

# Art & Poetry

The Biggs Museum is proud to present the 7<sup>th</sup> annual *Art & Poetry* program in honor of National Poetry Month. Each April, Delaware poets are invited to select an object from the permanent collection which inspires them, write a poem about the object, and present the poem at the opening reception for the *Art & Poetry* exhibition at the Museum the first Friday of the month. These poems remain on display next to the object that inspired them for the remainder of the month. You will find the poems on the corresponding yellow labels in galleries 2, 4, 6, Old Stair Hall, 9 and 13.





## **Why Wives Wait**

*The Sea at Atlantic City*, James  
Hamilton

Cumulus monsters, rise up  
higher than the imagination  
of any sky, the grey mass  
roils, rolls in the air, like  
a biblical wave threatening  
the smallest grain of sand.

They stretch, control the  
horizon at mid point, sit  
on the darkest line crushed  
to the density of lead.

The mass of tears is so deep  
the whole world would cry  
if it were not held up  
by a shiver of the strongest  
light, a spirit bearing the  
weight of every heart,  
while calm waves sweep  
in, reach out to land, as long  
as eyes will wait, for the

fisherman's safe return. –Gary Hanna



## Why the Buddha Smiles

Contemplating the white beyond,  
long robe, hand on knee, mustache trailing,  
he sits within his china-plate mountain landscape.  
Inscrutable expression,  
dragon-belly belt holding his holy power in.

He is calm, perhaps a reminder  
to see the joy in simple tasks,  
to sit among the dishes that surround,  
to see a kitchen task as one of meditation.

Perhaps the Buddha never worries  
because he sees no task before him;  
his vision is of billowing white clouds  
dressing the top of long-lost Shang-ri-la.

For him there is no task, there is no pain,  
there are no dishes for a Buddha to see.  
Buddha never saw a dirty dish...  
Perhaps only Mrs. Buddha did! - Clare Moore



## Not Yet the Resurrection

*Game Still Life*, Charles Alexander Stuart

pegged to a board like a boot  
swinging from its laces,  
pheasant, your claws  
splay stiff as a squawk: Christ's  
birthday in Vienna

the time Rosario came  
and influenced my mother  
to suspend New Year's  
dinner in the windows

overlooking the graveyard  
(Freud's old street) which once  
coughed up its dead  
like feathers from a bolster

sometimes you just want to go home

even if you've never  
been there before—

*like the boxwood  
near the museum,  
still puzzled by shells  
from WW II*

—it's still  
the nest you fly back to,

skin smeary from the plane  
the sweat of exams,  
complimentary Mozart  
kugel sticky in your teeth

dangling as you are,  
upside down  
there's nothing you can do—

*snow flecks the world  
with noise and silence*

—but take your history —Abby Millager



## Untitled

*Anna Dorothea Finney, John Hesselius*

Oh Anna...

I'm so glad you are wearing my favorite electric color.  
Why do you hide your right thumb under your dress?  
It must be another irritating colonial bug...

Oh Anna Dorothea...

I love the way you lean on your left elbow...  
Did you just fold the table?

Oh Anna Dorothea Finney...

How graceful you look holding your sprig of flowers...

With hope you turn your back to a winter landscape,  
as with one eye you look to the present, and with the other to our future.

Oh sever lady!

I wish I would be one of your pearls,  
and fall down right in the middle  
of your white snowy breast. - Guillermo Silveira



## Back to the Future

*The Pines*, Ethel Pennewill Leach Brown

Dear Ethel,

To thank you first of all, I write. Each time I visit this museum, I stand before *The Pines* to remind me why one loves a museum, its golden light late in the day, its particulars and pallid repetitions. In your painting, I understand no landscape stays as it is, as it was. We see everything as it existed in the past, astronomers say. Four-hundred-million-year-old light from a star. That star seen, finally, as it was 400,000,000 years ago. *The Pines* seen as it was decades ago. Thank you for brightening your canvas with the light of stars. It is hard work.

I don't paint. But I am trying to get to the pines. There was a forest of skinny pines I loved as a girl, especially on the day I tried to disappear. I see in your work the world I would step into. The forest where every day I write. You paint language. Its story makes me happy.

This museum is The Biggs. You're from Delaware, did you know him? The collector, Mr. Biggs—funny!—first name Sewell. No, he did not buy your work. Somebody donated your work. The museum owns several of your canvases, and keeps two on display. You should be proud—but you're lucky.

Because I went page by page through *The Sewell C. Biggs Catalog, Volume 2: Paintings and Sculpture*. Tell me something: when you were alive, Ethel, in your prime as a painter, as a woman, when you painted those gypsy children in France for example: How many other women loved to draw and paint, like you? Would you say that for every hundred men who took up charcoal or a brush, only two, perhaps three women did the same? No, really? Well then! These days, also, most of the students in art classes are girls: eighty percent, I have read. But walk through any museum and you have to ask yourself, What's happened to the talented girls? To the women who proved they are good? Did they get sick of campaigning? I looked at 182 works page by page in this catalog. Nine of them are by women, by six women. Five percent. The rest, 95%, are by men. No, I'm afraid not, Ethel. Women still get the shaft. (Oh sorry. Excuse me.)

Listen, it gets worse. Of the works on display at The MOMA in New York, 3.5% are by women and 96.5% are by men; at the Met, it's 3% by women; at the National Gallery of Art in DC, 2%. The list goes on. How will women's stories get told? I got these stats online, from two artists: The Guerrilla Girls. Online? Ethel, have you got time? As soon as I print this out, I'll call you, I promise. Until then,

I am most sincerely yours,  
JoAnn

- JoAnn Balingit



## **A Portrait of the Sitter**

*Mae Mafco, Edward Loper Sr.*

A kaleidoscope of color  
bathes the sitter  
as the sun blanketed  
her youth in earlier days.

Enriched by fervor,  
a warm palette softens  
an angular frame and hair,  
the color of flame.

A curl of drifting smoke and  
a sip of wine induce  
reverie and meditation.

With indulgence, the painter  
carves his model in color,  
as stealthily as a sculptor  
might render aquiline features.

Thoughts mask her eyes:  
like windows they reflect  
the wounds of memory. - Maria Keane



## There Are Red Leaves *Misty Mountain*, William Louis Sontag

If the ground falls away and the grey sky  
weighs against its slope;  
if you walk the path you've always walked  
and plan for things you hoped would come  
to pass,

what do you do if the ground falls away  
and all you see ahead is grey air full of sorrow?  
You used to know where you were going, but now your path has fallen off  
and the landscape no longer sustains you.  
If you were able to, you'd lift yourself up:  
there's a little bit of blue up there,  
well, bluish not-quite-so grey.  
You'd believed the road continued.  
What if it falls off,  
and there's no more solid ground,  
and you can't grow the sort of feathers that could take you  
to a bluish patch of grey?  
Are you clinging wingless to a slope that holds you  
while your heart beats?  
Perhaps, even though you're used to walking straight  
on visible roads, the path onward isn't.  
Perhaps the path is down and in and through dark,  
and what you trust is unreliable,  
what you see, unhelpful.  
Perhaps turning your belly to the grass will make you safe;  
after all, red leaves are growing where the cave starts,  
you can see red leaves at the entrance to a cave,  
one you'd never find if things were easier,  
if the road were clear or you really could fly.  
When you find the cave, who knows what will come next?  
Perhaps, after the dark, somewhere bluer or greener or redder than here.  
Who knows what will happen  
after the softening, the falling in? –Maggie Rowe