



*Nebraska
Poets on
Sheldon
Painters:*

*A Selection of Poems from
the Contest, 2008*

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The Sheldon Museum of Art is pleased to present the winning entries of its 2008 contest, Nebraska Poets on Sheldon Painters.

With grant funding provided by the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Humanities Council, Sheldon invited writers to examine the connections between visual arts and poetry in connection with the exhibition Poets on Painters. UNL English department faculty Mary K. Stilwell and Grace Bauer approached the Sheldon staff with the poetry contest idea, and doctoral candidate Rebecca Bednarz volunteered to seek funding and organize the project.

The contest was designed for four age groups — K-5th grade students; 6-8th grade students; 9-12th grade students; and adults, 18 and over — and invited Nebraskans to respond to paintings in the Sheldon's permanent collection with an original poem. This document as well as a number of poetry readings will celebrate the winning entries. A visual and literary exhibition, Poets on Painters, was organized by the Ulrich Museum of Art at Wichita State University and pairs paintings with poets' responses alongside each of the artworks.

We are extremely grateful to the Sheldon Art Association volunteers Jennifer Ebinger Graybill and Heather Thomas as well as staff members Laura Reznicek, Laurie Sipple, Stacey Walsh and Tom White who provided invaluable assistance with this important project. We also thank the contest judges Susan Aizenberg, Gary Day, Grace Bauer, Ed Forde, Mary K. Stillwell, Karen Kunc, Hilda Raz and Michael James. We appreciate the contributions of Ladette Randolph and the University of Nebraska Press, Jerry Johnston of Nebraska Educational Telecommunications, and Ted Kooser, our US Poet Laureate.

To the more than 250 poets who submitted entries, we, and our writing public are indebted to each of you for beautifully creative entries.

Finally, we express enormous gratitude to Rebecca, whose untiring dedication as well as her attention to the myriad details for the duration of this project are indeed exemplary.

Karen O. Janovy
Curator of Education

Winners



Max Weber (1881-1961)

Night

1915

Oil on canvas

48 x 40¼ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial

into
water shadow
talens' flower mirror
feather of bird flying
depth X-es
mountain

James Rehwaldt-Alexander
3rd Grade
Lincoln
After Max Weber's "Night"



Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000)

Paper Boats

1949

Tempera on board

17½ x 23½ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-F. M. Hall Collection
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(ARS), New York

Untold Voyage

The brittle wind, our only sail,
Is not the only life in us.
We refuse your christening of
debris:
of empty, heartless frames
when we depart from
gentle fingers;
Each a sturdy dock
in our harbor.

As we slide with the river,
And melt into the sleepy current,
We fill our fragile hulls
with more than frothy crystals;
Even as we flutter
down
and let our splintered frames
mingle with clouds
of sparkling silt,
And rest our shipwrecked fragments.

Decay will not infect our cargo
Once we submerge.
The drifting crates, filled
with childish joy,
innocent hopes and pleasure,
will gild the soiled water, and
outlast
our mired forms,
which billow with the water's calming pulse.

The rapid current
cannot halt the overspreading
happiness;
Which floods all
who have tarried by the river
to watch a fleet of
paper boats

Monica Claesson
Grade 8
Lincoln
After Jacob Lawrence's "Paper Boats"



Robert Henri (1865-1929)

Woods Interior

1905

Charcoal on paper

12 x 11¾ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-Gift of the Maynard Walker Gallery, New York

Cold Breath

We are a breathy sigh frozen in mid inhalation
We are a trapped winter
We are a thousand sleeping summers
We are the glint of white in the raven's eye
We are the keepers of the sounds that fill the silence
We are long shadows in the day
We are darker shadows in the night
We are the secrets of the lupine eyes
We are the consort of the fickle moon
We are the cold dream of stars long gone
We are the coagulated memory of a moment
We are the wicked smile and the furtive glance
We are a solemn silence remembered by no one, forgotten by none
We are the slips of vapor in a vision
We are the glass covered by frost
We are sleeping wood genies
We are the cold flute and graveyard's silence
We are the ice and snow's jealous lovers
We are the life in death.

Kelly Weber

Grade 10

Battle Creek

After Robert Henri's "Woods Interior"



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)

New York, Night

1929

Oil on canvas

40 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Thomas C. Woods Memorial. ©2008 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In Window, From Within

When I reach to touch you I find instead
my own wavering reflection caught
in coldness of night-time window.

Glass entraps an almost image
of my face and the blurred face
laid over it, of the clock
buried in the next building's brick
and the facelessness

of bodies, lampshade, an armchair framed in hotel window, rectangles
of yellow offices, illumination of the over-worked, avoiding homes
of those at home behind burgundy and blue curtains, ignoring the noise
of a thousand glittering cat-eye marbles rolling down the street, no –
creeping down the street nearly rolling into one another, braking
in a breath of steam and tuneless idling nearing and imperceptible
touch going the same direction, the road diminishes to darkness.
Never arriving (destination irrelevant anyway) surface everywhere
a whole city lives behind glass, between us a precipice of air

and it is this, the never quite touching, the always almost.

Rebekah Banks

Adult

Lincoln

After Georgia O'Keeffe's "New York, Night"

Finalists



John H. Twachtman (1853-1902)

Bark and Schooner

1900

Oil on canvas

24³/₄ x 24³/₄ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-F. M. Hall Collection

Seagull Boats

You lay listless in the harbor
Yearning and whittling away like a knot of dying wheat.
This is what it means to fall asleep
And never wake up.

It is time now, lift your sail wings
Stretch them taut against the wind.
Seagull boats
Soar, taste the sun, smell the water
Let the salt waves become your tears of redemption.

Deep beneath your wood —
Whorled skin, you crave to carve a pattern in the sky-sea
Like footsteps that never fade away.
Seagull boats, seagull boats
It's time to go a-flying.

Carmen Claesson
Grade 9
Lincoln

After John H. Twachtman's "Bark and Schooner"



Lilian Westcott Hale (1881-1963)

The Convalescent

1906

Oil on canvas

30 x 21¾ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Beatrice D. Rohman Fund

Perspective

Early this morning, I found Zeffy in bed.
Which made little sense: she told me she was dead.
But I don't believe the things that she tells me herself,
Because Zeffy the temptress lies like nobody else.

The sunlight beamed down on her angular face,
Like the pain from last night was already erased.
I think, for a second, it slipped from my mind,
That Zeffy's untruthful, and she'd lie to the blind.

As you can see, she's fragile thing,
Who gets sick very often and has manic mood swings.
But early this morning, when I found Zeffy in bed,
I'm sure that I realized she's not right in the head.
I know while I'm seeing black, she's seeing red.
I guess lying's not lying, if you believe what you've said.

Aubrey Thompson
Grade 8
Grand Island

After Lilian Westcott Hale's "The Convalescent"



Marsden Hartley (1877-1943)

Painting Number One, 1913

1913

Oil on canvas

39 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-F. M. Hall Collection

A Mountainous Morning in the Forest

Cool damp dew
lingering on grass

train track tunnel (ripped out)
mushrooms growing and glowing
upside down

rocky explosion
albino cave fish
moist frosty air

stars and suns
setting and rising
seems like a dream world.

Ryan McManaman
Grade 5
Lincoln

After Marsden Hartley's "Painting Number One, 1913"



Edward Hopper (1882-1967)

Room in New York

1932

Oil on canvas

29 x 36⁵/₈ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-F. M. Hall Collection

Little Space

She's not exactly new in town,
She's not quite a local.
I can tell she's gathered enough wit
to withstand all these confines
by the way she pushes her way into the subway.
The apartment is so small.
She lives there.
Her only consolation
is the piano that protrudes into the middle of the room.
It provides the soundtrack to her withered arrangement.
Days go on when she is not once
intentionally touched
and she is tired of
the evenings that linger on,
accompanied only by the sound of sighs.
He doesn't even see her anymore;
each glance grows more and more vague.
His focus lies solely on the bad news in the Times.
rather than the desperate love in her eyes.
She's not exactly new in town,
She's not quite a local.

Leah Grace Adams
Grade 12
Lincoln

After Edward Hopper's "Room in New York"



Frank Tuchfarber (active 1870-1890)

The Old Violin

1887

Chromolithograph

34⁷/₈ x 24 ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Gift of Bess Walt in memory of Edward J. Walt, Jr.

All Strung Out

Sing to me.

Tell me your woes.

Let your sorrows

Drift across my strings.

Rest your weary fingers
Upon my neck.
Nuzzle my body
With cheek worn smooth
By rivers of tears.

Grip the bow.
Release the tension.

Up,
A shrill shriek.
Down,
A lonesome serenade.

Croon forgotten misery,
Whisper anxiety,
Bellow your broken heart
To a world yet unscathed by evil.

Heart and mind.
The two become one,
A melodious waltz
To which one begs no end.

Let the newfound couple
Dance across the strings,
Twirling and swirling their tale.

The Maestro pauses.
A final dip,
A courteous bow,
And once again I am laid to rest.

Erin Carey
Grade 12
Lincoln
After Frank Tuchfarber's "The Old Violin"



Elizabeth Terrell (1908 – 1993)

Woman Scrubbing

About 1935

Gouache on paper

14 x 19 ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-Allocation of the U.S. Government, Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration

Woman Scrubbing

I see you down on your hands and knees,
scrubbing the floor in that picture
Elizabeth Terrell painted, and I think
of my mother. I think of her painting
the kitchen wainscoting white, painting
the doors to the dining room, laundry,
pantry, painting the back door leading
from the kitchen to the woodshed where
the men left their barn boots before they
came in, painting all those mismatched
tables and chair sunlight yellow, her favorite
color she always said, choosing wallpaper
with bowls of variegated fruit repeating

on the walls and a coordinated plaid print to camouflage the wrinkled ceiling. I see Mother getting Dad to fashion a “modern” lamp for over the sink – it was some kind of sheet metal which she sprayed to look like copper. I see her cleaning cupboards, unloading groceries, ripping open a new bag of flour, adding it to the tin canister where she dipped out just exactly the right amounts needed for cake, bread, pie, cookies, white sauce for macaroni and thousands of meals cooked on that fancy Tappan range with the pull-out stove top that cost a pretty penny, and how she’d waited years to get it, and I see her bent over the sewing machine in the corner by the back door, how she fashioned clothes and later patiently helped my sister and me with our 4-H projects, and the day she got that Maytag automatic dishwasher with a solid maple cutting board on top and wheels below so it could be pushed close to the sink, and the day they finally replaced that cracked, worn linoleum with something fresh, proud, and I see her beaming, wiping her hands on her apron, stirring something in a pot, but never, not once do I see her down on her hands and knees scrubbing that floor, although I’m certain she must have because why else would I still do it myself now, when I’m cracked and worn but still insist that’s the only way to really clean a floor.

Sarah Voss
Adult
Omaha

After Elizabeth Terrell’s “Woman Scrubbing”



Robert Henri (1865-1929)

Woods Interior

1905

Charcoal on paper

12 x 11¾ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-Gift of the Maynard Walker Gallery, New York

Untitled

Henri speaks through trees but not with words.

It feels like I'm lost,

Weaving in and out,

Looking for sunlight or people.

I'm alone

The place is deserted.

I don't have a voice

No one hears me but the trees.

Cassie Failor
Grade 4
Lincoln
After Robert Henri's "Woods Interior"



Jeanne Silverthorne b. 1950

Phosphorescent Betty

2004

Rubber, hair, and phosphorescent pigment

5½ x 2¼ x 1¾ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Purchased with donations from the Sheldon Forum. © Jeanne Silverthorne

Co relation

Nuclear

I

The cloud ballooned I mean
ballooned the cloud

just up and went awry
exploded became heat

an endless energy perfecting
her in plastic in the cloud

ballooned ballooning out
her dress solidifying every seam

a rash decision every cut
cocooned to permanence

II

The family sitting at table
settings eating. *What happened*

*to her I mean
really*

The not silence chewing
the scrape

of his fork. Then
Julia how many times

*do I have
to*

Rachael Wolfe
Adult
Lincoln

After Jeanne Silverthorne's "Phosphorescent Betty"



Mark Rothko (1903-1970)

Yellow Band

1956

Oil on canvas

86 x 79½ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Thomas C. Woods Memorial. © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Opening

Mark Rothko infuriates me as I stare
and stare and try to make sense of his painting.
It captured my attention from across the hall,
framed in an opening barely big enough
to contain it. The colors are warm and murmur
of life and vitality, but they are also muted
and bleary so that the big canvas seems
to be tired of its existence in the white-walled gallery,
and only half awake. Such a simple pattern and colors:
red band — yellow band — red band,
a five-year old could do it. Yet I bet
it's worth hundreds or even thousands of dollars.
I should get it, but I'm just not smart or
sophisticated enough. Why? I ask.
Rothko only sneers at me, turns up his nose,
saying, "You wouldn't understand."
I probably never will, but Yellow Band?
Where's the creativity? And it really isn't a picture
of anything, just....
That's when I realize that art as I've always known it,
as representational as possible, only takes great skill
plus zero imagination and is, in a sense, plagiarism.
This painting shows what creativity really is,
because art doesn't have to resemble anything.
It's an embodiment of passion and that
looks different for everyone. As for the title,
I now see that this painting really is nothing more,
nor does it need to be anything more
than a yellow band.

A. Lauren Higgins
Grade 7
Lincoln

After Mark Rothko's "Yellow Band"



Frank Duveneck (1848-1919)

Laughing Boy

about 1879

Oil on canvas

22 x 18³/₈ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial

Opulence

The businessman's son flashes
a smile over his shoulder,
an infectious grin wider
and brighter than usual.
The freezing lakeshore wind
ruffling his hair and reddening
his cheeks doesn't dim his
excitement at seeing dozens of
proud sailboats float and
weave between the waves,
their bows bobbing like apples.
He is so distracted by the
display that he doesn't
notice the dead fish
drifting into the slimy weeds
that cushion the shore,
or even that his father
is transfixed by it.
The permanent glare of
its eye could be a carbon copy
of the eye that haunts the businessman's
sleep and the back of his mind,
just as compelling and damning.
But this one does not have
the silt settled in its corners,
or sickly, bloated skin surrounding it,
or the blond hair tinged green,
swirling and flowing about her face,
and decorated with a dragonfly
clasp, bought when he hadn't
needed to raise his son alone.

Erica Bartz
Grade 12
Lincoln
After Frank Duveneck's "Laughing Boy"



Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937)

Horse of the Khedive-Egypt

1910

Oil on canvas mounted on panel

19½ x 25¾ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-F. M. Hall Collection

Fetching Jumanah

As I trudge out of my mud brick home, to fetch my powerful Arabian
mare

I look across the stretch of pasture - evening shadows everywhere.

Far north I perceive a sudden movement; a pure white flash — so lively:

It is my Jumanah, my “Silver pearl” — prancing, so playful and gracefully.

She turns her head and pricks her ears while galloping my way

The wind whips through her flowing mane and through her wispy tail.

I call a cheerful “yahdar-hadar” and she responds with a whistling neigh

Beside the gnarled, bent olive tree we meet — it is now dusk, the sky is
pale.

Heading home, I gently lead her by her mane and glance up nervously at
the churning sky

I feel heavy drops of rain splash down my parched face and watch them
stir up wisps of sand.

Jumanah and I shiver in the pouring rain as we listen to rumbling
thunder nearby

The stable is now in sight; Jumanah trots faster while I nudge her with my
hand.

Once we enter the stable, I dry Jumanah’s rain-soaked coat with an old
shawl

I whisper a tired “Tisbahi ala Kheer” and lead her into her cozy, hay-filled
stall

The others horses notice Jumanah and neigh their warmest greetings

I must hurry home now, for it is time for my evening prayers and *Torah*
readings.

Bethany Thornton

Grade 6

Lincoln

After Henry Ossawa Tanner’s “Horse of the Khedive — Egypt”

Notes:

The term “yahdar-hadar” translates to “come” and “Tisbahi ala Kheer” means “goodnight”.



Frank Tuchfarber (active 1870-1890)

The Old Violin

1887

Chromolithograph

34⁷/₈ x 24 ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Gift of Bess Walt in memory of Edward J. Walt, Jr.

This Was the Most Interesting Painting I Could Find

It saddens me to see this instrument,
once of a certain musical beauty, stripped of its varnish.
I pity it, knowing it lies on music
it will soon be unable to play. It may have once led a fine life,
creating sounds, notes to please its player, but that will soon end.
For if a person sees it, in its sad state, their first thought may be,
“It’s too old, nothing but deadwood.”
And then, it will be ruined,
fated to burn, like any old kindling you would find in the woods!
Unless a kind orchestral hand reaches,
to give it new varnish and woodwork.
But it will still grow old, imprisoned by time,
often confined to the dry darkness that a case provides,
with only a bow and rosin for company.
The violin may have a player, but not always, not continuously,
and when its useful life is over, it will be destroyed.
In fire, burning to cinders and ashes, there will be nothing,
no object to remember by, except memory.

Camille Harrah

Grade 4

Lincoln

After Frank Tuchfarber’s “The Old Violin”



Mark Rothko (1903-1970)

Yellow Band

1956

Oil on canvas

86 x 79½ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Thomas C. Woods Memorial. © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

A Sadness

When you are known like Kleenex is, like
Jeep is, like CNN, when your name stands in
like an understudy does, you've arrived. Say
Rothko and in educated circles, a canvas blooms

big as a wall. Say Rothko and color blurs at the edge
of great rectangloids in your mind, and if
you've ever seen his work, the one you've seen
sidles over to you and seizes the space. Not like
an old friend. It makes almost everyone
in the room uncomfortable because they have to ask
the question that sorts them out: Is this art?
If you hold the view that it is not art, you
are out, and if you are sure that it is, you are
in. Choosing makes you no richer or happier. It makes
you no more diligent or compassionate. It doesn't
decrease the chance of another war. It doesn't move you
any closer to a disease-free future. Not one scientific
breakthrough results. No debts are withdrawn. Your
recent difficulty sleeping doesn't abate. The planet
remains compromised; landfills keep filling, aquifers
emptying. The stand you take on Rothko's "Yellow Band" hangs
for a moment in the air, and when everyone has
had their whiff, the conversation moves on. You do,

politically correcting your gut feelings about this wall
that you're not supposed to say you can paint,
your kid can paint, or your artless, aging neighbor
who may benefit from the therapy
of great orange rectangles. One great yellow one.
If you bow to the painting, no matter what drove Rothko,
or inspired him, whether this was a delight to him or a burden heaved off,
you may ask at last and desperate: Yellow band could be
a wedding ring, couldn't it? See the way the sun rises
and sets with that promise. See the red?

Christine Hope Starr
Adult
Lincoln
After Mark Rothko's "Yellow Band"



Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917)

Hunter's Rest

1890

Oil on canvas

13¾ x 23½ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Thomas C. Woods Memorial

A Hunter's Night

One man and his horse
going around without a sound
trying to go unfound
moving around
in the night

Animals scurry
time to go
the hunter's here
gun ready to blow

A dark night
hard to see
the hunter's tired
by this night like gleam

He takes a break
next to a tree
his horse stands guard
protecting him from anything
throughout the time
his horse stands guard
watching for the threat

With a sudden sound
he wakes up
that pound
was the sound
of his prey

Derek Wallin
Grade 8
Newman Grove
After Albert Pinkham Ryder's "Hunter's Rest"



Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902)

River Landscape

1867

Oil on canvas mounted on panel

30¼ x 50 ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Gift of Mr. and Mrs.
Abraham M. Adler

trees by the water
water by the trees
trees by the water
fish looking up toward the trees
trees looking down to see their reflection
but they see fish in the way

Luta Menard
Grade 2
Lincoln
After Albert Bierstadt's "River Landscape"



Hans Hofmann (1880-1966)

The City

1958

Oil on canvas

60¼ x 52½ ins.

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Thomas C. Woods Memorial. © 2008 Renate, Hans and Maria Hofmann Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The City

Hofmann had it in him to
“eliminate any reference
to subject matter.”

“It’s a person’s duty to be lost,”
A friend explained to me once. “You
Owe it to the dark distances out there.”

“What if I come across a neighborhood of colors
So promising I can’t speak?” I ask. “Then
You are helpless forever,” he said,
As we passed a diner’s lit window.

The dim browns and grays of the ceiling
And walls, the bland coats of the customers,
Their faces almost non-existent —
In the intensity of their eating and talking

A blur. “I live where the roofs are red
And grackles bathe all day in foul oils.”
I thought he must be insane, or a prophet.
He left the city and I went to museums,

Yet it was he, once back, who pointed out
The palm tree in Hofmann’s painting.
“You misjudge surprise,” he said.

Richard David Wyatt
Adult
Omaha
After Hans Hofmann’s “The City”



The views expressed in this program booklet do not necessarily reflect the views of the Nebraska Humanities Council or the National Endowment of the Humanities

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