

Poetry Portal

On a quarterly basis in *ARAS Connections* we will host the **Poetry Portal** and introduce an image along with an "Invite to Write", whereby you can conjure, create and submit the poem that is inspired as you engage with the image. We will select and publish some of the poems you submit in the following issue along with a new image and invitation to enter the **Portal**. We hope the metaphor of a portal will help guide spirit, art, and psyche to new places of creativity.

The **Poetry Portal** can be a realm, a channel, a path, and an exploration that has infinite possibilities. In my working with ARAS over the last year, I recalled that there was a form of poetry called the Ekphrasis poem where image and writing coexist. Poets, writers, painters and artists come together and create something anew.

"**Ekphrasis**" or "*ecphrasis*" comes from the Greek *ek* and *phrasis*, meaning 'out' and 'speak' respectively, and the verb *ekphrazein*, to proclaim or call an inanimate object by name. In ancient times it referred to a poetic description of a thing, person, or experience. Modern ekphrastic poems have used a work of art as inspiration and generally shrugged off antiquity's obsession with elaborate description, and instead have tried to interpret, inhabit, confront, and speak to their subjects.

In his *Ars Poetica* (13 BC) the Roman poet Horace wrote his dictum "ut pictura poesis" (as is painting, so is poetry) and since then the two art forms have been linked in the critical mind. Poets and painters sometimes turn to one another for inspiration, and the dialogue has been mutually beneficial. In celebration of this great union, we will host the opportunity for writers and poets to join ARAS by contributing a poem to what we are calling the **Poetry Portal**.

As we stand at the threshold of this new Portal, I have provided an example of the Ekphrasis poem by the poet William Carlos Williams and the painting, *The Fall of Icarus* by Pieter Brueghel.



The Fall of Icarus, by Pieter Brueghel.
Oil-tempera, 29 inches x 44 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels.

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

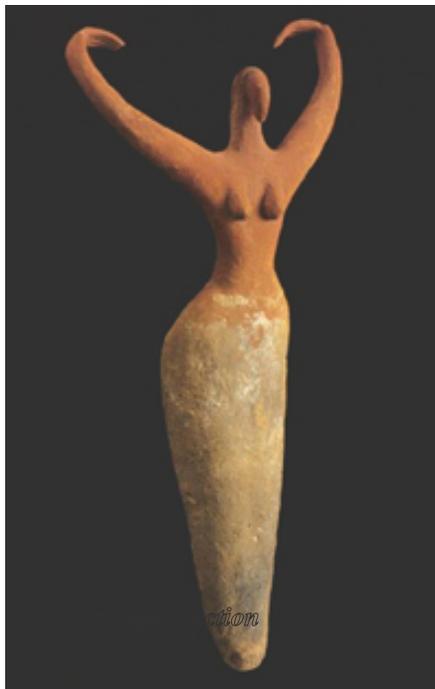
William Carlos Williams

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring
a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry
of the year was
awake tingling
with itself
sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax
unsignificantly
off the coast
there was
a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

Please note that Williams names the painter in the first line, and a reference to the title in the second. If you are writing a poem with a traditional ekphrasis form you would typically identify or name the painting in the first line of the poem. This is the only "rule" in writing an ekphrasis poem--the rest is left to creative freedom.

Invite to Write

The first theme of OFFERING is an intentional one that we have selected along with the following image. To make an offering is an ancient rite and as we pass through this new **Portal** together, we want to honor it by offering wit, enthusiasm, and creativity to the process and all of you.



"Untitled" Terracotta sculpture. Pre-dynastic Egypt

Here are some of the submissions from our first *Invite to Write* inspired by the theme of Offering and the image above:

Terracotta Grace

When Terracotta emerged
Unnamed from the ancient kiln,
Poised en pointe,
As dancers do,
She curved grace
Into the solitude of
My earth-worn soul.

- Karen D. Benson

Offering

O ancient one how you bare your chest
Today you came to visit thousands of years later
In offering a bare chest for man, woman and child to survive
Can I call you Wedna
How far how near
May your feminine offering remain clear
Today I bared my chest for the ones near
How appropriate of a time for your visit
Your posture from long time ago
Remind us to keep you near
You bare your chest to me thousands of years later
Reminding us again to bring the feminine
In all and for all
I dance and stand with my bare chest
As I share you with my psyche
Remain another few thousand years to be
So we may continue to live in harmony
When the new portal opened
I confessed of the pain in my chest
My dance and offering is submitted
I bare my chest for you to be nurtured
Hold my arms up for you to be uplifted
I look to the ground so you may be grounded
I bare my chest so I may be gifted
Higher consciousness is all that is nurtured
Alone in my offering I am alive and distant
Yet close I exist
Old and new continues it's emergence
As ancient as you and I continue into Life's destiny

- By Lera Welch

Offering

I gazed at a terracotta sculpture
unearthed from Pre-dynastic Egypt.
her legs sprung from tangled roots
sturdy as a tree trunk
from earth's red clay basin
her eyes in prayerful surrender
to Nut, Goddess of the Sky
who journeyed through the underworld
protecting a fallen star
as a crown lit the desert sands
black to hues of amber glow
she swayed with ecstatic joy
welcoming the birth of the sun
through a portal of stars.

- Joyce Brady

Untitled
Terra cotta
Sculpture
I don't know
Whose hands
Formed such graceful lines
Alive and breathing
In Pre-dynastic Egypt
I don't know
What you were called then
I know you as
Artemis
Goddess of the moon
Mistress of the hunt
Forever Virgin
Exulting in love
Of every kind
Never losing yourself
Always yielding completely
Focusing the arrow of attention
In each precise moment
Knowing fully
The only true reality
There ever is

I can smell
Rare incense
Guiding me
To your inner sanctum
No longer
Held captive
In my own temple

Letting go
Of ancient history
Drinking
The nectar of enough
In each
Sacred
Moment
This is
My offering
Living
At peace
With myself
I bring
Peace
To the World
Dreaming
A new dream

- Thea Spero-Shelley

I stand before you
empty one
I long for you with scree-like shifting

greeting your coming with a cascade of stones
lurching, stomach
churning, unstoppable
carrying all away

I raise my arms to you
broken
one
twisting, storm bent
releasing flocks from the branches
white
against your grey skies
pleading nothing

I cry tears for you
beloved

head thrown back to face the rain
soaking in knowledge of you
pouring
out libations
to the god who turns the wheel

- Rebekah Anokhina

Terra cotta

Five thousand years ago
 an Egyptian
formed it from clay —

its face like a bird;
 its arms
supporting the sky.

With my first morning
 stretch
I offer up my body —

my willingness to fly.

- E.E. Nobbs

A Sacred Offering

Hearing the cries of an Egyptian deity
Shrouded in Terracotta and mist
And dark robes
I anoint my nude body
With sacred oils
Their scents transport me to other realms
These realms are limitless
Dark swallowed by light
I see an image
The moon's ice melted within the sun's fire
A wedding of alchemical opposites
As I make an offering of raven feathers to the deity
Upon the white altar
I hear a voice in my heart
Calling me towards wholeness.

- Milo Bennett Burdine

The Pre-dynastic Egyptian goddess
Swings her arms and hips
In a dance of joy
Her arms encircle me, you, and the world
Her lacy trunk is like a mermaid's,
Connected to oceanic depths
While her lovely head tilts skyward.

Her fully feminine form
From breasts to flowing curves
Radiate abundance and beauty.
I am invited to join in but if I do not
The dance goes on...
I cannot resist becoming her
Raising my arms to embrace all
Dancing to the spirit of the cosmos
Offering all in joy

- Valerie Harms

offering

clay, we say we are, how does clay pray
after it's done with hoping to evade
pleasure and pain
her arms, her dance, inside your hands her trance leaves nothing,
not one trace on her soft sand skin
our only sin, erased
a beating heart?
a brain?
swallowed herself, the swallow of the soul
it only traced one path across the sky
but it lit all the others in the mind
the angle,
and the light
were right.
just right.
there's clay to keep the grains
and clay to keep the wine
and clay to hold your hand
and clay to hold your eye.
this clay
is I

- Sergiu Vasilov

An unequivocal gesture of leaving for good

- for Gisela

1.
Of course I was afraid to give it your name:
“untitled” was inevitable; the face too
had to be featureless; that is, apart from
the strange tapir nose I gave you; also
part of the deception that would save our lives.

Title name and face betray an identity compelled

by circumstance to secrecy: anonymity was all
we had

and discretion

- and a little art I suppose.

How were we to know that your posing in
my studio might throw us – you the Pharaoh's
spouse and I court artist well below your station –
into the tumultuous wave of love, lust, and
creativity roused in the hours and days when
you stood naked before me arms curved
like a heart caught in an instant of eternity?

2.

Long shadows fell across our lives:
murder, execution, brutality
of untold range and manner
a constant presence then.

The only way I could protect you
was to smooth away the gorgeous
features of your face, then sculpt
that awfully monstrous nose, and
obliterate your name leaving
your lithe and enigmatic form
still poised, the breasts so unlike
the way I knew them. I wrapped
your naked legs in silken cloth
swaddling beneath its lustrous
surface those lovely secrets
other men dared only imagine.

Even now in my studio I remain
consoled by the grace of your svelte
body; at least you were no Venus
of Willendorf short and bulbous
burdened with bloated dugs
fecund belly and jutting buttocks.
If she had been shaped beneath
my hands I might have bequeathed
to history's probing eyes a figure
far less like a pot or incense burner
or some Great Mother archetype.

3.

Every ritual demands this moment
of exquisite tension, of liminal stillness
between now and never
between the sacred and profane
between poise and movement.

On the last day you posed for me
your arms swooped earthwards in

a deep voluptuous bow. It left me
utterly uncertain: was this gesture
meant to invite me into those arms
for good? Or were you just bowing
out in an extravagant farewell
devised to disguise your anguish?

4.

So there you stood, anonymous untitled
seductive as ever. I was left puzzling
what offering, what vicious sacrifice or
exquisite future your open arms
presumed. You never said. I never knew.

After all these years, your silence intrudes into
every remnant of the self that age has wrought:
these days it feels much like the imminent voyage
- to the Field of Reeds perhaps if all goes well.
I admit I shall surrender most reluctantly yet
- quite unlike you, my lost and ever-secret love -
with an unequivocal gesture of leaving for good

- Tony Ullyatt

no title
no fixed identity
what word could describe
woman... becomes wave,
becomes heart, then mind, then soul
daughter becomes mother
young becomes old
Fluid feminine
Ever-changing
Circle of embrace
Beauty and curve
Movement and stillness
Empty and full
Woman

- Josie Kelly

State of Grace

What is your *Untitled* offering,
Pre-dynastic Egypt?

Clothed in little more than
Grace
Your terracotta woman stands
Unstrained.
“Offering,” she says,
“Is the rest step,
The pose for which the human form
Was made.”

She raises high her open arms,
Fingertips intent on heaven,
Until some subtle force
From deep within
Reminds her to return,
And heeding its insistence,
Her supple hands revert toward ground,
Creating through their serpentine surrender
An intimation of a heart
To house that slender head.

Within paradoxes,
Within insoluble complexity,
Pausing and poised
In the molten vortex
Where the fiery planes
Of heaven,
Earth,
Other,
Self,
The possible,
The real,
The never-more,
And yet-to-be
Converge into the kiln
That fixes fast the offering
Forever,
We terracotta dancers
Stretch and find
Beyond our reckoning
Surprisingly natural poses
Wherein we discover
Ourselves
As the only offering

—A state of grace we hold *en pointe*
Until our dynasties erupt.

- Jane Zich

The Bird Woman

It's odd to view
this ancient terracotta sculpture
from pre-dynastic Egypt, its
stylized head resembling
a bird's beak, muscular arms
held high—maybe antlers
or wings. Those breasts
aren't breasts
exactly but
protuberances.

That's the only
word to describe
something so un-
breast like
and also mimicking bird's
beaks.

And the rest of her hidden
in a skirted form
more phallic
than female
tapering down
to who knows
what
underneath.

I suppose you could call it
lovely, but
I'm grateful
these ancient artists
didn't get
their hands
on men.
No telling what
they might
have done.

- Lily Iona MacKenzie

OFFERING

An offering
Exchanged
Inside a dream
Pieces of you
For lost
Pieces of me
Then

Switched
In the night
Fragile skin
Fed
From Psyche's placenta
Shards of gold
Alive now
On a nun's
tattered robe
An unbidden exchange
An alchemical trade

- Judith Harte

Drawn from the shore of the Nile's silt loam,
Red clay is shaped by an unknown hand,
A goddess emerges from ooze of the earth,
Her arms reaching upward to beckon her maker,
Her hips swell under his muddy fingertips,
He smooths, refines, caresses in worship,
Cradles her endless allure, his ancient desire
To return with the god-given woman he made
To her eternal riverbed of red
On the banks of the river Nile.

- Jennifer Molton