

21. Beyond two arts : lyric beyond ekphrasis

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Jane Hedley (Bryn Mawr, USA)

“Post-Ekphrasis : Claudia Rankine's Citizen”

An important legacy of Romantic ekphrasis, centered as it is in the museum, is a poetic approach that reads the visual work closely and deeply, presupposing its self-sufficiency and seeking out meanings latent within it that a less probing encounter would miss. In the 21st century, we have arrived at a “post-ekphrastic” moment distinguished by a more mobile, interactive relationship between word and image. *Citizen: An American Lyric* is a case in point: Claudia Rankine’s “curation” of the verbal and visual texts that are co-active in this innovative book-length work was intended, she explains, to “destabilize” their relationship so that both image and text would interact in ways that go “beyond [the poet’s own] curating powers.” Unstable encounters and mobile, disconcerting interactions are endemic to the poem as a whole and crucial to its staging of American citizenship. Rankine stretches our sense of what lyric poetry is and does with a hybrid text that lives in between word and image, prose and poetry, monologic “I”-speech and collective “you”-speech.

Reena Sastri (Edinburgh, UK)

“Wildly Constant : Anne Carson’s Critical-Creative Fidelity”

Anne Carson enacts a distinctive mode of poetic ekphrasis, or lyric criticism, marked by inventive fidelity. Carson explores the possibilities of being true: to the lyric genre, in particular its earliest texts; to the artwork in creative response; and to a loved other.

The occasion of Carson’s “Wildly Constant is a writer’s residency at American artist Roni Horn’s *Library of Water*, set in a former town library in Stykkishólmur, Iceland. In Carson’s reading, the *Library*’s windows, which imperfectly protect against Iceland’s powerful winter winds, and the installation *Water, Selected*, whose glass columns contain water from each of Iceland’s glaciers, chime with Greek lyric’s figurations of eros as battering north wind or melting heat. At the same time, Carson’s experiential-reflective response to Horn’s artwork models an alternative kind of criticism to the objective, scholarly style she has long resisted. Resembling what Toril Moi (drawing on the work of Stanley Cavell) calls criticism as acknowledgment, this kind of response—rooted in time and in embodied experience—allows loving constancy and wild inventiveness to coexist toward works of art, as faithfulness and freedom may coincide in relations between persons.

Ann Keniston (U. Nevada Reno, USA)

Lyric Betweennesses : (Anti-)Ekphrastic Animation in Mary Jo Bang's *A Doll for Throwing*

Mary Jo Bang's 2017 *A Doll for Throwing* evokes several ekphrastic conventions, but it isn't strictly ekphrastic at all: it focuses not (only) on works by Bauhaus photographer Lucia Moholy but on her life in terms that conflate Moholy's experiences with those of Bang, who was once a commercial photographer. This paper explores the volume's insistent descriptions of dolls ranging from inanimate or semianimated robots, to dolls meant to be "throw[n]" or debased, to doll-like humans. These figures focus attention on questions about animation and agency central both to ekphrasis and to lyric, which often (figuratively) animates the absent or dead. Bang's probing of the space between dead artist and living poet, and between the artist's life and her (generally unattributed) works reimagines not only traditional ekphrasis but lyric's life-affirming power.