Picturebooks, Ekphrasis, Illuminated Manuscripts, and The Practice of Poetry

Professor: Dorothea Lasky

Course description: Historically, poetry has always had a relationship with visual art. In this craft class, we will explore the idea of how interactions with visual art fuel poetry. A mix of texts—ekphrastic poetry, illuminated manuscripts, children’s picturebooks, literature that we might consider *visually-driven*, and related scholarship—form the basis for our investigations, discussions, and creative work. Among other key critical questions, we will consider: 1) How has an intersection with visual art been important to poetry historically?; 2) How does visual experience relate to particular aspects of poetry writing?; 3) How can we use visual art towards our own creative process in the future, either by using visual art in writing poetry or by incorporating illustration in the presentation of our written work? Such investigations will help us better understand the works studied and will inspire us to build visual considerations into our writing.

Field trips: Field trips have been planned within the course to several museums and galleries in Florence. Writing exercises will be given out to help us engage with what we encounter in these settings.

Critical Writing Assignments: 1) 1-page weekly reading responses; 2) one short 3-4 page critical paper; 3) one longer 8-page paper.

Ekphrastic Writing Assignment: I will ask you to write a total of five poems about four pieces of visual art and/or art objects. We will go to several museums and galleries and you will be encouraged to go on your own to visual art sites that interest you. For the assignment, you will go to a museum or gallery, select four pieces of art there, and write poems inspired by the pieces. You will also find a piece of art that may not be considered art by everyone (for example, a painting by a child, a rock, an earring your aunt made, a plate of cookies, and so forth). You will write a poem for this art object as well.

Villa la Pietra tours: Another special project we will do is to rewrite our own tours for the Acton collection. These tours can take any form you’d like and do not need to be linear.

Discussions: You will each lead the class in two discussions throughout the course. These will be assigned the first day of class and noted as “FP” and “CD” in the class schedule. The types of discussion are outlined below.

1. Favorite poet discussions: Once in the course, you will bring in work by a favorite poet (1-2 poems), discuss her/his background, influences, and trajectory of career (all of this 1 page). You will also compare his/her work to a poet we are reading in the course by discussing how their work deviates and intersects.
2. Class reading discussions: Once in the class, you will lead the discussion on class readings. You can start the discussion in any way you want to, with the aim in helping us engage with the work in some meaningful way.

Class readings

Course texts
Matthea Harvey, *Of Lamb*, McSweeney’s, 2011.

Course packet

Grading: The grading breakdown will be as follows: 1) Weekly response papers-10%; 2) Short critical paper-15%; 3) Longer paper-20%; 4) Ekphrastic Writing Project-15%; 5) Class Participation (Discussions, Presentations, and Attendance)-20%; 6) Villa la Pietra Tour-20%

Schedule
6/1-Introduction to the Ekphrastic Lens: Tour of VLP (4:30) and introduction to final project
6/3-Picturebooks as the Practice of Poetry: Harvey, Sendak, and Blake, *Response paper due*
6/10-Color as the Painting of a Poem: Batchelor, Nelson and Chase/Quilter, *Response paper due*
6/15-Art as Inside All Disciplines and Every Discipline: La Specola visit
6/17-Ekphrasis Take 1: O’Hara and Bang, *Ekphrastic Writing Project due, Response paper due*
6/22-Ekphrasis Take 2: Ashbery, Guest, and McClatchy
6/24-The Final Say You: *Tour due, Longer paper due, Response paper due*