



*The
Turning*

Leafflets

Summer 2025

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The Turning Leaflets project is a quarterly zine created through collaboration between TTLJ staff and members from the writing community. Inside each leaflet is a letter from the editors, 1-2 craft essays and/or book reviews, and an interview with contributors.

Submissions for craft essays and book reviews are open on a rolling basis. For more information, please visit our website: www.turningleafjournal.com

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The Turning Leaf Journal

Letter from the Editor:

Bridging Connectivity Through Art

Dear readers,

Welcome to the Summer 2025 Leaflet! Take a pause, pour yourself a cup of tea, and let's explore the backstage of editors, artists, and writers working together in conversation about creating art.

Here we hope to spark banter with readers, especially as our audience grows. We feel privileged to connect with the vulnerable makings of writers from around the world. We love reading about diverse cultures, backgrounds, careers, childhood memories, untanglings of grief, smattering of acrylic, anger at gods who speak in spills of crimson, the tender moments of becoming a parent, we are here for it all, the messy first drafts and essays you've been submitting to journals for years. We are honored to be a part of your writing process. Witnessing you, even for a brief moment, is like watching a comet ignite a trail of blue across a weave of stars. In these leaflets, we get to focus more intentionally on how to create art, and what it means to be a creator.

As a U.S. based journal, it seems impossible to write to you without expressing our own grief at the current political push to censor, dehumanize and polarize. The value of creativity has been diminished in favor of "productivity"—as though exercising our creative muscles. isn't a productive use of our lives.

My plea is to use art, now more than ever, as a bridge. As writers and artists, a privilege we share is our ability to stop someone, if just for a moment, and make them stare. Our gifts enable us to hold our viewers in

a perspective that is not their own and can create a sense of connection, understanding, or questioning. Art can serve many functions. It can be pasta and meatballs arranged on a plate to look like a fish, meant to make someone laugh. It can be a painting of the starry night, meant to explore an innovative style. It can be a photograph of horrors hoped never to be repeated. Regardless, art creates a connection between the viewer and creator. This connection affirms the humanity in all of us.

I don't know about you, but the longer I spend living on this planet, the more deeply I feel people are meant to laugh, sing, weep, play, change, and create together. I encourage us to lean into these experiences and use art as a bridge to understand and hold one another. Historically, writers and artists have often played an important part in bringing to light the humanity in all of us and truths difficult to witness. I encourage us to continue forward in this good cause.

And for the days it all feels too heavy to even pick up a pen, it is okay. Emotional burnout waters down creativity. I encourage you, dear reader, to hold yourself. Find whatever simple thing that sparks joy. It doesn't need to be writing an award winning book right now. Play with glitter, hot glue gun a fairy house, draw flowers using sidewalk chalk, anything to revive your grounding when the air feels like lead.

Most importantly, thank you for reading. It is because of readers like you we are able to publish meaningful art. We are thankful for this community and hope to continue fostering growth. We're excited to read more from you soon... or shut the computer and go run through a field, take a hot bath, make fresh tortillas, whatever sparks that art-colored wonder we hunger for.

Sincerely,
Lauren McKinnon

Craft Essay

Ekphrasis and The Art of Inspiration

Megan Eralie-Henriques

In her craft Bible, *The Writing Life*, Annie Dillard advises writers to “Push it. Examine all things intensely and relentlessly” (78). Developing the skill to look beyond oneself and observe the world surrounding comes with the reward of unlocking inspiration in even the most unexpected places. This act of looking often leads me to ekphrastic writing.

Recognized as a rhetorical tool, ekphrastic writing is used to describe an existing work of art—a description that is ultimately reflective of the action within the work. The writer, through this reflection, adds to or renews the original meaning of the artwork. For example, a poem written after viewing Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers” in which the poet connects the swirling yellows with meaning found from a memory of their youth. At its core, Ekphrasis is an exercise in observation and connection.

Here’s some advice you’ve probably heard a thousand times:

me what you see. Tell me what you feel.

You might be thinking “There’s plenty of poems about art--we don’t need more.” Writers, myself included, tend to compete for originality as though it’s a life or death race to live the most unique life possible so that what we write can be interesting. Sometimes we forget that what we have in common with each other is interesting too, and maybe even more important than what separates us. So, tell me what you see in Van Gogh, not what you think other people want you to see. I want to know how your favorite piece of art haunts your dreams. I want you to tell me how you see yourself in the face of Rembrandt’s “Lucreita.” Tell me how the art inspires you.

Ekphrastic writing doesn't need to be about the writer at all, and frequently is not. A poem can imagine the life of the figures in Edvard Munch's "Two Women on the Shore." But remember: just because the text on the page isn't about you doesn't mean the writer is not present. Great writing always reveals something about its author. My suggestion to you is that ekphrastic writing can be a tool to help discover or reaffirm one's identity and values as a writer. What are you drawn to, when you observe other works of art? What emotions or memories does artwork conjure? Surround yourself in art, and inspiration too surrounds you.

Writing Exercise

Visit an art museum, either local or virtual, and look for a piece of art that speaks to you. First, list what you see. Use bullet points, forget sentence structure. What/who is the subject of the art? What colors are used? Then, write about what you feel. What is the tone? How does this art make you feel? Don't think too hard here either. Consider this step your research phase, not your drafting phase.

Put your notes away for a while, long enough that you almost forget you wrote them. Return on a rainy day. Without looking up the art again, write a poem based solely on your notes. Think about the colors, the feelings. What is your subject now? Once a draft exists, look back at the original artwork. How has the artwork taken on new meaning?

Recommended Ekphrastic Works:

- "The Starry Night," Anne Sexton
- "Everyday around the world a woman is pulled into blue," Krista Franklin
- "The Gospel of Mary," Mary Jo Bang
- "Panic at John Baldessari's Kiss," Elena Karina Byrne
- One from our archive, "Immigration," Allison Burris

I'm trying to decide
if this is what I want.



An Interview With *Susan Barry-Schultz*

When reviewing artwork submissions we look for pieces that reveal something about the artist and/or the subjects they're exploring. Susan's evocative work tells a clear story while leaving room for the viewer to see themselves within the work, which is why we included four of her pieces in Volume 1, Issue 2—including the issue cover. These collages, formed from found materials, explore themes of identity, connection, and transformation. As we've gotten to know Susan better, we've discovered that Susan's vibrancy extends far beyond just her artwork—everything she touches is infused with life and love.

In this interview, conducted asynchronously in June 2025, Susan opens up about her creative process, what's inspiring her, and how being a visual artist and poet go hand-in-hand.



How would you describe your art to someone who has never seen it before?

I create abstract pieces of visual art on canvas from found materials to convey a mood or message primarily through the use of color. I mainly use scraps of paper torn from magazines or catalogues although I often incorporate ephemera and other forms of text (vintage book pages, blue prints, postage stamps, etc.) and sometimes add elements of ink, paint and pencil.

In three words I would say: kinesthetic, textural, color-driven. Wait, is that four words?

One of my favorite quotes about writing, from an essay by Rosemarie Waldrop, applies to what I am hoping to explore in my visual art as well: “Collage, like fragmentation, allows you to frustrate the expectation of continuity, of step-by-step-linearity. And if the fields you juxtapose are different enough there are sparks from the edges.”

I am very excited by the idea of bringing forth those “sparks from the edges.”

We know you for your collage work. Do you work in any other mediums? Are there mediums you'd like to experiment in, but haven't yet?

I have done some work in water color and lately I have been working with acrylic ink. The only formal training I have in art is a 6-week watercolor class I took at a local arts center. I took an online course on color theory through the Guggenheim earlier this year, which gave me great insight into how much I don't know.

I have also recently discovered pastels. I admired Jesse Kercheval's work in her 2024 graphic memoir *The French Girl*, and ordered a set of pastels so I could try them out. My gray pastel disappeared within a couple days of me opening the set and I am hoping my dog didn't eat it! I have been watching a lot of beginner pastels videos on YouTube and experimenting with them and other media as part of an Index Card a Day art challenge.

I spent a lot of time earlier this summer trying to create this impossible imaginary shade of pink I have in my mind. The table in my studio is covered with about 50 index cards covered in various hues of pink! I still haven't gotten it but I will keep you posted!

Since I deleted all my Zuckerberg apps in November 2024, I miss the connections I had with other visual artists on IG the most. I try to participate with the arts community on Bluesky.

In your artist statements you reference some of the magazines you source collage material from. How do you choose elements of these magazines to cut out?

For my collage pieces, I separate the processes of “gathering” materials from sources and the “assembling” into art into two different distinct steps.

1. Gathering: I will spend an hour or two going through magazines and catalogues looking mostly for colors but also text and shape that inspire me. It's very interesting because while I'm doing this “hunting for color” I can't listen to a podcast or even music. I get into some kind of zone. It's a very good feeling. I use scissors but I like the effect of torn edges so I also tear strips.
2. Assembling: When I am creating the actual pieces, I work from a number of cardboard boxes into which I have sorted the scraps. So that is my palette, I guess. I used to keep them all in labeled bins organized by color but I found having random colors juxtaposed in the same bin can lead to exciting results. I work on canvas, mixed media paper and book board, the inside covers of discarded old books.

What, to you, is the value of creating art? Do you create art for yourself first, or do you imagine an audience when creating (is it always the same)?

Most of the time I think I am creating art to make something to connect with other people. For me, beauty is a primary concern (in both my poetry and art), but also loneliness. There is a hope of making someone else feel slightly less alone. Even if that someone is me.

On the value of creating art, I think this passage on Vincent Van Gogh, from Brenda Upland's 1937 book, *If You Want to Write*, comes close to describing what my “creative impulse” might be: "If you read the letters of the painter Vincent van Gogh you will see what his creative impulse

was. It was just this. He loved something, the sky, say. He loved human beings. He wanted to show human beings how wonderful the sky was so he painted it for them. That was all there is to it. ... He looked out his window at a watery twilight, a thin lamppost, a star and he said in his letter something like this: It is so beautiful I must show you how it looks. And then on his cheap ruled notepaper he made the most beautiful, tender little drawing of it."

Have you always been an artist? How has your relationship to creating artwork changed over time?

I have always been creative. I was brought up in an environment in which beauty and the arts were something to be valued, for which I am grateful. For some reason(s) I never really allowed myself the investment in time and resources to seriously explore visual art and poetry until I became disabled and unable to "work" in 2020. I was lucky enough at that time to find a supportive group of local poets and artists who were and are extremely generous with their knowledge and attention and love of learning. We have been meeting on Wednesdays on Zoom for five years now.

You're also a poet! How does being an artist inform your work as a creative writer, or vice versa? Do you look for intersections between these mediums?

I started this creativity-focused era of my life (late!) by immersing myself in the world of poetry in 2020. I signed up for the free international online ModPo class through UPenn and was fortunate to have that amazing and focused community to formally introduce me to that realm. At that same time, I found myself no longer able to work as a physical therapist due to chronic illness. (I have Crohn's Disease and Ankylosing Spondylitis which are related and incurable auto-immune conditions.) Keep in mind, this was also the first year of the pandemic,

which we mustn't pretend didn't happen, so there was a lot going on in my life!

Anyway, I started working on a project engaging with my college Gray's Anatomy textbook as a source text, trying to extract "found poetry" from paragraphs of the very dry technical language you would expect from an anatomy textbook. It was challenging and satisfying at the same time. I was using ink and colored pencil to add contrast and to help emphasize the text.

Looking back, I can see that I was searching for a way to integrate my changing identity from a health care provider/ professional to a new identity as a disabled individual and poet/artist. Of course I had no idea at the time! I gradually started adding collage elements to some of these visual/found poems, like in my pieces published in *Red Ogre Review*.

Naturally, this led to me jumping straight into creating collage. So yes, my poetry and visual art definitely inform each other, especially considering my gravitation towards working in two different art forms that explore the use of found materials. Also, again, going back to this idea of "sparks at the edges." You can think of this as it relates to color or shape or line in visual art, but also how it might relate to line breaks, contradictory ideas, surprising syntax or juxtaposition of unexpected images in poetry.

Do you begin a new piece with a vision, or do you just start piecing things together and wait to see what happens?

With collage I begin with a vision and then...end up with something completely different. There is something to be said for losing yourself in the process and the joy of allowing yourself to become immersed in the doing itself and letting go of any plan you might have had, so that you can really respond to what you are laying down, even if it means covering up that really cool image of a rusty tricycle that you originally

planned on highlighting. I guess this might apply to writing poems as well.

I keep a quote from Mary Ruefle, (*Madness, Rack & Honey*) near my writing desk, “I would rather wonder than know.” I think this might be a good place to come from when approaching any creative endeavor.

Are there any artists or writers living rent-free in your head? What about them captivates you?

Chen Chen is a poet I really admire and turn to often. There is something very tender about his work that I am drawn to. He doesn't shy away from humor and joy and he is somehow able to make me laugh and tear up in a single poem, sometimes in a single line. I feel very invited and included by his work. Another writer I really admire is Diane Seuss. Her work is very generative for me in that when I read her, I am inspired to write—immediately and frantically! She seems to be such a generous literary citizen as well. I find a kind of nourishment in the quiet and steady poetry of Linda Gregg. Her essay "The Art of Finding" is one I find myself re-reading on a regular basis. Her thoughts on artists having “resonant sources” which forever influence and inform their work is fascinating to me. I also return again and again to both the book and the audio recordings of the lectures by Rachel Zucker comprising *The Poetics of Wrongness*.

As far as visual artists, I am drawn to the work of a contemporary collage artist named Robert Voights. He uses a lot of vertical lines in his work and I have the same tendency. I have a weird obsession with painter Ellsworth Kelly. Vermeer was probably the first artist I really was captivated by. One of my daughters lives in DC so I try to stop in the National Gallery of Art to see his work in person when I am there. For free! This year I read three separate poetry collections (by Lauren Camp, Brian Teare and Victoria Chang) all informed by the work of the artist

Agnes Martin. Another favorite is Estonian textile artist Anu Raud (Bird Song is one of my favorite works). The book *Hotel Almighty* by Sarah J. Sloat, a visual poet/artist, engages with the hybrid type of collage/ found poetry work that really interests me. Earlier this year, I saw a mural in Philly of a young Black woman in a mustard-colored hat against a bright teal background that took my breath away, by artist Amy Sherard. She has an exhibition at The Whitney Museum right now I am hoping to see. Philadelphia as a city itself is a great inspiration for art. So many murals, and art installations and street art. I find it very invigorating to be there. StreetsDept.com is a great resource for Philadelphia's Public art scene.

Do you often find inspiration from other artists/writers? How do you know when you've been inspired?

Yes. I have a practice of reading one poetry collection a week for the past few years. Shout out to the Public Library! I have written and published many "after poems" where something I have read has inspired me to write something in response. I find comfort and company in the words of other poets, both those from long ago and contemporary writers. Ekphrastic poetry has a long tradition and I enjoy engaging with that type of work. Obviously, I'm also interested in flipping that to make works of visual art inspired by poetry.

What projects are you working on right now (art, writing, or beyond)? Or do you have any projects you're planning?

I have two poetry chapbooks out for consideration for publication. I have come close several times, but no luck getting it picked up yet. I have entered some of my collages in a two art shows this summer, which is a leap for me, as I have only recently been able to describe myself as a visual artist. I am also working on a series of poems considering my Estonian heritage. My mother was born on a small island off the coast of Estonia

I was fortunate to be able to make a trip there in 2018 but I need to go back. The Estonian National Museum in Tartu was impressive and endlessly fascinating and honestly, I would like to spend a week wandering around inside. Kind of like an Estonian version of *The Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*.

One genre I would love to explore is graphic memoir/essay. I recently bought the book *Field Guide to Graphic Literature*, edited by Kelcey Ervick and Tom Hart. These all sound like very exciting avenues to explore.

What advice do you have for other creatives (artists, writers, etc.)?

I think I might be too new an artist to offer much advice, but maybe for other newer artists, I would offer this: Try to make it a priority to regularly spend time to talk and learn about art with other creative people, who take their work (but not necessarily themselves!) seriously. I have found this consistent dedicated and scheduled time to be invaluable for my growth as an artist.

I would also say immerse yourself in art of any kind whenever you can. In her book *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron emphasizes the importance of "artists dates." I am a big believer in those. And spending time in solitude and silence. Which is hard to do.

The following section of the interview pertains particularly to Susan's piece "I'm Trying to Decide if this is What I want," the title of which originates from Linda Gregg's poem "Highway 90." This piece was published in Volume 1, Issue 2 of The Turning Leaf Journal.

Which came first: the title, or the artwork? How did they find each other?

For me a poem came first. I had a golden shovel published in Quartet Journal based on that same line from Highway 90. If you read down the

end words of each line you will see that it is the same line that I used for the title of that collage, “I am trying to decide if this is what I want.”

To Tonawanda from New York on the I-90

—after Linda Gregg’s Highway 90

A woman, who is me, is driving west. I’m
going back to the river again, trying
to remember how it is that I came from it. To
reconcile the disconnect, decide

how I’m related to the flowing chunks of ice, to discover if
there is anything left in this
flat landscape for me to excavate. Is
there dirt to be brushed from these sharp fragments? What

pulls me back is not the tide. I
was fresh-water birthed. This swift current feeds a fathomless want.

I think that line resonates with me so much because I have gone through so much change in the past few years. And also, as I have gotten older, I started to realize how for much of my life I seemed to not necessarily be making decisions or choices but more or less going along with what I had internalized was the expected or the “normal” life path. I think at this point in my life I want to be more intentional in my choices and with my time and give myself full permission to be kind of a weirdo, since I think that is my natural state.

To us, this piece speaks to the conflict between the urge to fit in with social constructs of femininity versus authentic expression of feminine identities. What does this piece mean to you?

Yes. Being a woman in this culture is complicated. We often are judging

ourselves, and for me at least, I find myself asking am I doing it right? I know other women writers and artists my age who say they are so much more at ease, but I haven't gotten there yet.

The inclusion of blue prints and the vintage book page, where little bits of illustrations of hands demonstrating how to make an envelope are visible, speak to instructions and expectations that we receive. The pink flowers and hints of floral-patterned clothing speak to a softer more expected idea of feminine identity. And the woman figure (from a 1970s National Geographic) seems to be trying to construct something genuine and authentic but she isn't sure how it would look based on her lived experience and examples. For me this piece engages with the questions "What kind of life do I want to build for myself in this present time and culture? Can I explore both femininity and masculinity? Does it have to be one or another? Is it even so binary?"

How long did you work on this piece/what was the process like? What challenges did you face?

I have a habit of working on a piece of visual art obsessively until its "done." You can ask my husband (haha). So probably it took about 6 hours (including preparing the canvas and applying a couple layers of thin varnish afterwards to protect it) but in a very compacted time frame. I found the blue prints from a water treatment plant in Hudson NY stamped December 29, 1948 at an antique store upstate and I loved the intricate white lines contrasted against that rich shade of blue. The technical difficulties I had were getting the adhesive to work for the blueprint since it is much thicker than the usual paper I work with.

Do you feel like this piece is a fair representation your typical work?

I think it is a fair representation of some of my earlier works. I have collected a lot more source material over the past two years, so I tend to

use more color and shape and form at present. Also, I've learned I am happier with both the process and the result, when I allow myself to be surprised by the process, to respond more to what I am laying down, rather than working from a predetermined plan. Sometimes a collage, like a poem, despite best efforts, doesn't "work" and that is OK. Well, usually that's OK.

A final section on the theme of change

What changes have you experienced lately, and how/have they influenced your work?

I have experienced significant personal grief over the past year, as well as grief for the planet and the country. It is pervading my poetry and visual art even when I try to reach toward something lighter. Because I am always searching for answers and am sometimes stubbornly convinced I can find them in a book, I have read many, many books on grief in the last year. My favorites: *The Wild Edge of Sorrow* by Francis Weller. I underlined so many passages in that book, including this quote, "Sorrow is the sustained note in the song of being alive." So good. Also equally loved and was devastated by Edward Hirsch's 2014 masterpiece on grief, *Gabriel*.

How do you define change?

Change can be a verb or a noun, it can mean to alter or modify, or it can be a substitution. Or a transformation, or the way oak leaves turn to gold in the fall. It can be a coin you keep in your pocket or an extra outfit in the back seat of your car, just in case. It can be the break in a voice as it deepens with time, or the sudden dizzying change of life at midlife, a switch in the mind. It could be great, as in a sea change, or ordinary, in as a lane on the parkway. It can be a swap or a negligible additional amount or an afternoon thunder storm that finally breaks the humidity

in July. Or a specific type of pitch in baseball. On one hand, some things never change but on the other hand, everything changes. Change is when something is not what it was.

Is there anything you think folks tend to misunderstand about change?

I think that it is inevitable, as much as we like to cling to the past. It's one of those lessons that most of us have to keep relearning over and over. When I first got sick, I kept trying any new cure or method I would come across and expending so much time and energy trying to get "back to the way I was". It took five years for me to realize that was never going to happen. I guess acceptance is key, but you can't just intellectually come to that conclusion. It takes time and mistakes and errors and missteps and falling back into old unhelpful habits and re-learning and re-remembering what you thought you already learned. But on the other side is more empathy for others and hopefully self-compassion too. And there can be an opportunity for shedding of some of those old roles and expectations and norms that can be liberating.

Is there anything you wish you could change? (about your life, the world, publishing, or anything). What would the impact of that change be, for you personally?

Such a big question! One thing I would like to see is for people to remember that we are born to be deeply connected to the earth. We are animal. I wish we would view ourselves as part of nature rather than separate from it—that realization would propel us to take better care of the planet. And maybe even each other.

We believe it's important to source and share our good news. Is there anything you've been celebrating recently?

I have an artist website now that my daughter helped me design. The homepage photo features an image of the sea I took when we were visiting the island where my mother was born in Estonia.

What can you tell us about your background?

I come from Tonawanda, a small river town in western New York, just north of Buffalo. Tonawanda means swift running water in the language of the Iroquois. I am very drawn to and connected to rivers. Right now, I'm listening to an episode of my favorite podcast (Between the Covers, with David Naimon) featuring Robert Macfarlane talking about his new book, *Is A River Alive?* (To which I would answer with a resounding yes!)

I grew up as one of seven children in a big old ivy-covered stucco house with stained-glass windows and French doors and cherry wood molding which was both beautiful and completely falling apart. My father was a newspaper man and my mother went back to college when I was in high school to finish her degree and became a librarian. There were a lot of books in our house!

I graduated from Ithaca College and worked as a Physical Therapist in hospitals and outpatient clinics and even as a health care coordinator for an order of Catholic nuns. Since I became disabled in 2020, I have grown to consider myself a working poet/artist. Walking is part of my process, the movement and rhythm helps me "write" in my mind, so on the days that I can walk I go into the woods. I try to read every day in the morning. I have way too many books. I am trying to declutter and donate them to our library's Book Barn, but sometimes I'm sure I buy some of them back by accident.

I live in a lake neighborhood in the Hudson Valley region of New York with my husband and our 13-year-old dog Willow. My three adult children live in San Jose, DC and Philly. I miss them the most on their birthdays.

Final Thoughts:

Life is hard right now. Make sure you listen to your favorite songs, loud and on repeat! Dance with your dog and your cat! Ignore their judgmental looks!



Susan Barry-Schulz (she/hers) is a first generation Estonian-American poet and visual artist who grew up just outside of Buffalo, NY. Her work has been nominated for multiple Pushcart Prizes and Best of the Net awards and has appeared in *The Westchester Review*, *Rust & Moth*, *SoFLoPoJO*, and in many other print and online journals and anthologies. You can find her on BlueSky at [@susanbarryschulz.com](https://susanbarryschulz.com) or find out more about her work at www.susanbarryschulz.com



Book Review

Ekphrasis from Picture to Process

Kira Rosemarie

In *Bluest Nude*, Ama Codjoe pulls the reader through the work as if following a brushstroke along a canvas. Each turn of the paint is grounded in a new type of imagery, from the familiar and familial of “Two Girls Bathing” to the speculative ekphrasis in “Detail from ‘Poem After Betye Saar’s The Liberation of Aunt Jemima’” to the descriptions of nature in “Slow Drag with Branches of Pine,” Codjoe places footholds not by referencing what has been referenced intimately, but by continually introducing new ways of seeing the intimate. This focus on building new views for the reader as she traverses the collection is why I see Codjoe’s ekphrastic pieces as the standout works of *Bluest Nude*.

At its heart, the ekphrastic style is a conversation primarily between two artists and secondarily among the two artists and the reader/viewer. Codjoe sparks these conversations with multiple approaches to the style: relational, speculative, and process-based.

In “Posing Nude,” Codjoe anchors her poem with the artwork “Living Room, Brownsville, Brooklyn” by Deana Lawson. She uses the photograph as a jumping-off-point to show how the visual relates to her own experience with an ex-lover:

*This particular ex anticipated
my needs like a photographer considers
sources of light.*

Detail from “Detail from ‘Poem After Betye Saar’s The Liberation of Aunt Jemima’” takes a different approach: speculative. Codjoe uses this poem to speculate what’s next in the scene presented by Saar’s work, and builds a surreal world on top of the already-rich image:

*And out of her gushing head, I witnessed
four fully-grown women spring forth
like winged beasts*

The process-based ekphrastic poems interested me the most when considering the conversation among the two artists and the reader/viewer. By naming the process, Codjoe invites readers to not only consider the art alongside her writing, but also the process of actually making the art and how that impacts the effect of the works together.

In “Aubade (after Romare Bearden’s Patchwork Quilt (1969),” the speaker states “I’m standing / in the middle of a room constructed / with pencil, adhesive, and paper.” This places the speaker and the reader in the physical artwork itself, not just the ideas the artwork represents.

In “Poem After an Iteration of a Painting by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Destroyed by the Artist Herself,” Codjoe directly describes Yiadom-Boakye’s process: “Instead of re-priming / the canvas, she reduces it to 2 X 2 ½ meter / pieces.”

And in “Le Sacre du printemps (after Pina Bausch),” Codjoe points not to a visual artwork but to a choreographed dance and how it affects her:

*Tonight, I remember
I vowed to feel as alive as the woman
who, in a rite of spring, must dance herself
to death.*

Codjoe's various approaches to ekphrasis, combined with the arresting and surreal imagery she creates throughout the collection, create a uniquely harmonious work that made me feel as if I were present for moments of the speaker's emotional ponderings, clarified by a curatorial eye yet unfiltered by oppressive shame or propriety.



Ama Codjoe is the author of *Bluest Nude* (Milkweed Editions, 2022), winner of the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, and finalist for the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Poetry, the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, and the Paterson Poetry Prize; and *Blood of the Air* (Northwestern University Press, 2020), winner of the Drinking Gourd Chapbook Poetry Prize. In 2023, Codjoe was appointed as the second Poet-in-Residence at the Guggenheim Museum. She is the winner of a 2023 Whiting Award and a recipient of a 2024 Arts and Letters Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

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