelis Girmay, and Nkosi Nkululeko each leverage the fluidity of language to challenge the fictionalization of their own identities and citizenships by the larger society.

An ekphrastic poem attempts to communicate the essence of an artwork while also commenting on the world in which the artwork resides. The poets included in this booklet expand upon and reimagine the socio-historical boundaries of our current society alongside visual artists Paul Stephen Benjamin, Walter Price, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Texas Isaiah, Krista Clark, and Maya Stovall. The resulting poetry enlivens and enriches the visual experience of *Fictions* and furthers the Museum's commitment to serve as a platform for artistic exchange across genres.

Fictions

Fictions is a survey of recent work by nineteen emerging artists of African and Latin American descent who live and work across the United States. The artists in the exhibition engage with a variety of media—including video, photography, drawing and sculpture—with some combining multiple artistic practices to create large-scale installations. The works in *Fictions* investigate questions at the core of The Studio Museum in Harlem's mission to be the nexus for artists of African descent locally, nationally, and internationally, and for work inspired by black culture. They draw inspiration from diverse sources—such as everyday objects, childhood memories, current and historic events, and the body—often creating parallel or alternate narratives that complicate fact, fiction, and memory.

The exhibition is the fifth in a series of emerging artist exhibitions presented by the Studio Museum, following *Freestyle* (2001), *Frequency* (2005–06), *Flow* (2008) and *Fore* (2012–13). Like its predecessors, *Fictions* illustrates the diversity and complexity of artistic practices by artists of African descent. Tracing the artistic developments since *Fore*, *Fictions* emphasizes the development of narrative content in contemporary art over the past five years. From the personal to the political and the everyday to the imagined, *Fictions* examines the stories that form the foundation of these artists' practices.



Paul Stephen Benjamin
God Bless America, 2016
Courtesy the artist
Photo: Adam Reich

The Next Black National Anthem

Joshua Bennett

Will naturally begin
with a blues note.

Some well-adorned
lovelorn lyric

about how
your baby left

& all you got
in the divorce

was remorse.
& a mortgage.

& a somewhat
morbid, though

mostly metaphorical,
obsession with

the underground.
How it feels to live

in such unrelenting emptiness,
unseen, altogether un-correctable

by the State's endless arms.
Just imagine: Ellison's Prologue

set to the most elaborate
Metro Boomin instrumental

you can fathom, brass
horns & pulsar cannons

firing off in tandem
as Aretha lines a hymn

in the footnotes. Twelve &
a half minutes of unchecked,

bass-laden braggadocio.
The most imitated,

incarcerated human
beings in the history

of the world & every nanosecond
of the band's boundless

song belongs to us.
It is ours, the way

the word overcome
or The Wiz or Herman

Melville is ours. In any corner
store or court of law, any

barbershop argument
or hours-long spat

over Spades. The Next Black
National Anthem will,

by the rule, begin
in blood, & span

our ongoing war against
oblivion. Clarify the anguish

at the core of our gentleness.
How even that generosity

is a kind of weapon.
This music, our blade

-d criticism of a country
obsessed with owning

everything that shimmers,
or moves with a destination

in mind. Even the sky.
Even the darkness

behind our eyes
when we dream.



Walter Price
(b. 1989, Macon, Georgia; lives and works in New York, NY)
Extra Virgin Olive Oil, 2017
Courtesy the artist and Karma, New York

Extra Virgin Desiree C. Bailey

Look once: and it's her fingers that pull you in
the absence of them, how they've disappeared
within her, splitting her body like reeds
at the river's lips. Bantu Knotted American
Queen, pedestaled at the top of the canvas.
Spill of red paint, blue drip of stars
pooling the foot of the nation.

Look again: not a clit
but a book that occupies the hand
and you smile at how easy it is
to mistake one pleasure for another
membrane for membrane
twin yearnings for the flesh-spit of knowledge
for after all, to know (in the biblical sense)
is to let the sweet waters run,
down down the slope,
the purple mountains.

Stare until the painting becomes a mirror
until you are sixteen again in your room
with Jimi Hendrix plastered on the wall
like a saint. You are clutching a book
blotting the page with your sweaty palms
shoving the words into your mouth
practicing, repeating, drilling, and American accent
sloughing the saltwater off your tongue
speaking yourself into disappearance.

And you would have disappeared
were it not for the pussy's pages
how turning them lit the tunnel into
yourself, to the books that could only be read
in salt and seaweed, and the touch that made you
crave your own dark scent. What tiny stars you
are, spilling.



Matthew Angelo Harrison
//// with Synthetic Foramina, 2016
Courtesy the Rennie Collection, Vancouver, and Jessica Silverman Gallery
Photo: Adam Reich

invasive species reflects on the consequences of synthetic apertures

Marwa Helal

invasive species reflects on the consequences of synthetic apertures

after Matthew Angelo Harrison

i was made invasive species beast of no nation a fish caught then thrown back my answers garbled waxed a pitted bubblesong of zebra bones spread against an empire of skinned accusation through plastic window bulletproofed and conveyer belted i saw myself reflected fur dripping in every image they fevered to cache fingerprinted with furrowed forehead grooves from my many migrations above the clouds and when i saw them infiltrating my first and only home land with retracted scales i spreaded paws through film and video through their tinted windows i leapt and clawed into their tall airconditioned bus and laughed like hyena saliva dripped at the sight of their oversoft and overtly sunscreened flesh ah ah they thought us savages but did not have eyes enough to see themselves and as i tore a trail at them i moved so swiftly through their theories of evolution: bird and beast, fish and fauna, golden and gulping, feathered feral and scaled, nocturnal and fecal but ah ah i was the one who became the consequence ah the rapture ah the aperture to live in era where i knownt how they all loved to watch themselves watch themselves so i left them stunned and dangling by their own intestines to watch how i thrice evolved quintuple helix amoeba bondt stood standing on mine own hind legs and found myself staring at african specimen ah ah dearest skull of wildebeest collected and frozen free and timeless was when i understood i too might like to look at myself for in its orbits i saw mine city that made me now running through me the city where i made my kill and didnt bury but instead made a spectacle of their flesh i invasive species beast of no nation a being of no consequence



Texas Isaiah
My Name Is My Name I, 2016
Digital photograph, 20 × 30 in.
Edition of 3
Courtesy the artist

this is what bodies do

Chanice Hughes Greenberg

bend under weight
carry as well
fold into another
& another

a limb here fits into the space yours creates
the light invited in
kept close

how many miles of organs do we contain
how to measure breaths taken
a mouth's capacity

scars stitches body hair
a fingerprint a tongue
apply pressure

deliver a palm reading
an elbow a kneecap
a memory of fracture

sometimes a vessel
a warning
tender when touched

held
praised
bathed
left
then collected contained
offered obeyed

stretched toward the light
towards the morning through the binds

in another life a constellation
in another no history of pain
a body at rest



Krista Clark
Stopped, Westviews Through Ontario, 2017
Courtesy the artist
Photo: Adam Reich

She, Through, *origins*

Aracelis Girmay

She a stranger, written in shards,
with the paths of sky, of soil, the pages of water
water She

a fit, a flash that
things the dark with memory, its ordinary streets
filled by here and else-

where She, a line of she, a line
of lines, She dark with plural,
skeletal and thick, mimics
the big body of a wind
shaping a sail spelling distance, oh
such gestures mark her longing for
Home (her love
and question) una herida abierta

She—a stranger, a woman, a body tracked with blood and space—
little by little lives and leaves
time, bodies it and changes it.

She palimpsest and blossom
and blossom of the history of rocks and salt,
dark and water, grew inside
a vessel, a mother so She—time, mutating

She, a question come back

and

She stones in the water
running away

*I was interested in where Krista Clark's processes might inform (and overlap with) my own. This in mind, I wanted to use found materials, and wanted to employ repetition, layers, and collage in my drafts. I decided to incorporate outside texts "found" in my library. Intuitively, and without at first realizing, I reached for several texts in which writers are wrestling with experiences of place, dislocation, migration, and movement. In a few of these texts, writers are also insisting on language as a means of survival, connection, transformation. Taking Clark's lead, I was interested in what shape and

form might reveal, and so I really tried to think of the texts as building materials and looked for passages whose qualities (of heft, density, sparseness) differed. I then made/wrote this draft of poem in three phases: 1) a poem-drawing based on *Stopped, Westviews Through Ontario* 2) an erasure of my "drawing" 3) a poem born out of that erasure. The phases and poem(s) draw their language from: June Jordan's "These Poems," Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Meena Alexander's *Poetics of Dislocation*, Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival."



Maya Stovall
(b. 1982, Detroit, MI; lives and works in Detroit, MI)
Untitled A, 2017
Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist, Tod Stovall, and Greg Winters

Mirror, Mirror

Nkosi Nkululeko

I can attest, yes, to nothing civic or fair
to be seen in mirrors. Only Fuhrers and fewer
men a man can trust reflect from ghoul-glass
faces. Days, I did search for mercy inside
my eyes, came harder truths I must've bared;

Like in dark rooms at noon I knew I made
havens and heavens despite the boy (a prince
of prints he could've been) that played
until he tamed my flesh that would, at best,
mimic his own. My twin! I, your dearest slave.

The boy who'd have touched me in my sleep
can sleep. The child in me that weeps can weep.
Passion sweeps across the floor of my chest
like a river. The blood in me is red, like a river.
We think it blue but it's the sky, its light that bleeds.

Tell me there's more beyond the multitudes,
in the house of glass and galore, I only believe
you are here with me, my love, because of
the song you make outside of my head.
Your light shifts shapes and shapeshifts, too.

There's nothing clear here to see or hear.
We see not ourselves, but what we wished
we saw had we a choice. Mirror after mirror,
we find our religions, the gods that says
there's nothing besides our vanity, our fears.

Participant Biographies



Joshua Bennett

Dr. Joshua Bennett hails from Yonkers, NY. He is the author of *The Sobbing School* (Penguin, 2016), which was selected as a winner of the National Poetry Series, and *Being Property Once Myself: Blackness and the End of Man*, which is forthcoming from Harvard University Press. Bennett holds a Ph.D. in English from Princeton University, and an M.A. in Theatre and Performance Studies from the University of Warwick, where he was a Marshall Scholar. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Josephine de Karman Fellowship Trust, the William F. Milton Fund and the Ford Foundation. His writing has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry* and elsewhere. He is currently a Junior Fellow in the Society of Fellows at Harvard University.



Desiree C. Bailey

Desiree C. Bailey is a poet, writer and educator. She is the author of the fiction chapbook *In Dirt or Saltwater* (O'Clock Press, 2016). Her work is published in *Best American Poetry 2015*, *Callaloo*, *Washington Square Review* and *The Rumpus*, among other publications. She has a BA from Georgetown University and MFA from Brown University. Desiree was born in Trinidad and Tobago and lives in New York, where she teaches English at CUNY's Borough of Manhattan Community College.



Aracelis Girmay
Photo: Sheila Griffin

Aracelis Girmay was born and raised in Southern California. She is the author of *The Black Maria* (BOA Editions, 2016); *Kingdom Animalia* (BOA Editions, 2011), winner of the Isabella Gardner Poetry Award, and a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; and *Teeth* (Curbstone Press, 2007). She has received fellowships from Cave Canem, Civitella Ranieri, the Whiting Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Girmay is a 2017–18 June Jordan Fellow and is on the editorial board of the African Poetry Book Fund.



Marwa Helal

Marwa Helal is a poet and journalist. Her work appears in *Apogee*, *Hyperallergic*, *the Offing*, *Poets & Writers*, *the Recluse*, *Winter Tangerine*, and elsewhere. She is the author of *I AM MADE TO LEAVE I AM MADE TO RETURN* (No, Dear/Small Anchor Press, 2017) and *Invasive species* (Nightboat Books, 2019). Helal is the winner of BOMB Magazine's Biennial 2016 Poetry Contest and has been awarded fellowships from Poets House, Brooklyn Poets, Cave Canem, and the Conversation Literary Festival. Born in Al Mansurah, Egypt, Helal currently lives and teaches in Brooklyn, New York. She received her MFA in Creative Nonfiction from The New School and her BA in Journalism and International Studies from Ohio Wesleyan University.



Chanice
Hughes-Greenberg

Chanice Hughes-Greenberg is a poet, Capricorn, and postcard collector hailing from upstate New York by way of Long Island. Her work has appeared in *Caketrain*, *Art Observed*, *Packet Biweekly*, *Horse Less Review*, *Big Lucks*, *Studio* magazine, and *No, Dear* magazine. She has participated in readings with The Poetry Project, Lamprophonic, Sunday at Erv's, and The Freya Project. She received a BFA in Writing from Pratt Institute. Chanice works in Development at The Studio Museum in Harlem and resides in Bed-Stuy with her cat Huxley.



Nkosi Nkululeko

Nkosi Nkululeko is a Callaloo, *The Watering Hole*, and 2017 Poets House Fellow. A speaker for TEDxNewYork and a finalist for the 2016 Winter Tangerine Awards for Poetry, Nkosi has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize as well as a nominee and finalist for Best of the Net anthology. He is the author of the chapbook *American/Unknown* (Penmanship Books 2016), and his work is currently published in *[PANK]* magazine, *Apogee*, *VINYL*, *No Token*, and other publications. Nkosi lives in Harlem, New York.

Upcoming Events

Studio Squared: Time Capsules

Sunday, January 14, 1–3 pm

Artists on Artists: *Fictions*

Sunday, January 14, 3–5 pm

Artists on Artists: Performing *Fictions*

Monday, January 15, 1–4 pm

Black Spatial Cultural Memory: Julie Mehretu, Mabel O. Wilson, and American Artist in Conversation

Monday, January 15, 4–6 pm

For more information and to purchase advance tickets, please visit studiomuseum.org. All seating will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

After **January 15, 2018**, the Museum's dynamic exhibitions, events, and programs will be presented at partner sites and satellite locations as part of *inHarlem*. You'll find us throughout the neighborhood and beyond as we prepare to construct our new home right here on our current site.

For more information, visit studiomuseum.org/inharlem.

Cover Image: Walter Price, *Extra Virgin Olive Oil* (detail), 2017. Courtesy the artist and Karma, New York

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