

## Poetry Portal

On a quarterly basis in *ARAS Connections* we will host the **Poetry Portal** and introduce an image along with an "Invite to Write", whereby you can conjure, create and submit the poem that is inspired as you engage with the image. We will select and publish some of the poems you submit in the following issue along with a new image and invitation to enter the **Portal**. We hope the metaphor of a portal will help guide spirit, art, and psyche to new places of creativity.

The **Poetry Portal** can be a realm, a channel, a path, and an exploration that has infinite possibilities. In my working with ARAS over the last year, I recalled that there was a form of poetry called the Ekphrasis poem where image and writing coexist. Poets, writers, painters and artists come together and create something anew.

"**Ekphrasis**" or "**ecphrasis**" comes from the Greek *ek* and *phrasis*, meaning 'out' and 'speak' respectively, and the verb *ekphrazein*, to proclaim or call an inanimate object by name. In ancient times it referred to a poetic description of a thing, person, or experience. Modern ekphrastic poems have used a work of art as inspiration and generally shrugged off antiquity's obsession with elaborate description, and instead have tried to interpret, inhabit, confront, and speak to their subjects.

In his *Ars Poetica* (13 BC) the Roman poet Horace wrote his dictum "ut pictura poesis" (as is painting, so is poetry) and since then the two art forms have been linked in the critical mind. Poets and painters sometimes turn to one another for inspiration, and the dialogue has been mutually beneficial. In celebration of this great union, we will host the opportunity for writers and poets to join ARAS by contributing a poem to what we are calling the **Poetry Portal**.

As we stand at the threshold of this new Portal, I have provided an example of the Ekphrasis poem by the poet William Carlos Williams and the painting, *The Fall of Icarus* by Pieter Brueghel.



*The Fall of Icarus*, by Pieter Brueghel.  
Oil-tempura, 29 inches x 44 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels.

## **Landscape with the Fall of Icarus**

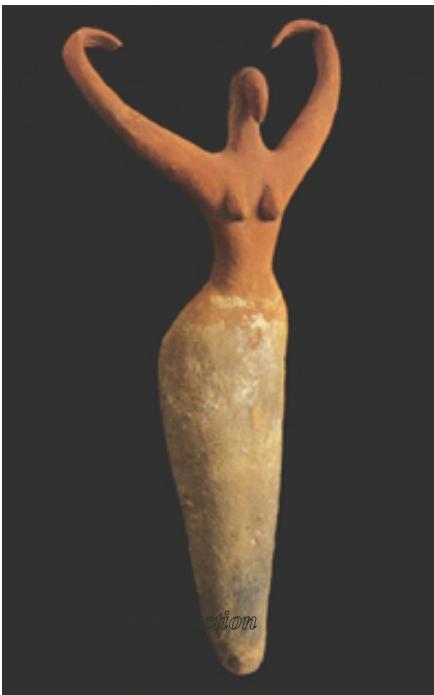
William Carlos Williams

According to Brueghel  
when Icarus fell  
it was spring  
a farmer was ploughing  
his field  
the whole pageantry  
of the year was  
awake tingling  
with itself  
sweating in the sun  
that melted  
the wings' wax  
unsignificantly  
off the coast  
there was  
a splash quite unnoticed  
this was  
Icarus drowning

Please note that Williams names the painter in the first line, and a reference to the title in the second. If you are writing a poem with a traditional ekphrasis form you would typically identify or name the painting in the first line of the poem. This is the only "rule" in writing an ekphrasis poem--the rest is left to creative freedom.

### **Invite to Write**

The first theme of OFFERING is an intentional one that we have selected along with the following image. To make an offering is an ancient rite and as we pass through this new **Portal** together, we want to honor it by offering wit, enthusiasm, and creativity to the process and all of you.



"Untitled" Terracotta sculpture. Pre-dynastic Egypt

**Here are some of the submissions from our first *Invite to Write* inspired by the theme of Offering and the image above:**

### **Terracotta Grace**

When Terracotta emerged  
Unnamed from the ancient kiln,  
Poised en pointe,  
As dancers do,  
She curved grace  
Into the solitude of  
My earth-worn soul.

- Karen D. Benson

### **Offering**

O ancient one how you bare your chest  
Today you came to visit thousands of years later  
In offering a bare chest for man, woman and child to survive  
    Can I call you Wedna  
    How far how near  
May your feminine offering remain clear  
Today I bared my chest for the ones near  
    How appropriate of a time for your visit  
    Your posture from long time ago  
    Remind us to keep you near  
You bare your chest to me thousands of years later  
    Reminding us again to bring the feminine  
    In all and for all  
    I dance and stand with my bare chest  
    As I share you with my psyche  
Remain another few thousand years to be  
    So we may continue to live in harmony  
    When the new portal opened  
    I confessed of the pain in my chest  
    My dance and offering is submitted  
    I bare my chest for you to be nurtured  
    Hold my arms up for you to be uplifted  
I look to the ground so you may be grounded  
    I bare my chest so I may be gifted  
Higher consciousness is all that is nurtured  
Alone in my offering I am alive and distant  
    Yet close I exist  
    Old and new continues it's emergence  
As ancient as you and I continue into Life's destiny

- By Lera Welch

## **Offering**

I gazed at a terracotta sculpture  
unearthed from Pre-dynastic Egypt.  
her legs sprung from tangled roots  
sturdy as a tree trunk  
from earth's red clay basin  
her eyes in prayerful surrender  
to Nut, Goddess of the Sky  
who journeyed through the underworld  
protecting a fallen star  
as a crown lit the desert sands  
black to hues of amber glow  
she swayed with ecstatic joy  
welcoming the birth of the sun  
through a portal of stars.

- Joyce Brady

Untitled  
Terra cotta  
Sculpture  
I don't know  
Whose hands  
Formed such graceful lines  
Alive and breathing  
In Pre-dynastic Egypt  
I don't know  
What you were called then  
I know you as  
Artemis  
Goddess of the moon  
Mistress of the hunt  
Forever Virgin  
Exulting in love  
Of every kind  
Never losing yourself  
Always yielding completely  
Focusing the arrow of attention  
In each precise moment  
Knowing fully  
The only true reality  
There ever is

I can smell  
Rare incense  
Guiding me  
To your inner sanctum  
No longer  
Held captive  
In my own temple

Letting go  
Of ancient history  
Drinking  
The nectar of enough  
In each  
Sacred  
Moment  
This is  
My offering  
Living  
At peace  
With myself  
I bring  
Peace  
To the World  
Dreaming  
A new dream

- Thea Spero-Shelley

I stand before you  
empty one  
I long for you with scree-like shifting

greeting your coming with a cascade of stones  
lurching, stomach  
churning, unstoppable  
carrying all away

I raise my arms to you  
broken  
one  
twisting, storm bent  
releasing flocks from the branches  
white  
against your grey skies  
pleading nothing

I cry tears for you  
beloved

head thrown back to face the rain  
soaking in knowledge of you  
pouring  
out libations  
to the god who turns the wheel

- Rebekah Anokhina

## **Terra cotta**

Five thousand years ago  
an Egyptian  
formed it from clay —

its face like a bird;  
its arms  
supporting the sky.

With my first morning  
stretch  
I offer up my body —

my willingness to fly.

- E.E. Nobbs

## **A Sacred Offering**

Hearing the cries of an Egyptian deity  
Shrouded in Terracotta and mist  
And dark robes  
I anoint my nude body  
With sacred oils  
Their scents transport me to other realms  
These realms are limitless  
Dark swallowed by light  
I see an image  
The moon's ice melted within the sun's fire  
A wedding of alchemical opposites  
As I make an offering of raven feathers to the deity  
Upon the white altar  
I hear a voice in my heart  
Calling me towards wholeness.

- Milo Bennett Burdine

The Pre-dynastic Egyptian goddess  
Swings her arms and hips  
In a dance of joy  
Her arms encircle me, you, and the world  
Her lacy trunk is like a mermaid's,  
Connected to oceanic depths  
While her lovely head tilts skyward.

Her fully feminine form  
From breasts to flowing curves  
Radiate abundance and beauty.  
I am invited to join in but if I do not  
The dance goes on...  
I cannot resist becoming her  
Raising my arms to embrace all  
Dancing to the spirit of the cosmos  
Offering all in joy

- Valerie Harms

### **offering**

clay, we say we are, how does clay pray  
after it's done with hoping to evade  
pleasure and pain  
her arms, her dance, inside your hands her trance leaves nothing,  
not one trace on her soft sand skin  
our only sin, erased  
a beating heart?  
a brain?  
swallowed herself, the swallow of the soul  
it only traced one path across the sky  
but it lit all the others in the mind  
the angle,  
and the light  
were right.  
just right.  
there's clay to keep the grains  
and clay to keep the wine  
and clay to hold your hand  
and clay to hold your eye.  
this clay  
is I

- Sergiu Vasilov

### **An unequivocal gesture of leaving for good** - for Gisela

1.

Of course I was afraid to give it your name:  
“untitled” was inevitable; the face too  
had to be featureless; that is, apart from  
the strange tapir nose I gave you; also  
part of the deception that would save our lives.

Title name and face betray an identity compelled

by circumstance to secrecy: anonymity was all  
we had  
and discretion  
- and a little art I suppose.

How were we to know that your posing in  
my studio might throw us – you the Pharaoh's  
spouse and I court artist well below your station –  
into the tumultuous wave of love, lust, and  
creativity roused in the hours and days when  
you stood naked before me arms curved  
like a heart caught in an instant of eternity?

2.  
Long shadows fell across our lives:  
murder, execution, brutality  
of untold range and manner  
a constant presence then.

The only way I could protect you  
was to smooth away the gorgeous  
features of your face, then sculpt  
that awfully monstrous nose, and  
obliterate your name leaving  
your lithe and enigmatic form  
still poised, the breasts so unlike  
the way I knew them. I wrapped  
your naked legs in silken cloth  
swaddling beneath its lustrous  
surface those lovely secrets  
other men dared only imagine.

Even now in my studio I remain  
consoled by the grace of your svelte  
body; at least you were no Venus  
of Willendorf short and bulbous  
burdened with bloated dugs  
fecund belly and jutting buttocks.  
If she had been shaped beneath  
my hands I might have bequeathed  
to history's probing eyes a figure  
far less like a pot or incense burner  
or some Great Mother archetype.

3.  
Every ritual demands this moment  
of exquisite tension, of liminal stillness  
between now and never  
between the sacred and profane  
between poise and movement.

On the last day you posed for me  
your arms swooped earthwards in

a deep voluptuous bow. It left me  
utterly uncertain: was this gesture  
meant to invite me into those arms  
for good? Or were you just bowing  
out in an extravagant farewell  
devised to disguise your anguish?

4.

So there you stood, anonymous untitled  
seductive as ever. I was left puzzling  
what offering, what vicious sacrifice or  
exquisite future your open arms  
presumed. You never said. I never knew.

After all these years, your silence intrudes into  
every remnant of the self that age has wrought:  
these days it feels much like the imminent voyage  
- to the Field of Reeds perhaps if all goes well.  
I admit I shall surrender most reluctantly yet  
- quite unlike you, my lost and ever-secret love -  
with an unequivocal gesture of leaving for good

- Tony Ulyatt

no title  
no fixed identity  
what word could describe  
woman... becomes wave,  
becomes heart, then mind, then soul  
daughter becomes mother  
young becomes old  
Fluid feminine  
Ever-changing  
Circle of embrace  
Beauty and curve  
Movement and stillness  
Empty and full  
Woman

- Josie Kelly

## **State of Grace**

What is your *Untitled* offering,  
Pre-dynastic Egypt?

Clothed in little more than  
Grace  
Your terracotta woman stands  
Unstrained.  
“Offering,” she says,  
“Is the rest step,  
The pose for which the human form  
Was made.”

She raises high her open arms,  
Fingertips intent on heaven,  
Until some subtle force  
From deep within  
Reminds her to return,  
And heeding its insistence,  
Her supple hands revert toward ground,  
Creating through their serpentine surrender  
An intimation of a heart  
To house that slender head.

Within paradoxes,  
Within insoluble complexity,  
Pausing and poised  
In the molten vortex  
Where the fiery planes  
Of heaven,  
Earth,  
Other,  
Self,  
The possible,  
The real,  
The never-more,  
And yet-to-be  
Converge into the kiln  
That fixes fast the offering  
Forever,  
We terracotta dancers  
Stretch and find  
Beyond our reckoning  
Surprisingly natural poses  
Wherein we discover  
Ourselves  
As the only offering

—A state of grace we hold *en pointe*  
Until our dynasties erupt.

- Jane Zich

**The Bird Woman**

It's odd to view  
this ancient terracotta sculpture  
from pre-dynastic Egypt, its  
stylized head resembling  
a bird's beak, muscular arms  
held high—maybe antlers  
or wings. Those breasts  
aren't breasts  
exactly but  
protuberances.

That's the only  
word to describe  
something so un-  
breast like  
and also mimicking bird's  
beaks.

And the rest of her hidden  
in a skirted form  
more phallic  
than female  
tapering down  
to who knows  
what  
underneath.

I suppose you could call it  
lovely, but  
I'm grateful  
these ancient artists  
didn't get  
their hands  
on men.  
No telling what  
they might  
have done.

- Lily Iona MacKenzie

## **OFFERING**

An offering  
Exchanged  
Inside a dream  
Pieces of you  
For lost  
Pieces of me  
Then

Switched  
In the night  
Fragile skin  
Fed  
From Psyche's placenta  
Shards of gold  
Alive now  
On a nun's  
tattered robe  
An unbidden exchange  
An alchemical trade

- Judith Harte

Drawn from the shore of the Nile's silt loam,  
Red clay is shaped by an unknown hand,  
A goddess emerges from ooze of the earth,  
Her arms reaching upward to beckon her maker,  
Her hips swell under his muddy fingertips,  
He smooths, refines, caresses in worship,  
Cradles her endless allure, his ancient desire  
To return with the god-given woman he made  
To her eternal riverbed of red  
On the banks of the river Nile.

- Jennifer Molton