



Lay Bare the Canvas: NB Poets on Art.

Marie Harris

Dear Mrs. Dewing

after *Iris at Dawn* by Maria Oakley Dewing

The first thing I have to say is that I am a writer. And I have already decided that I'm going to be a writer for the rest of my life. I told this to my Great-Aunt Helen who visits our family for a week every summer. (My father says she only has one lung which is why she talks and walks quite slowly.) She gave me this box of blue notepaper (my last name is the initial in the middle) as a birthday present. Also a new ink pen that uses cartridges. I have selected a blue-black color which I like very much. Great-Aunt Helen asked me to write to her on a monthly basis with news of my daily life and she would write back with her news. She said this would be an epistolary relationship. Also she has asked me to choose a person whom I admire to write to as well. She gave me some suggestions and I have chosen you. It's okay that you're dead because as I said I'm a writer so I can easily imagine writing to someone in another "place." You probably don't know this about me but I am a flower lover like you. Daffodils are my favorites but really all flowers make me happy and so when artists paint them the way they actually grow in nature like those irises (did you really get up at dawn to paint them?!) I feel somewhat the way I do when I

find the exact word to say what I want to say which must be how you feel when you get just the right shade of purple or the best green. Does that make sense? Also, Great-Aunt Helen said that artists like you are very, very interested in Beauty with a capital "B." Me too. One more thing we have been writing to each other about and that's how lots of really good women artists don't get the same kind of importance as men artists. G-A Helen told me that you stopped painting portraits because your husband was a pretty famous portrait painter and that sometimes he asked you to put your flowers in the background of his portraits which I would say isn't really fair. I will ask you more about this in my next letter.

Well, goodbye for now.

Your admirer,
Marie Harris, Writer
(age 10 $\frac{3}{4}$)

DEAR MRS. DEWING

Marie Harris
Iris at Dawn, 1899
Maria Oakey Dewing

The first thing I have to say is that I am a writer. And I have already decided that I'm going to be a writer for the rest of my life. I told this to my Great-Aunt Helen who visits our family for a week every summer. (My father says she only has one lung which is why she talks and walks quite slowly.) She gave me this box of blue notepaper (my last name is the initial in the middle) as a birthday present. Also a new ink pen that uses cartridges. I have selected a blue-black color which I like very much. Great-Aunt Helen asked me to write to her on a monthly basis with news of my daily life and she would write back with her news. She said this would be an epistolary relationship. Also she has asked me to choose a person whom I admire to write to as well. She gave me some suggestions and I have chosen you. It's okay that you're dead because as I said I'm a writer so I can easily imagine writing to someone in another "place." You probably don't know this about me but I am a flower lover like you. Daffodils are my favorites but really all flowers make me happy and so when artists paint them the way they actually grow in nature like those irises (did you really get up at dawn to paint them?!) I feel somewhat the way I do when I find the exact word to say what I want to say which must be how you feel when you get just the right shade of purple or the best green. Does that make sense? Also, Great-Aunt Helen said that artists like you are very, very interested in Beauty with a capital "B." Me too. One more thing we have been writing to each other about and that's how lots of really good women artists don't get the same kind of importance as men artists. G-A Helen told me that you stopped painting portraits because your husband was a pretty famous portrait painter and that sometimes he asked you to put your flowers in the background of his portraits which I would say isn't really fair. I will ask you more about this in my next letter.

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Marie Harris, Writer

(age 10 $\frac{3}{4}$)

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DEAR MRS. DEWING

Iris at Dawn (1899) oil on canvas
Maria Oakey Dewing
Hood Museum of Art

BIO:

Marie Harris, NH Poet Laureate from 1999-2004, is the author of four books of poetry, and three children's books (the most recent of which—*THE GIRL WHO HEARD COLORS*—is due out from Putnam Penguin in the Fall of 2013). She has edited several poetry anthologies. She performs her original narrative of the life and work of Amy Beach, America's first female composer, with the North Country Chamber Players. Her current project is a hybrid work of poems and images in collaboration with the poet Sebastian Matthews.

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT:

Over the past few years, whether by design or accident, I have been encountering the works of American women artists of the 19th and 20th centuries. Composers. Musicians. Poets. Painters. Dancers. What they share is a strange and almost ghostly presence on the pages of artistic histories. That is, they are there—in footnotes and asides; in mentions and suggestion—but only barely. Yet these women held their own alongside their male contemporaries (often husbands), and continue to shine into the 21st century.

When I surfed the pages/rooms of the cyber-New England museums, I was trolling for women. And I found Maria Oakey Dewing. A founder of the Art Students League in New York, she was an esteemed portrait painter, and subsequently, wife of Thomas Dewing, into whose artistic identity she all but disappeared, though her floral backgrounds sometimes appeared behind his portraits.

But Maria Oakey Dewing's extraordinary outdoor still lives, the few that remain, deserve to be recognized as exemplary American visual art. My "letter" to her, in a young person's voice, is a way of acknowledging my debt to her and to all the unsung women artists and poets and composers and dancers who have preceded me, and in whose debt I will also always be.

1 box of .

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writing

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Your admirer,

Marie Harris, Writer

(Age 10 3/4)

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03.14.13

Invited Submission Guidelines

1. Write one poem inspired by artwork from a New England museum. Art can be found online at The Athenaeum. See a list of New England museums represented at The Athenaeum below.

Go to <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/> Then click on "by museum" found in the left column to find a list of all museums on The Athenaeum. Scroll down to one of the New England museums listed below. Click on the "number of artworks" on the right side of the listing. Then click on a painting that inspires you. To enlarge the image, click on the artwork. Write a poem inspired by or in response to the painting.

2. Select art in the public domain only. The majority of works on The Athenaeum website are in the public domain. Click on the Copyright Status button on the artwork's page you selected to determine if the art is in the public domain.

3. Submit one unpublished poem, no longer than 2 pages. Under the title of your poem please write your name, the name of the painting, and the artist's name.

4. On a cover page please provide the following information: name, address, phone, email, poem title, name of the painting, artist's name, name of the New England museum, as well as a short Bio and an author's statement about your poem.

5. During the Invited Submission period (Jan.1- Mar. 15, 2013), please send your poem and cover page in a file attachment to info@thepoetryloft.org. (File format: Microsoft Word.doc; Font: Times New Roman, 11 point; File name: your last name, Invited Submission)

SELECT ARTWORK from the following New England museums found at <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/>

Massachusetts: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Fogg Museum of Art, Cambridge; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown; Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton; Worcester Art Museum, Worcester; Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover; Mead Art Museum, Amherst; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown; Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield; Peabody Essex Museum, Salem; Provincetown Art Association & Museum, Provincetown; Cape Ann Historical Association, Gloucester.

Connecticut: Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford; New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain; Yale Center for British Art, New Haven; Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme; New Haven Museum, New Haven.

Rhode Island: Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence; Newport Art Museum, Newport.

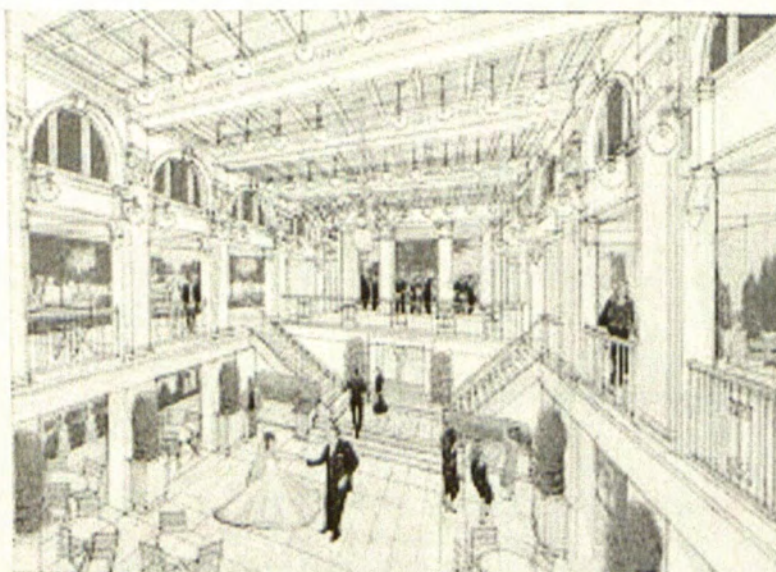
New Hampshire: Currier Museum of Art, Manchester; Hood Museum of Art, Hanover.

Vermont: Shelburne Museum, Shelburne; St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, St. Johnsbury.

Maine: Portland Museum of Art, Portland; Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland; Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick; Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville.

2013 LOFT ANTHOLOGY AWARDS GALA

The Providence Public Library in partnership with the The Poetry Loft presents the third annual Loft Awards Gala. Winners will be announced at the event. Winners, finalists and contributors will be honored at the 2013 Loft Awards Gala on **June 6, 2013** at the Grand Hall and Garden Courtyard, **Providence Public Library, Providence, RI.**



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- 1. "Providence Public Library." *Providence Public Library*. Providence Public Library, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.providencelibrary.org/>>
- 2. "The Poetry Loft." *The Poetry Loft*. The Poetry Loft, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.thepoetryloft.org/>>
- 3. "2013 Loft Awards Gala." *2013 Loft Awards Gala*. Providence Public Library, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.providencelibrary.org/2013-loft-awards-gala>>
- 4. "Providence Public Library." *Providence Public Library*. Providence Public Library, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.providencelibrary.org/>>
- 5. "The Poetry Loft." *The Poetry Loft*. The Poetry Loft, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.thepoetryloft.org/>>
- 6. "2013 Loft Awards Gala." *2013 Loft Awards Gala*. Providence Public Library, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.providencelibrary.org/2013-loft-awards-gala>>
- 7. "Providence Public Library." *Providence Public Library*. Providence Public Library, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.providencelibrary.org/>>
- 8. "The Poetry Loft." *The Poetry Loft*. The Poetry Loft, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.thepoetryloft.org/>>
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- 12. "2013 Loft Awards Gala." *2013 Loft Awards Gala*. Providence Public Library, 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.providencelibrary.org/2013-loft-awards-gala>>

External links

- <http://www.providencelibrary.org/>

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DECEMBER 1981

*If, in the season's long night,
we imagined ourselves itinerant
star gazers, shepherds
in a grazed over land,
we might offer each other
no gift
but a watchful eye
an ear to the earth's heart.*

© Marie Harris

DECEMBER

If, in the season's long night,
we imagined ourselves
itinerant star gazers, shepherds
in a grazed-over land,
we might offer each other
no gift
but a watchful eye,
an ear to the earth's heart.

DECEMBER

If, in the season's long night,
we imagined ourselves
itinerant star gazers, shepherds
in a grazed-over land,
we might offer each other
no gift
but to keep a watchful eye,
an ear to the earth's heart.

December, 1981

If, in the season's long night,
we imagined ourselves itinerant
star gazers, shepherds
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we might offer each other
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CHAPTER I

There is a great deal of talk about the
state of the world at present, and some
of the things that are going on in it.
But what is the state of the world?

It is a world of many things, of many
people, of many nations, of many
languages, of many customs, of many
religions, of many sciences, of many
arts, of many pleasures, of many pains.

Harris

Drought

These skies are vinegar and hyssop.
Less than a tile of water left, and none
to offer the corn, the fruit
on shriveled vines.

If I were in the habit of prayer
I'd pray for rain. Not rain
that blows from the west,
but the downpours of childhood
that shut the spirit into dreams
as surely as opening a book.

DROUGHT

These skies are vinegar and hyssop.
Less than a tile of water left in the well, none
to offer the corn, the musk melons
on shriveled vines.

If I were in the habit of prayer
I'd pray for rain. Not rain
that blows sour from the west,
but the downpours of childhood
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