

WORDS ON CANVAS

Harn Museum of Art

WRITING COMPETITION



2020 WINNERS

Art is a highly personal experience; it is also a collective one. We might say that the meaning of a painting, sculpture or photograph remains incomplete until it has been viewed, discussed or written about. It is in sharing what we see when we look, that we learn more about art and about ourselves. *Words on Canvas* exists to facilitate this shared understanding.

For the writer, it is a chance to look beyond the surface of a work of art. For you, the reader, it is a chance to share another's perspective for a moment. We hope you enjoy this year's winning *Words on Canvas* entries. Feel free to take this booklet with you into the Harn's galleries and see what stories emerge and inspire you during your visit.

Words on Canvas 2020 was coordinated by **Errol Nelson**, the Harn Museum Campus Engagement Intern.



Cover Image: El Anatsui, *Old Man's Cloth*. 2005

We wish to thank the *Words on Canvas* judges who devoted their time, expertise and interest to the challenging task of selecting winners from among the many fine submissions by the students at the University of Florida and Santa Fe College.

Derek Burdette, Assistant Professor of Art History

Delia Steverson, Assistant Professor of English

Phillip Wegner, Professor of English and Marston-Milbauer Eminent Scholar



Professors Burdette, Steverson and Wegner

Our appreciation goes out to all those who participated in *Words on Canvas*, looking closely, writing carefully and gamely submitting their writing. Congratulations to each of you for your fine efforts.

Words on Canvas is made possible by the generous support of the UF Honors Program.

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Hannah Lazar (UF English)

Black and White

Heather hated the color black. Black was storm clouds and deep water and shadows. Today was scary enough without the reminders. If it were up to her everyone would be wearing white, but no one asked for her opinions. No one wanted the opinions of a child; it was why she now sat alone in a stiff black gown upon a rusty park swing. She wasn't really alone, but her guardian paid so little attention to her she might as well be.

"Aunt Linda, is Mommy an angel now?"

Her aunt looked up, eyes swollen from crying. Little black veins of mascara pooled into bruises against a tidal wave of grief. Her aunt took some time to respond, worrying the thick pearls strung around neck with gloved fingers. Heather didn't mind; she was patient. After all, Heather was a veteran of funerals. She had been a baby when they lowered her father into the ground, but it still counted. He had left them after some war. Heather never knew which one and didn't like to ask. It made her mom look like Aunt Linda did now.

"Of course, she is Heather. She's up there in heaven with your daddy right now."

Then it was decided. Heather was going to fly up and greet them. She pumped her little legs furiously, kicking up dust and scuffing the tops of her clunky black dress shoes. Pretty soon she rocked herself into a rhythm and only had to sway where the world pulled to continue her descent into the sky.



Inspired By

André Kertész. *Washington Square Park*. 1970

“Not too high Heather. I don’t want you hurting yourself and ruining that nice dress.”

Heather didn’t hear her. Not with the wind whistling through her ears like a chorus of angels beckoning her home. She was close now. The faded blue sky spread out before her as the sun dipped behind the trees to bathe her fair ivory skin in buttery light. Her small fists clung to the metallic chain, staining her hands a faint orange where the rust met her palms. Chain links pressed little divots to run from forearm to fingertip.

“Heather get down from there! It’s getting late, and we should be getting home.”

She had no home. Her home was buried six feet below them. She wanted better. She wanted to be above. Heather was so high up now that each swing sent the old playset below her rattling to buck against the earth in thunderclaps. She could feel the momentary weightlessness as she was pulled from her seat before being viciously yanked back down. It was time.

“HEATHER!”

Aunt Linda was a moment too late. Heather leaned back, the air tugging hair in front of her eyes as the swing slung backwards, thrashing as a live, writhing thing. She hung suspended for a moment, then momentum propelled her small frame skyward, the chain snapping to clatter against the ground in a tinkling of church bells. She flung herself at the milky twilight, black dress billowing, and arms stretched out as wings. The moon a faint white halo coaxing the stars into the sky. They winked at Heather as old friends, as family. Heather was flying home.

Brianna Steidle (UF Psychology)

Half-Cubism
after Luljeta Lleshanaku

It's November now, and the mosquitoes
have long since died.
Steam tiptoes around iron bars
and upward.
Below the streets the subway rumbles;
a giant turns in his sleep,
his hand brushing the pitted stone chimney.
Dawn sets to shredding tower by tower
(the sidewalk, still shaded,
pimpled with grass, laughs heartily).
A curly beard cracks open his Bible
and begins, in birdsong:
*Look toward heaven
and if you are able
number the stars*



Inspired By
Bertram Hartman, *City Blocks*. Circa 1929

Christine Taylor (UF English)

Times Square, 1979

Rainbow droplets fall,
Following the slant of her chin.
For the moment, she allows them.
They reflect neon warning lights.
The honking horns answer them:
“Flee, young blaze; it’s late.”

She breathes in fire,
Leaning on a Chevy Drag van,
Facing the glow of danger, Fear,
Like smoke, clutching each tired lung
In a calculated grip.
Dark angels watch her.

Times Square joins their play,
1979 devils.
New York tangles her curls. She screams.
Garish “Orange Julius” light
Reveals a Buchnera print
On her poisoned throat.

The horns sound distant,
as if evading her anguish.
With defeated gasps, blood, and tears,
She pulls cotton over satin,
Praying for the strength to flee.
Curse the Incubi of New York City.



Both inspired by—Noel Mahaffey. *Night-Times Square*. Circa 1979

Valentina Sarmiento (SFC Journalism)
The Ballad of Orange Julius

Neon effervescence sets the air abuzz.
Humming like a hornets' nest; a fluorescent Midas touch
blinding passive passersby and pedestrians alike.
Claiming its own circadian rhythm in defiance.

My fixed stare,
a concession,
doubles as an unspoken confession.
Letting liquid courage ferment at the back of my throat.
Nevertheless,

my breath

still honors

their Pulse.

A million tongues have already professed their affection-

add me to the list,
Androgyny, my love.
I turn to the ostentatious orangery;
they say citrus stains the teeth.

It tastes to me of tangerine and technicolor.
Sweet and sour and feverishly female.



Angelina Bonilla (SFC Microbiology)
Death in B Flat

I'm afraid of Death
maybe you are, too.
but of all the mysteries and myths
I know this is true:

space hums in B flat
so there is a song
a celestial orchestra
and life sings along

Death might be a dancer
pirouetting through time
through the yawning of space
to music sublime

a ceaseless waltz,
a pas de deux
Death dances with Life
a dance for two

I think Death sways gently
as he moves to the hum
in tune with the groans
of his dancing bones

when he offers his hand,
over the stellar expanse
do not be afraid
it is only a dance

Inspired by—Imai Oshin. *Skeleton*. Circa 1920-1930

Joshua Evangelista (UF English & Theater)

Of Old Man's Cloth

The ridges deep and broad
fabric stretched like
folds over heavy-
lidded eyes.
A story shackled and
plowed like currents
cross the Atlantic.
A people petrified.
Matter turned to mineral.
May its banner fly high
for misery ephemeral.

Inspired by—El Anatsui. *Old Man's Cloth*. 2005. Reproduced on cover.

Image Credits:

El Anatsui

Old Man's Cloth, 2003

Aluminum and copper wire

16 ft. x 17 ft. 1 in. (487.7 x 520.7 cm)

Museum purchase with funds from friends of the Harn Museum
2005.37

Bertram Hartman

City Blocks, c. 1929

Oil on board

48 x 30 1/8 in. (121.9 x 76.5 cm)

Gift of William H. and Eloise R. Chandler
PA-84-163

André Kertész

Washington Square Park (child on swing, 04-04-70, #20A), 1970

Gelatin silver print; double weight air dried, glossy

Image: 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm)

Gift of Lori and Kenneth Polin Family
2018.79.44

Noel Mahaffey

Night-Times Square, 1979

Silkscreen

17 1/2 x 15 in. (44.5 x 38.1 cm)

Gift of Leonard Velick
PR-81-28-1

Imai Oshin

Skeleton

Japanese, Taisho and Showa, Late Taisho - early Showa era, circa 1920-1930

Burl wood

11 x 7 1/4 x 4 5/8 in. (27.9 x 18.4 x 11.7 cm)

Museum purchase, funds provided by the Robert H. and Kathleen M. Axline Acquisition Endowment
2012.24



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UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA