



ART MEETS LITERATURE

AN UNDYING LOVE AFFAIR

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This limited-edition publication, created exclusively for the program *Art Meets Literature: An Undying Love Affair*, features a selection of nine works of art from the collections of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, chosen by the nine museum curators. Each art selection is accompanied by an original poem, written by one of nine award-winning poets.

The program *Art Meets Literature: An Undying Love Affair* was developed to explore the relationship between poetry and the visual arts. The Library of Virginia and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts are thrilled to welcome the Smithsonian Institution's ever-popular presenter Dr. Aneta Georgievska-Shine for a magical evening uncovering the "undying love affair" between poetry and master works of art.

Art Meets Literature is an event of the Virginia Literary Festival. Anchored by the elegant Library of Virginia Literary Awards Celebration and the popular James River Writers Conference, the Virginia Literary Festival celebrates Virginia's rich literary resources with a weeklong series of events.

Throughout its colorful history, Virginia has produced significant literary figures. Writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Rita Dove, Tom Wolfe, Ellen Glasgow, William Styron, Lee Smith, Virginius Dabney, and Douglas Southall Freeman have enriched American literature with their poetry, fiction, history, biography, and criticism.

Today, Virginia is home to a large, diverse, and ever-growing group of accomplished novelists, nonfiction writers, and poets.



Jina, Probably Shreyamsanatha, 1160, Indian, Rajasthan, probably vicinity of Mount Abu, white marble with slight traces of pigment, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2000.98

Serenely seated in meditation, this figure is a Jina, or Tirthankara, one of the great teachers and exemplars of the Jain faith. An inscription on his elegantly decorated cushion seems to name him as Shreyamsanatha, the eleventh of the twenty-four Tirthankaras. It also gives the date the sculpture was made and names the merchant and clergyman who commissioned and installed the image. With a triangular torso, cylindrical limbs, and spherical head, the figure's body is abstracted into almost pure geometrical shapes. Lotus medallions on his large hands and feet are auspicious marks indicating his exceptional status. A strip of cloth that emerges near his feet shows that he is not entirely nude, but meagerly clad in the manner of an ascetic. Traces of color indicate that the sculpture was once wholly or partially painted.

TIRTHANKARA

BY SHONDA BUCHANAN

This eleventh son spent an eternity
breathing quietly into the palms of his hands
so as not to hurt another being.
Into the amber air of the heart's chambers
into his wife's hair cascading down her henna swept back
into the light of every alabaster morning
into the next life where the children of Jain
breathed into their masks and waited
to become enlightened. Oh, the long wait.
Into the sky's beckoning mouth
into the trembling calyx of lotus flowers
into the blood of deserts and their cool hot sand
humming of unquenchable thirsts,
into the very soul of humanity until all
was rendered...
Still, truth never emerged.
Not the seeds of power, not the mind,
not the body, not the pinpoint eyelash of the soul
and a knowing that we are the water in a willing, but weak hand.
We are the trickling, and the rushing and at once the falling
over of life's cliff.
Better to kiss deeply, or sit and breathe? Better to let go
than hold on to emptiness.
Better to make love and eat well
or wait in silence? Better to recover
from a broken heart, and childhood,
and war's bitter, salty kiss.
Better to mend; better to forgive. Yes,
Better to let it all come.



Shonda Buchanan, poet, creative nonfiction and fiction writer, and essayist, is the author of *Who's Afraid of Black Indians?* and editor of *Voices From Leimert Park: A Poetry Anthology*. Working on a second collection of poetry and a novel, she is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Hampton University. Shonda's poem *At Buckroe Beach* was nominated by Long Story Short as the 2010 Poem of the Year. For more info, please visit www.shondabuchanan.com.



Jaguar, Moche style (Peru), 400–100 BC, gold with green stones, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund, 59.28.9

Of all the creatures worshiped by pre-Columbian peoples, predatory felines such as the jaguar were the most respected. Possessing great hunting skills and no natural enemies, these animals moved between different realms of nature since they could swim rivers and climb trees as well as live on land. This flexibility endowed them with symbolic and supernatural importance. Only the most powerful shamans could transform themselves into such felines.

This gold Moche jaguar is one of at least seven identical copies. Each version was produced by pressing sections of thin gold sheets into molds, then assembling the various pieces to create the final product. Pairs of holes found on the tail and lower body of the ornament suggest that it was originally sewn to a headband, shirt, or belt. The hollow jaguar also holds a pebble which means that it was meant to rattle when worn.

JAGUAR

BY CLAUDIA EMERSON

This was what we first feared, then coveted,
and knew we could never achieve—densely
fleet night-climber, swimmer, its leap one of mute
beauty into flight. So we fashioned a likeness
of glossed gold to wear jewel-like, the hollowed
lightness of its body a chamber for the stone
we placed inside—a percussive pulse we made
obedient to the poverty of our bodies,

the fire we circled suddenly finer-muscled,
the shadows we cast leaping higher than we could,
the figment of all desire we bound to us,
green eyed at the waist, across the chest—fire-glozed—
its soul that small stone, lonely bone, such bright-
quickenings we could believe to be our own.



Claudia Emerson's five books include *Late Wife*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, and most recently, *Secure the Shadow*. Emerson has been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Library of Congress, and the Guggenheim Foundation. Former Poet Laureate of Virginia, Emerson was also awarded the Carole Weinstein Poetry Prize through the Library of Virginia.



Window, ca. 1901–02, by Georges de Feure, French, made by Hans Müller-Hickler(?), German, stained and leaded glass, bronze, wood, gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis, 85.349

Georges de Feure was an artist, designer, and interior decorator based in Paris around 1900. He was one of three artists chosen by Siegfried Bing to design interiors for Bing's pavilion at the World's Fair in Paris in 1900. De Feure designed stained-glass windows, textiles, carpets, glassware, and furniture for a boudoir. This window, designed by de Feure and probably made by Hans Müller-Hickler, shows a female figure surrounded by floral imagery. Commissioned by Bing, it was most likely also shown at the de Feure exhibition held in Bing's gallery in 1903.

FEMME FATALE

BY CAROLYN KREITER-FORONDA

I wear silence to bait you,
my hands pillowed
beneath the chin,

a floral gown showy
with a mermaid's
frounce and flare.

Like the moon, I wear
seduction:
serpentine feathers

woven through a hat,
embellished
with a sparrow.

Its amorous song flits
among orchids,
poppies, fleshy irises

that adorn my dress
and climb the stone
wall I lean against.

Never turn your back
on a lady
whose fragrance draws you

into smoky webs: umber,
green, rose in the glint
and glare of glass.

In a garden of calla lilies
opening, I beguile
you. With lead strips

I encircle your heart.
Darkness soars
through an alluring sky.

PHOTO BY DICK WELTON



Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, a poet and visual artist, served as Poet Laureate of Virginia from 2006 to 2008. She has published five books of poetry and co-edited two poetry anthologies. Her numerous awards include five grants from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, six Pushcart Prize nominations, a Special Merit Poem in *Comstock Review's* annual contest, a *Passages North* contest award, an Edgar Allan Poe first-place award, and a Resolution of Appreciation from the State Board of Education for her contributions as Poet Laureate. She is an Adjunct Faculty Member for the VMFA Statewide Program and serves as a Literary Arts Specialist for the D.C. Metrorail Project.



Moonlight Marine, 1885, by Edward M. Bannister, American, oil on canvas, J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane Fund for American Art, 2009.308

Painting and the sea were dual passions of Edward Mitchell Bannister, the first African American artist to receive widespread acclaim. After a youth spent working on ships along the Atlantic seaboard, the Canadian-born artist eventually settled in Providence, Rhode Island, where he became one of the earliest faculty members of the Rhode Island School of Design.

Best known for pastoral landscapes inspired by Jean-François Millet and the French Barbizon school, Bannister invested his later marine subjects—views of the Atlantic and Rhode Island coastline—with a more experimental vision and dramatic touch. *Moonlight Marine* is an exceptional example of the painter's bolder mature style.

MOONLIGHT MARINE

BY CAROLYN KREITER-FORONDA

At dusk, mist lifts
out of the ocean,
surrounds clouds
woven like a vow.

Tossed onto rocky
shoals, waves
unravel, undo
all mockery of blue

as they glisten,
then retreat
toward a ship
sailing to sea.

Ringed in gold, moon
rises, discloses
wanderings
beyond the horizon:

whales trawling
in speed-bursts
with the freedom
of wind, their roars

magnified as they tunnel
the depths.
I step into night,
douse myself

in luminous froth
until up I rise,
spinning
in the whirl of air.

PHOTO BY DICK WELTON



Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, a poet and visual artist, served as Poet Laureate of Virginia from 2006 to 2008. She has published five books of poetry and co-edited two poetry anthologies. Her numerous awards include five grants from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, six Pushcart Prize nominations, a Special Merit Poem in *Comstock Review's* annual contest, a *Passages North* contest award, an Edgar Allan Poe first-place award, and a Resolution of Appreciation from the State Board of Education for her contributions as Poet Laureate. She is an Adjunct Faculty Member for the VMFA Statewide Program and serves as a Literary Arts Specialist for the D.C. Metrorail Project.



Inkstone Box, Japanese, Edo period (1615–1968), lacquer on wood with gold and silver sprinkled powder (*maki-e*), metal foils, silver fittings, museum purchase with Estate of Lewis H. Blair, Honorable David K. E. Bruce, Helena Woolworth McCann Collection, gift of the Winfield Foundation, Senator Hugh Scott, by exchange, 2010.80

A traditional writing tool, this inkstone box, containing an inkstone, a water dropper, and writing utensils, is part of a dowry for use at the incense ceremony (*kōdō*). The process of the ceremony is to smell samples of heated incense, write poems, and to play various games, a social ritual practiced among the feudal aristocracy and imperial family.

This lacquer is lavishly decorated with design of pine, bamboo, and cherry blossoms, the symbols of longevity, strength, and prosperity. The family crests on the lacquer indicate the marriage between two powerful feudal families (*daimyo*): a cross in a circle for the bride's Shimazu family, and the plum blossom for the groom's Hisamatsu-Matsudaira family. It was recorded that the wedding lords took place in January 1827.

The design is achieved by sprinkling gold, silver, and other metal powders onto the lacquer surface, and then enhanced by the raised powder and the inlaid foils. The marvelous craftsmanship on this box represents the Japanese lacquer craftsmanship of the early 19th century at its best.

THE INKSTONE BOX

BY HENRY HART

We sit on a porch above the lake.

Sun drops gold coins through birches
onto the lacquered box—

a wedding gift from your father.

In July we buried his ashes
beneath cherry trees in the mountain's shadow.

His last breaths rattle in waves—

mantras from the lake's dark throat,
white syllables lost in pebbles.

You strike a match, light incense

in a bowl,
stand back from smoke and scattered ash.

Is it balsam that smolders,

its scent on the trail we hiked
above Black Mountain Cemetery?

Tears fall from the dropper,

dribble along stone
smudged with an ink stick.

I dip my pen and scratch,

dip my pen and scratch:
"The hermit left the capitol in April mist.

When he arrived at White Stork Tower

frost burned leaves
to red and orange dust.

To pass the time in his stone room

he composed mysteries.
The Pleiades leapt from amber clouds



into night, dusted Orion's sword
for telltale prints,
examined the moon's stigmata.

After days alone with his books,
the silence dizzied.
Mist whited out the horizons.

He craved another voice,
even flames
reaching from the stove to touch him.

December wind guided him
down the mountain
to bells clinking in a temple.

Snow blew wedding veils
through a bare tree by the gate.
He wanted to catch one

in his inkstone box, write
a love note to the world,
white letters that would never melt."



Henry Hart has published three books of poetry and critical studies of Seamus Heaney, Robert Lowell, and Geoffrey Hill. His biography of James Dickey was runner-up for Southern Book Critics Circle Award in 2000. He was one of the founding editors of *Verse* magazine. His poems and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *Sewanee Review*, and many other journals. He teaches at the College of William and Mary, where he is the Mildred and J.B. Hickman Professor of Humanities.



Rolling, 1961, by Adolph Gottlieb, American, oil on canvas, gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis, 85.396

Art is an adventure into an unknown world, which can be explored only by those willing to take the risk. This world of the imagination is fancy-free and violently opposed to common sense. It is our function as artists to make the spectator see our way, not his way.

—Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman

Gottlieb used abstract shapes and colors to express deep, subconscious levels of thought and emotion. A series of works he described as imaginary landscapes led, in the late 1950s, to his “burst” paintings; *Rolling* is one of these. Luminous red and blue disks hovering in the upper part of the composition suggest planets, while an agitated tangle of brushstrokes below evokes the earth. Gottlieb’s masterful, calligraphic brushwork exemplifies the Abstract Expressionist emphasis on gesture.

A CURATOR ASKS A CHILD ABOUT ADOLPH GOTTLIEB’S *ROLLING*

BY SUSAN KINSOLVING

Do you see how the artist felt free to scribble there in black?

No, said the child, *I see an agitated gesture, dark and abstract.*

Let’s look at the two big circles; one is red, the other blue.

Primary colors in a spatial relationship, shrugged the child, *what else is new?*

Does the pink splotch on the left remind you of a flower?

Not really, it reads like a mistake, a botch at a late hour.

Does the painting make you think of planets or something new?

It makes me wonder if there’s something else we can do.

Want to try another painting? Let’s take a look around.

No thanks, said the child. *Gottlieb’s sufficiently profound.*

You’re quite precocious. The curator smiled, How old are you?

I’m ten, like Picasso said, making art is a kid’s purview.

Do you have colored paper at home? Scissors, paint, glue?

Yes, and a block from Carrara. I’m working on a statue.



Poet **Susan Kinsolving** earned a BA at the University of California, Los Angeles, and an MFA at the California Institute of the Arts. Kinsolving’s collections of poetry include *The White Eyelash* (2003) and *Dailies & Rushes* (1999), which was a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist. Kinsolving has won the Poetry Society of America’s Lyric Poetry Award as well as several international fellowships. She has taught at the Bennington Writing Seminars, the University of Connecticut, and the California Institute of the Arts.



Red-Figure Bell-Krater, 330–310 BC, attributed to either the Python Painter or the Boston Orestes Painter, Greek (South Italian, Paestan), Terracotta, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund, 81.72

Side A: Libation scene with warrior and woman

Side B: Two draped youths

In Greek and Roman religion, offerings were made to the gods prior to most undertakings. Here a warrior prepares to depart for war while a woman pours out a libation (liquid offering). The woman's headdress and the feathers on the warrior's helmet are native Italic attire, not Greek, which suggests that the vase was made for the native market.

THE PAINTER'S WORK: RED-FIGURE BELL-KRATER

BY DEBRA NYSTROM

The art has reached its highest form,
clay slip brushed across the pot as delicate
lines of drapery, gesture, eyes that seem to see. Some
works now bear the name of the painter, who must not
any longer be a slave. Here, on each side, one figure holding
a vine of ivy toward another—peace between
two men who talk at ease, grace in waves that curl beneath them, a ring
of waves above the base, passing too below the opposite scene—
feathers curving over a helmet; wasp-waist lion on a soldier's shield; the open
hand again, the vine between thumb and finger offered to a woman
lifting cup and bottle, preparing for the warrior's taking leave—or might
this be return from battle? Armor, libation, *Gods Be Praised* give way to wild delight?
Krater: for mixing wine and water at parties, to celebrate, let
go remembering a while. What has happened, who we are. That forgetting is a threat.



Debra Nystrom has published three books of poems, *Bad River Road* (2009) and *Torn Sky* (2003), both from Sarabande Books, and *A Quarter Turn* (1991) from Sheep Meadow Press. Her work has been published in numerous magazines and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry*, and has received awards from *Five Points*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Shenandoah*, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, and the Library of Virginia. She teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Virginia.



Ga Wree-Wre Mask, 19th–20th century, Dan culture (Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire), wood, metal, fiber, cowrie shells, glass beads, brass, bone, hand-woven cloth (the raffia skirt is not original), Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 92.242

The dramatic visual impact of African masks is evident in this solemn-looking judgment mask, known as *Ga Wree-Wre*. It walks about and sits, but does not dance. An interpreter who understands the mask's strange, animal-like "language" accompanies it, communicating its messages to the assembled public.

Elements of the *Ga Wree-Wre* contrast the wilderness, symbolized by the brass leopard's teeth and the raffia skirt, with the village, suggested by the human features, the headdress, and the woven cape.

GA WREE-WRE: THE JUDGMENT MASK

BY LUCINDA ROY

I recognize you, *Ga Wree-Wre*. Once you spoke the language of leopards. In the filtered light of the museum, protected from termites and heat, you'll last indefinitely—though now no spirit-dreams beget you. Far from the forest of secrets you have no interpreter, no symbiont, no Poro Society votary. You are a mouth that cannot move.

As a child, I remember seeing your brothers in masks my father carved. For centuries, in Accompong—the birthplace of my Maroon(ed) father—the tradition of the carver was passed from father to son. Five thousand miles away from the people of Dan, relocated Africans like him remembered you.

I am your daughter, once removed, but I would never have been granted the honor of carving you, *Ga Wree-Wre*, or becoming your porter. Even so, my lineage is yours: the mane of cowrie shells framing your head, your beard of small bells, your crusader's cape, your cast-down eyes, your intransigent beauty. The monoxyulous carver didn't make you his—what fool would try to own a spirit-god?—he made you for them, and it was to them, the village, that you spoke in your animal-tongue behind the wooden door of your face.

Mask without a man, African-Diasporan, antique mannequin of wood and shells and bone resting on your yellow raffia skirt (as stained-as-a-Kola-nut-eater's-teeth)



looking for all the world like someone capable
of sleep, you are *Ga Wree-Wree*
in hibernation.

I lived where you once lived.
In my spine is something fossilized.
Among the Poro patriarchs and the
matriarchs of the Bundu, I dispensed
with Time—as if it were a cage I'd lived in
formerly before I found a key.

Outside at night in Africa were stars
as intimate as rain; outside at day
were sudden citrus sunrises, orange
enough to make my wide eyes sting. If you
are wise, *Ga Wree-Wree*, you will keep your secrets
underneath your magic cape and skirt. Don't tell
us that you see inside the dark—we'll picture
flashlights and fluorescent bulbs, we'll never see
your path through time, a leap from here to more
intently *there*.

Ga Wree-Wree, they say you are no dancer.
(What judge would risk such spontaneity?)
Instead, you perform the spoken word—
a duet between persona and interpreter.
Yet what are words if not a dance from pronoun
to imperative, from a dialect
of mercy to an idiom of something
else—from *he* to *she*—from you, *Ga Wree-Wree*,
to me?

PHOTO BY RICHARD ALINJITT



Lucinda Roy is an Alumni Distinguished Professor in English at Virginia Tech, where she teaches fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Her publications include the poetry collections *Wailing the Dead to Sleep* and *The Humming Birds* (winner of the Eighth Mountain Poetry Prize); the novels *Lady Moses* (a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers selection), and *The Hotel Alleluia*; and a memoir-critique, *No Right to Remain Silent: What We've Learned from the Tragedy at Virginia Tech*. She is currently at work on another poetry collection and a series of oil paintings depicting the Middle Passage.



Battle of the Centaurs and the Lapiths, 1852, by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, French, oil on canvas, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund, 2008.100

In the 19th century, the French academic system privileged “history painting,” which was considered to be the highest and most important category of painting, and therefore the ultimate expression of artistic talent. History paintings by definition are multi-figure scenes with narratives taken from literature, history, mythology, or the Bible. William-Adolphe Bouguereau painted *Battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths* while he was a student at the French Academy in Rome, which was a highly desirable situation for a young French artist. While living in Rome, Bouguereau was surrounded by the city’s ancient art and architecture, and this immersion in the past was itself considered crucial to the artist’s development. The painting depicts a highly dramatic moment taken from Greek mythology, the Battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs. The two groups had been long-standing enemies, but the Lapiths attempt to reconcile with the Centaurs and invite them to a wedding banquet and celebration. The Centaurs, mythological creatures who were half-man and half-horse, got drunk and caused mayhem when they tried to abduct the bride. In Bouguereau’s image, the viewer sees the most violent chapter of the story. This is a clash of civilizations, and the dead and wounded from both sides litter the ground. As the two central male figures fight over the woman, their bodies create a dynamic pyramid-shaped composition, which allows the eye to be drawn toward the terrified bride, partially draped in a violently red cloak. Bouguereau relied on poses derived from ancient sculpture throughout the work.

BOUGUEREAU’S BIG BOW-WOW

BY RON SMITH

My money’s on the Centaur, yours
on Mister Muscle with the perfect butt.
The Centaur’s the force
that splits the woman
off from the man, the fierce face
that steals their faces, that pulls ours
to the wall, handfuls
of hooves freezing
the hero, turning the woman’s eyes
away from the human.

Caught between good intentions
and really bad manners,
between angry sky and barren earth,
I’d say the fit fellow’s already Xed.
The woman struggles
feebly. But you say,

*The man’s achieved the stasis
of cultured concentration.
Yes, I say, a perfect target for a club so cocked
that it will free
this woman from her buff kinsmen—
long enough at least to stretch her
horizons.*

*A pyramid for stability, you say.
But the pyramid’s apex
is the savage wedge that will destroy it.
Balance, you say you see, the beautiful man
and the beautiful woman, joined
in a moment of—by an image of—
unity.*



It's a battle scene, I say—it's terrorism.

Dark struggles all round, bestiality
triumphant in the shadows. *It's lovely,*
you say. And you say: *Hands sprout,*
thus tame, hooves. And, look: Is Mister Muscle
growing up a tail?

Faulty anatomy, I tell myself—but I hold
my tongue, thinking,
I can't help thinking,
of yours.

PHOTO BY ERIC DOBBS



Ron Smith has two books from LSU Press, *Its Ghostly Workshop* (forthcoming) and *Moon Road*. The title poem of his first book, *Running Again in Hollywood Cemetery*, has been recently reprinted in *Southern Poetry Review* and in the anthologies *Don't Leave Hungry* and *Remapping Hallowed Ground*. Smith was an inaugural winner of the Carole Weinstein Poetry Prize and is now one of the curators of that prize. He is Writer-in-Residence at St. Christopher's School in Richmond.

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