

The Pedagogic Force of *Ekphrastic Poetics*

Kelly Young

Art by Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Part I: Maternal Legacies



"A Study" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Long looking at paintings is equivalent to being dropped into a foreign city, where gradually, out of desire and despair, a few key words, then a little syntax make a clearing in the silence. Art, all art, is a foreign city, and we deceive ourselves when we think it familiar.

Jeanette Winterson *"Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery"*



"Exhale" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Imprints

She leaves
footprints
in our lives

shields our hearts
with knowing looks
enfolds us in her
whispers

we inhale
her words
crafted
by her quill
that dances
over crisp
dry parchment

her taut limbs
ache and tingle
muscles constrict
suffocating nerves
as surges of ink
exhale from her plume
breathing new life
onto her canvas.



"Offering" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Her Talisman

In your cradle
ancestors whisper secret lies
tender words flutter
like restless birds
murmur stories
of heirloom treasures;
old hat boxes and laced leather boots
cedar scented remains
of maternal legacies
where history sits
hidden deep
in trunks of navy blue
adorned with big brass buckles
wrapped in a dream's lullaby.



"Request" Mahshid Farhodi-Di Marco

Writing Myself into History

I absorb lessons
from the classroom
move toward
seeing the world anew

inhale each moment
lecture halls
students, texts
rework ruins
of inherited scripts
bear witness
to courage
that flows through
bursts of writing

poetry is a rope that binds us
shared language across tongues
tying knots into ideas
woven through poetic research

the body remembers
aching wrists
musty library stacks
rhythms of key strokes
pulsating on the alphabet
as words color
the body, mind and soul

the body remembers
breathing
creating worlds made of
fugitive memories, forgotten flesh
and language
as I scribble myself into history
through transformational responses
to traditional ways of
writing in academia.



"Broken Glass" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Our Daughters

A child dreams,
her heart
opens to fiction
aches
to absorb light

her bones
amber, smooth
body hinged
between
earth and sky

she dances
on paths
trodden by servitude
rhythmic footsteps
compress earth's
marrow

wandering beneath
stippled clouds
she inhales
the winds of history
in her search for
women's stories
tales of red earth

she embraces
the new century
a pilgrim
marking soil
mapping sacred roads
parting tall grasses
wrapping her in a
labyrinth of grace.



"I, dishes and the sun" Mahshid Farhoudi Di-Marco

Mouthing the Words

Within you
remnants of great civilizations
cast shadows over me
as time flows and tumbles
dancing,
giving birth to seasons
while a tapestry of your life
remains a legacy.

Part II: The Journey

...strong poets participate in critical storytelling.

Tom Barone *"Breaking the mold: The new American student as strong poet"*



"Search" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Breath

In your night garden
perpetual dusk reminds you
of silent eyes
words woven by the wind
faint taste of saffron between lips

for days you wake
breathe
recall your two year journey
of border crossings
to freer lands
across sandbanks
and emerald groves

trace a history of walking
on paths
bleached from summer gold
ashen gray from rain.



“Transparent Creed” Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Breathing Lessons

History bleeds
from his braided whip
burns scars
into memory
branded as livestock

it never leaves you
in the vein of tumbling
stones that carve
river banks under
cold November skies

restrains memory
of distant tides
that once and again
wash silt out to sea.



"Pray in Red" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Flesh

Blots on pigment-cloth
conceal
florid eyes
made of plums
ensnared
in lily clouds
teeming beneath red shroud

brushstrokes in thick oils
tame a self-portrait
picture-poem
sculpt a woven body lattice
cable-knit pattern
tainted crimson
between ribs and shoulder blades

at first light
your brush dances
sways over curves
conceals tattered flesh
made of crisscrossed laths
where rivers
of vermillion once flowed
along currents
of your spine.



"The Other Side of the Picture" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

The Other Side of the Picture

The museum is guarded
framed through shades of green
once palettes
part oil, part canvas
priceless - exact

exhibits are
labeled, titled, displayed
found treasures named
form a body narrative

vagrant air chisels my face
throat tightens before
captured savages
depicted in exile
wear blood like threads
subject and object of discipline

private collections
void of fingerprints
identity or dirt

brush strokes
blur hills, pilgrimages
melt tongues stripped of agency
entry rights, desire
where landscapes
resist histories
as yearning foothills
embrace remote mountain culture
on the other side of the picture.

Part III: Landscapes

Art is... a longest road through life, ...[and in] writing poetry, one is always aided and even carried away by the rhythm of exterior things; for the lyric cadence is that of nature: of the waters, the wind, the night.
Rilke, "Letters to a Young Poet"



"Embrace" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Wanderlust

Blood-pulsed waters cover pearly shores
as her heart rises in mid-ocean
and her spirit moves shoreward
toward temptations of the wild.

In exile she enters the edge of wilderness
buffeted by rain and wind
while tender storms illuminate darkness
mapping terra incognita.



"Tales of Red Earth" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Hollow Border

Portrait.

An old highway
exposes itself
lingers along landscape
weaves a portage
of ancestry
into
a
 series
 of
 edges

where
a map of sound
absorbs dialogue
dissolves
into monologue
sheds its rootless name

where
a wordless song
surfaces
travels along currents
flowing past tree roots
spills out
under boundless sky

where
yawning earth
swallows errant shards of light
within a fashion
akin to the odyssey itself.



"Red Earth" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Writing from a Place

Above Silvaplanersee
mercury-filled snow melts exposes

pulsing mountain womb grazes
boulders below forest canopy spreads

wide along scarlet sunset drapes
iron wrought fences asleep in granule carries

in memory this wily carved terrain
in the heart of a breath.



"Breath" Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

Stardust or the Edge of Light

I am becoming an actress
in the drama of weather
warm fronts pour into my body
wrapping the curves of my spine

I am becoming an invisible ocean
sun's halo seeps through my veins
echoes the weight of my heart

I am becoming violet fire
updrafts burn beneath my flesh
covering me in a blanket of ash

I am becoming candle droplets
trapped in winter's bloom
hungry saliva stills me like
fur holds in memory

I am becoming a wind vane
in Marvell's garden
my arrowhead tail spins
tilts in the western winds

I am becoming slow pulsing poetry
a symphony of morphemes
dance on my tongue
performing a song for Mother Nature.

Notes for the Reader

Art by International Visual-Artist Mahshid Farhoud-Di Marco and poems by Kelly Young are reprinted with permission of the authors and publisher from *Breath: Writing Herself into History*, Palabras Press, Peterborough, 2006. A juried exhibition of the collected artworks opened April 21-24, 2006 at AWOL Gallery in Toronto, Ontario sponsored in part by the Canada Council for the Arts. The creation of this collaborative work evolved over several years (2000-2006) between Kelly Young while residing in Toronto, Canada and Mahshid Farhoud-Di Marco while residing in Florence, Italy. The artists engaged in a process of *ekphrastic poetics*, an art form dating back to Classical Greece that involves the act of aesthetic response by conveying an interpretation and representation of visual arts through poetic writing. Excerpts of this work can be viewed at *The Other Voices International Project* <http://www.othervoicespoetry.org/vol15/>

The Pedagogic Practice of Ekphrastic Poetics

As an example of arts-based educational research, the pedagogic practice of *ekphrastic poetics* necessitates interpretive response activities that involve spending time with a painting in order to allow a poetic response to emerge. For Jeanette Winterson (1995), "Art takes time. To spend an hour looking at a painting is difficult" (p. 7). In the context of poetry as research, my process involves spending long periods of time with each painting, engaging in conditioned writing practices, such as timed writing exercises to stimulate a poetic response to the visual form. I draw on Barone's contention that strong poets engage in critical storytelling by providing poetic responses to each painting. I also draw upon William Pinar's (1995) conceptualization of "curriculum as aesthetic text." For Pinar (1995),

To understand the role of the imagination in the development of the intellect, to cultivate the capacity to know aesthetically, to comprehend the teacher and his or her work as inherently aesthetic: these are among aspirations of that scholarship which seeks to understand curriculum as aesthetic text. (p. 604)

I conceptualize the work of *ekphrastic poetics* as a curriculum and aesthetic text. An example of an *ekphrastic* activity that I use in my teacher education classroom involves an examination of Don McLean's (1971) song, *Vincent (Starry Starry Night)* that is an *ekphrastic* response and tribute to 19th century Dutch painter, Vincent Van Gogh's (1853-1890) and to his painting, *The Starry Night* (1889). For articles on ekphrastic poetics see (Blackhawk, 2002; Brown, 1992; Cushman, 2002; Gorrell, 2000; Heffernan, 1993; Mitchell, 1992; Raitt, 2006; Raphael, 2006; Verdonk, 2005).

Part I: Maternal Legacies

Art by Mahshid Farhoud-Di Marco
"The Study" 120 cm x 90 cm, oil on linen.

The citation from Jeanette Winterson is from Winterson, J. (1995) *Art objects: Essays on ecstasy and effrontery*. Toronto: Alfred Knopf, p. 4.

"Imprints" was previously published in Young, K. (2005). *New horizons: Poetry anthology*. Peterborough, ON: Peterborough Area Branch Canadian Authors Association, p. 96.

Art by Mahshid Farhoud-Di Marco
"Exhale" 30 cm x 20 cm, mixed media on wood.
"Offering" 20 cm x 30 cm, mixed media on wood.

"Writing Myself into History" was previously published in Young, K. (2002). *Life Writing: Poetic Practices and Pedagogy*. *Language and Literacy: A Canadian Educational E- Journal*. 4(2), 1-11.

Art by Mahshid Farhoud-Di Marco
"Request" 30 cm x 20 cm, mixed media on wood.

“Our Daughters” was previously published in *Child: An Anthology of Poems and Prose*. R. Dunlop (Ed.). Vancouver: Boundary Bay Press, p. 31 and Young, K. (2005). *New horizons: Poetry anthology*. Peterborough, ON: Peterborough Area Branch Canadian Authors Association, pp. 94-95.

Art by Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

“Broken Glass” 20 cm x 30 cm, mixed media on wood.

“I, dishes and the sun” 30 cm x 20 cm, mixed media on wood.

The theme of dishes is reflected throughout this collection of paintings as an indicator of the importance of the ways in which maternal legacies are passed down *intergenerationally* through cultural objects found in the kitchen (such as dishes and recipes among other items) as well as through stories that were recounted to and by women. These epistemologies and ontologies shape identity-formation and form a framework for the paintings and poems in this section.

Part II: The Journey

Tom Barone conceptualizes the student as “strong poet.” Cited in Pinar, W. (1995). *Understanding Curriculum*. New York: Peter Lang, p. 574.

Art by Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco.

“Search” 18 cm x 24 cm, mixed media on wood.

“Transparent Creed” 120 cm x 90 cm, oil on linen.

“Pray in Red” 30 cm x 20 cm, mixed media on wood.

“The Other Side of the Picture” and “Writing Myself into History” were previously published in Young, K. (2002). *Life Writing: Poetic Practices and Pedagogy. Language and Literacy: A Canadian Educational E-Journal*. 4(2), 1-11.

Art by Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

“The Other Side of the Picture” 30 cm x 40 cm, mixed media on wood.

When Visual-Artist Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco escaped from the political tyranny in Iran in the 1980s and began her journey to Canada, she brought with her memories of being arrested and flogged for wearing lipstick (among other political and socially oppressive experiences). As a young girl, she arrived at Pearson International Airport in Toronto, Ontario with the clothes on her back and her paintbrushes. In her paintings, she visually recalls her story of surviving in Iran while living in exile in Canada. Poet Kelly Young engages in critically storytelling by bringing words to her visual artwork.

Part III: Landscape

The citation from Rainier Maria Rilke is from Rilke, R. M. (1984). *Letters to a young poet*. (S. Mitchell Trans.). New York: Random House, p. 11.

Art by Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

“Embrace” 18 cm x 24 cm, mixed media on wood.

“Hollow Border” was previously published in Young, K. (2002). Poetic Intervention in Teaching and Learning. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (JCT)*. 18(4), 159-178.

Art by Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco

“Tales of Red Earth” 20 cm x 30 cm, mixed media on wood.

“Red Earth” 18 cm x 24 cm, mixed media on wood.

“Breath” 18 cm x 24 cm, mixed media on wood.

Author

Kelly Young is a Canadian-born writer and Assistant Professor of English Language Curriculum Methods in the School of Education and Professional Learning at Trent University. Her poetry and fiction have been featured in *Child: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose* (2001), *Provoked by Art: Theorizing Arts-informed Inquiry* (2004) and *Breath: Writing Herself into History* (2006). She has published in the area of curriculum and culture and its relationship with critical, technological and ecological literacies in *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research* (AJER), *Language and Literacy: A Canadian Educational E-Journal*, the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (JCT), the *Ecojustice Review* (EJR) and the *Journal of Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* (JCACS). She is an active member of the Peterborough Branch of the Canadian Authors Association and is currently working on her second book of ekphrastic poetry with artist Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco.

Artist

Mahshid Farhoudi-Di Marco is an Iranian-born International Visual Artist who teaches at the Ottawa School of Art. She currently lives in Ottawa, Ontario and plans to return to Florence, Italy in 2007. She is a recipient of several grants from the Canada Council for the Arts in support of her art. Her work is a political statement and commentary on maternal legacies and women living in exile. She is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) and worked as an OCAD Teaching Assistant for several years in Florence, Italy. She was trained at the Charles School of Art in Florence in renaissance technique using oil on canvas, as well as developing a photo-lifting process with mixed media on wood. Her work has been exhibited in Germany, Italy, Canada, and in the United States of America.

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