

**LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME
POETRY AND PICTURES POETRY WORKSHOP
FEBRUARY 2021: SUFFERING FOR YOUR ART**

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EXERCISE ONE: Warm up exercise – Abstract Noun, Concrete Noun

Look at the lists of Abstract Nouns and Concrete Nouns. Choose one abstract noun and one concrete noun from each list. Write a piece/poem using the language and imagery of the concrete noun to describe the abstract noun. Eg: How is grief like a bicycle? How is love like an elephant? You may begin with ‘Courage is like a pair of socks because...’ This exercise is a great starting point for poems - it makes you look at and consider things in a different way.

<u>ABSTRACT NOUNS</u>	<u>CONCRETE NOUNS</u>
JEALOUSY	ELEPHANT
JOY	CANDLE
COURAGE	BICYCLE
GRIEF	SOCKS
LOVE	RUG
PRIDE	APPLE
PATIENCE	KETTLE
IMPATIENCE	SCISSORS
KINDNESS	COMB
ANGER	SHELL
LAZINESS	KEY
LUST	TREE
GENEROSITY	ONION

EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this exercise is Suffering For Your Art

We know the phrase ‘to suffer for your art’ means to go the extra mile, whatever the cost, to achieve your artistic vision. We will focus on four artists who have suffered for their art in various ways, both physically and mentally, or have used their suffering to create their art.

<https://www.artsy.net/article/the-art-genome-project-8-works-of-extreme-art-from-chris-burden-to-marina-abramovic>



Godfrey E. Lundberg from <http://lordsprayerpin.com/history/>

SLIDES : The Lord’s Prayer engraved on the head of a pin (1913-15) - Godfrey Lundberg

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godfrey_Lundberg

http://mtplesantpioneerofthemoth.blogspot.com/2011_11_28_archive.html

Godfrey Emanuel Lundberg (1879 – 1933) was an accomplished engraver during the early part of the 20th century. He is most noted for his hand engraving of the Lord's Prayer on the tiny head of a gold pin that was displayed at the 1915 Panama–Pacific Exposition in San Francisco and won a gold medal in engraving. He engraved the pin in Spokane, Washington between 1913 and 1915.

In 1907, Paul P. Wentz engraved the Lord's Prayer on a brass pinhead with a diameter of 2 mm or .079 inch. Lundberg became aware of this pin in 1912 and was convinced that he could do a much more difficult piece of work, namely engrave the Lord's Prayer on a pinhead with a much smaller area. He chose a gold pin with a head diameter of 1.19 mm or 0.047 inch, about 1/3 the area of the Wentz pinhead. He preferred gold, as it is very stable and does not corrode, rust, or become negatively affected by age. Before commencing the work, Lundberg realized that he needed to be in top physical shape to undergo the rigours of such a long, nerve-racking endeavour. A *Spokesman-Review* article in 1915 states:

“First, he [Lundberg] went into training. The steadiness of nerve that would be required could come only as the result of a conditioning process stricter than that of the highly trained athlete. Tobacco, coffee and like indulgences were out of the question. Fresh air and exercise were necessary. Complete rest for the eyes had to be assured. When he felt himself ‘fit’ Lundberg started the next stage, which was the manufacture of a special engraving tool, which had to be of a degree of fineness beyond that attempted by the makers of the most minute instruments. It took six months to perfect the graver. The point had to be of steel specially tempered so that it would hold an unprecedentedly fine point that would cut and that would not be brittle. The process by which he tempered his steel is one of Lundberg's secrets. When he finished he had a point so fine that it was hardly visible to the naked eye, and yet had sufficient tensile strength to last through the whole long-drawn, nerve-straining process.”

To keep his arm, hand, fingers, microscope, graver, and pin steady enough for this most delicate job of engraving, Lundberg assembled an original piece of equipment that clamped everything rigid except the tips of his fingers. Alvin H. Hankins, a jeweller and lens grinder who knew Lundberg, was present during most of the engraving. In a letter to *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, Hankins told of the gruelling conditions Lundberg imposed upon himself to complete the work. Lundberg worked from a barber's chair, strapping his hands to an iron bar to keep them from shaking. He also bound his wrists tightly with leather straps, because the rhythm of his pulse caused the engraving tool to skip. Lundberg could only work on the pin in the evenings, when the rumbling trolley cars that passed by his shop had stopped running for the day. He destroyed more than two hundred pins in his attempt to create one perfect engraving.”

Lundberg only worked on the pin for a short period of time in the late hours of the night or early hours of the morning because there was too much vibration from activity in the area at other times. Even with this professional prudence, a tragic setback tested Lundberg's will and determination:

"In spite of all precautions there were several setbacks, one of them particularly disheartening. Two or three pins Lundberg had started, only to have some unexpected minute jar deflect the needle and spoil the letters that had been drawn. But finally eight of the twelve lines had been completed and the end was in sight. Starting early one morning on the ninth line Lundberg saw through the microscope the graving tool swerve and cut through the completed part. He had felt no jar, but he knew there must have been one. He ran out of the shop, could see no vehicle on the deserted streets, but heard the rumble of a heavy truck. It was two blocks away, but its effect had been as destructive as if it had been in the same room. The work had to be begun all over again. ‘I came near to giving up the job’, says Lundberg when he tells about this tragic event. But he started out, a few

strokes a night, reaching his home early every morning with each individual nerve on edge and with eyes aching from the strain. He has calculated that 1863 strokes of the graver went into the task.”

Nervous strain caused Lundberg to lose weight and culminated in a nervous breakdown after he had finished the pin. He declared, “I wouldn't undertake a feat like that again for any amount of money.” Being exhausted with nervous prostration and in desperate need of total rest, Lundberg entrusted the task of revealing the pin to the public to his brothers, Carl and Mauritz.



SLIDES 3-8: The Sistine Chapel (1508-12) – Michelangelo

Clockwise from top left: The Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo's own sketch of himself painting God, ceiling detail, Hands of God and Adam, The Sistine Chapel pre-Michelangelo

<https://www.history.com/news/7-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-sistine-chapel>

<https://100falcons.wordpress.com/2010/07/25/how-michelangelo-painted-the-sistine-chapel/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sistine_Chapel_ceiling

Contrary to popular belief, Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City, Rome, in a standing position. When they picture Michelangelo creating his legendary frescoes, most people assume he was lying down. But in fact, the artist and his assistants used wooden scaffolds that allowed them to stand upright and reach above their heads. Michelangelo himself designed the unique system of platforms, which were attached to the walls with brackets. The impression that Michelangelo painted on his back might come from the 1965 film *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, in which Charlton Heston portrayed the artist. According to Giorgio Vasari, a 16th century Italian artist, writer and historian: “The work was carried out in extremely uncomfortable conditions, from his having to work with his head tilted upwards”. Working on the Sistine Chapel was so unpleasant that Michelangelo wrote a poem in 1509 about his misery.

The entire ceiling is a fresco, which is an ancient method for painting murals that relies upon a chemical reaction between damp lime plaster and water-based pigments to permanently fuse the work into the wall. Michelangelo drew directly onto the ceiling. He painted onto the damp plaster using a wash technique to apply broad areas of colour, then as the surface became drier, he revisited these areas with a more linear approach, adding shade and detail with a variety of brushes. For some textured surfaces, such as facial hair and wood-grain, he used a broad brush with bristles as sparse as a comb. Fresco painting requires real physical effort. Every day the artist has to mix up a batch of plaster and trowel it onto the wall, then hurry to finish his painting before the plaster dries.

And painting a ceiling is doubly hard because everything has to be lifted, scribed, and painted above your head.

Michelangelo designed his own scaffold, a flat wooden platform on brackets built out from holes in the wall near the top of the windows, rather than being built up from the floor. According to Michelangelo's pupil and biographer Ascanio Condivi, the brackets and frame that supported the steps and flooring were all put in place at the beginning of the work and a lightweight screen, possibly cloth, was suspended beneath them to catch plaster drips, dust, and splashes of paint. Only half the room was scaffolded at a time and the platform was moved as the painting was done in stages. Michelangelo stood on the wooden plank of the scaffolding sixty feet in the air and worked looking up. He rubbed and rubbed his neck, it ached so. In a letter he drew a little caricature of himself painting a saint on the ceiling, his head bent back as far as it would go. He drove himself to the limit. He practically lived in the chapel, eating onions and stale bread. "I have no friends and don't want any," he wrote to his father.

On 10 June 1508 the cardinals complained of the intolerable dust and noise generated by the work. Though some sunlight would have entered the work space between the ceiling and the scaffolding, artificial light would have been required for painting, candlelight possibly influencing the appearance of the vivid colours used. As the scale of the work got larger, Michelangelo's style became broader; the image of God in the act of Creation was painted in a single day, and reflects Michelangelo himself in the act of creating the ceiling. The bright colours and broad, cleanly defined outlines make each subject easily visible from the floor. Despite the height of the ceiling, the proportions of the Creation of Adam are such that when standing beneath it, "it appears as if the viewer could simply raise a finger and meet those of God and Adam".



Clockwise from top left: The Broken Column 1944, painting in bed, painting body cast, FK's studio, body cast, body cast

SLIDES 9-14: The Broken Column (1944) - Frida Kahlo

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/may/21/art>

<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/broken-column-frida-kahlo/>

<https://improvisedlife.com/2012/03/19/frida-kahlos-body-cast-paintings-art-trans-forms/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frida_Kahlo

<https://www.vintag.es/2020/02/frida-kahlo-on-bed.html>

Frida Kahlo (1907 – 1954) was a Mexican painter known for her many portraits, self-portraits, and works inspired by the nature and artefacts of Mexico. Inspired by the country's popular culture, she employed a naïve folk art style to explore questions of identity, post-colonialism, gender, class, and race in Mexican society. Her paintings often had strong autobiographical elements and mixed realism with fantasy. She is known for painting about her experience of chronic pain.

In 1922, Kahlo was accepted to the elite National Preparatory School, where she focused on natural sciences with the aim of becoming a doctor. The institution had only recently begun admitting women, with only 35 girls out of 2,000 students. However, a severe bus accident in September 1925 left Kahlo in lifelong pain. Kahlo and her boyfriend, Arias, were on their way home from school. They boarded one bus, but they got off the bus to look for an umbrella that Kahlo had left behind. They then boarded a second bus, which was crowded, and they sat in the back. The driver attempted to pass an oncoming electric streetcar. The streetcar crashed into the side of the wooden bus, dragging it a few feet. Several passengers were killed in the accident. While Arias suffered minor damages, Kahlo had been impaled with an iron handrail that went through her pelvis. She later described the injury as “the way a sword pierces a bull.” The handrail was removed by Arias and others, which was incredibly painful for Kahlo.

Kahlo suffered many injuries: her pelvic bone had been fractured, her abdomen and uterus had been punctured by the rail, her spine was broken in three places, her right leg was broken in eleven places, her right foot was crushed and dislocated, her collarbone was broken, and her shoulder was dislocated. She spent a month in the hospital and two months recovering at home before being able to return to work. As she continued to experience fatigue and back pain, her doctors ordered x-rays, which revealed that the accident had also displaced three vertebrae. As treatment she had to wear a plaster corset which confined her to bed rest for the better part of three months.

During this time, Kahlo began to paint. Her mother provided her with a specially-made easel, which enabled her to paint in bed, and her father lent her some of his oil paints. She had a mirror placed above the easel, so that she could see herself. Painting became a way for Kahlo to explore questions of identity and existence. She explained, “I paint myself because I am often alone and I am the subject I know best.” She later stated that the accident and the isolating recovery period made her desire “to begin again, painting things just as [she] saw them with [her] own eyes and nothing more.”

The accident ended Kahlo's dreams of becoming a doctor and caused her pain and illness for the rest of her life; a friend stated that Kahlo “lived dying”. Indeed, while Kahlo was gaining recognition as an artist in her home country, her health continued to decline. By the mid-1940s, her back had worsened to the point that she could no longer sit or stand continuously. In June 1945, she traveled to New York for an operation which fused a bone graft and a steel support to her spine to straighten it. The difficult operation was a failure. Kahlo also sabotaged her recovery by not resting as required and by once physically re-opening her wounds in a fit of anger. Her paintings from this period, such as *The Broken Column* (1944), reflect her declining health.

Due to her spinal problems, Kahlo wore twenty-eight separate supportive corsets, varying from steel and leather to plaster, between 1940 and 1954. She experienced pain in her legs, the infection on her hand had become chronic, and she was also treated for syphilis. Kahlo wore plaster corsets for most of her life because her spine was too weak to support itself. She painted them, naturally, covering them with pasted scraps of fabric and drawings of tigers, monkeys, plumed birds, a blood-red hammer and sickle, and streetcars like the one whose handrail rammed through her body when she was eighteen years old. The corsets remain to this day in her famous blue house—their embedded mirrors reflecting back our gazes, their collages bringing the whole world into stricture. In

one, an open circle has been carved into the plaster like a skylight near the heart. Kahlo, confined in terrible casts most of life, painted them, transformed them, took them over as much as she could, turned them into something beautiful, expressive; she turned them into art.

The Broken Column was painted shortly after Frida Kahlo had undergone another surgery on her spinal column. The operation left her bedridden and “enclosed” in a metallic corset, which helped to alleviate the intense, and constant pain she was in. In this painting Kahlo is depicted standing in the middle of a completely arid, cracked landscape. Her torso is encased in metal belts lined with fabric that provide pressure and support for her back. They help to prevent her body from collapsing, a possibility which is announced by the image running down the middle of her torso. A completely fractured Ionic column on the point of collapse has replaced her spinal column. Frida’s head rests on the capital. The nails piercing her body are a symbol of the constant pain she faced.

A picture such as *The Broken Column* seems to give us her pain as almost no other; her body stuck with nails, the pale tears on her cheeks, the expression of terrible courage. But we can see what a complicated language is being brought into being to transmit the emotion; the pain is expressed through a combination of realism, with the depiction of a steel corset that she had to wear, and surrealism, as her body is opened up to reveal a crumbling column instead of a spine.



SLIDES 15-18: The Reincarnation of Sainte-ORLAN (1990–1995) - ORLAN

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orlan>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/jul/01/orlan-performance-artist-carnal-art>

<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/orlan-interview-1650289>

ORLAN (born Mireille Suzanne Francette Porte) is a French contemporary artist best known for her work with plastic surgery in the early to mid-1990s. ORLAN is credited as a pioneer of “Carnal Art” a form of self-portraiture that utilizes body modification to distort one's appearance. She adopted the pseudonym “ORLAN” in 1971. ORLAN chose to style her new name in capital letters, “because I do not want to return to the ranks, I do not want to be put back into the line.” She lives and works in Paris.

ORLAN practices painting, sculpture, photography and video, and produces plastic works, installations and performances. She also uses digital media, surgery, medicine, robotics, AI and biotechnologies. At the age of 15, she took on the assumed name ORLAN, her first reinvention in an

over 30-year career of transformations and fictional re-births. From 1990 to 1995, for *The Reincarnation of Sainte-ORLAN*, the artist underwent nine plastic surgeries on her face intending to rewrite Western Art on her own body by resembling the features of famous women in Western art history. One operation altered her mouth to imitate that of François Boucher's Europa, another changed her forehead to mimic the protruding brow of Leonardo's Mona Lisa, while yet another altered her chin to look like that of Botticelli's Venus. She decided to go under the knife again and again – not because her life was at risk, but because she believed surgically changing her body could be a powerful work of art. When she had plastic surgery on her brow in New York in 1993, ORLAN emerged with two little implants – usually used to enhance cheekbones – on either side of her forehead. Hostile critics called them “demon horns”. ORLAN decorates them with glitter eyeliner to accentuate their presence. She simply refers to them as “my bumps.” The implants were inserted during a live performance broadcast to museum audiences.

ORLAN picked these characters from art, “not for the canons of beauty they represent... but rather on account of the stories associated with them”. ORLAN's operating table became her baroque theatre. Dressed in Baroque-inspired gowns from designers such as Paco Rabanne and Issey Miyake, the artist remained conscious throughout the operations. Poetry was read and music played. Her surgical transformations were filmed and broadcast in institutions throughout the world and sometimes fed to audiences around the globe via live satellite link-ups.

Images shot post-operation show her face swollen and discoloured, red bruises blooming around her eyes. Taken at the window in ORLAN's apartment in Lower Manhattan, the photos show the Twin Towers and the Woolworth building just behind her. “I'm getting emotional when I look at it, because New York doesn't have the same face,” ORLAN told *artnet News*.

Was she trying to make herself more beautiful? “No, my goal was to be different, strong; to sculpt my own body to reinvent the self. It's all about being different and creating a clash with society because of that. I tried to use surgery not to better myself or become a younger version of myself, but to work on the concept of image and surgery the other way around. I was the first artist to do it.” She says, “The face that you have is something you don't choose. I wanted to attack Mother Nature.”

Unlike the traditional motivations for plastic surgery, these operations weren't an effort to make her look younger or more beautiful. Tired of the ways that societal beauty standards constrain women, ORLAN specifically set out to make herself less beautiful. “All my work is against the stereotype.” ORLAN defines cosmetic surgery as “nomadic, mutant, shifting, differing.” She stated in her *Carnal Art Manifesto*: “I can observe my own body cut open, without suffering!... I see myself all the way down to my entrails; a new mirror stage...”

So, what is Carnal Art? According to ORLAN's *Carnal Art Manifesto*, it's “not against cosmetic surgery, but rather against the conventions carried by it and their subsequent inscription”. She says her work is a “struggle against the innate, the inexorable, the programmed, nature, DNA – and God.” She also believes it is important to underline her work as a feminist artist. “All my life I came second, as men were always coming first. Not to talk about feminism would mean that I didn't respect myself.”

Now look at the following poems:

Wild Geese - Mary Oliver

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/09/24/mary-oliver-reads-wild-geese/>

<https://poemanalysis.com/mary-oliver/wild-geese/>

The speaker, presumably Oliver, is talking directly to her reader, imploring them to not worry so much about being good; rather, the reader should be true to nature and the beauty found in it. Throughout the poem, Oliver uses the word “you” to speak to the reader, which lends an intimate, almost urgent air about the work.

Structurally, there is not much to the poem. It comprises only one stanza and eighteen lines. The simplicity of its structure seems to reflect the themes of nature that are so prevalent throughout the work. *Wild Geese* is written in free verse, but Oliver does make use of half-rhyme. The poem has the feeling of rhyme, without using full/ complete end rhymes.

Oliver makes use of several poetic techniques in *Wild Geese* including anaphora - the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of multiple lines, usually in succession. For example, “Meanwhile” at the beginning of lines seven, eight and twelve. Or, “You do not have to” in lines one and two.

A Baby Asleep After Pain - D H Lawrence

<https://poets.org/poem/baby-asleep-after-pain>

Notice how Lawrence makes use of repetition to create effects - "heavy" "heavily" - the words sigh through the poem. He also uses the repeated image of a "drenched, drowned bee" to describe the baby - an extended metaphor.

Michelangelo: To Giovanni Da Pistoia When the Author Was Painting the Vault of the Sistine Chapel, 1509 - Michelangelo, translated by Gail Mazur

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57328/michaelangelo-to-giovanni-da-pis-toia-when-the-author-was-painting-the-vault-of-the-sistine-chapel>

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/poem/2010/01/labor_pains.html

Michelangelo (1475-1564) himself provides a refreshing dose of reality. In 1509, an increasingly uncomfortable Michelangelo described the physical strain of the Sistine Chapel project to his friend Giovanni da Pistoia. A gifted poet as well as a sculptor and painter, he wrote energetically about despair, detailing with relish the unpleasant side of his work on the famous ceiling. This translation is by the American poet Gail Mazur. Her lines are musical but informal, conveying that the Italian artist knew well enough that he and his work were great—but that he enjoyed vigorously lamenting his discomfort, pain, and inadequacy to the task. No wonder his artistic ideas are bizarre and no good, says Michelangelo: they come through the medium of his body, that “crooked blowpipe”. This is a vibrant, comic, but heartfelt account of the artist's work.

The hint of rhyme between ‘honour’ and ‘painter’ in Mazur's translation gives some suggestion of a clinching couplet. Despair is certainly there in Michelangelo's self-description. Maybe his friend Giovanni laughed out loud at his final “not a painter” as we—anyone who has had a hard time at work on a demanding project well worth doing—can add our own exclamation of astonishment, rue, and amusement.

EXERCISE THREE: Suffering for Poetry

Write a poem/piece inspired by the theme and/or the artworks and artists we have explored. Here are some suggestions for ways in to the writing:

- Choose an image to work with. Write a sentence or two about why you chose this image, how it makes you feel, and/or what it makes you think about.
- Next, write a detailed description of the image. Be sure to include words that indicate size, shape, colour, light/shade, objects, figures, etc.

- Finally, write a poem in response to your image. If you need inspiration, look back at your answers above.

There are many different ways to go about writing your poem. Here are some suggestions:

- Write a poem about your thoughts and feelings as you experience the artwork.
- Speculate about how or why the artist has created this artwork.
- Write from the point of view of something in the image – bring it to life and make it think and feel like a human being.
- Write a poem from the point of view of the artist / someone depicted in the artwork.
- What is being revealed and what concealed in the artwork?
- Imagine what was happening while the artist was creating this work.
- Write a poem about your own or someone else's experience. A memory.

Your poem could be written in the style of a poem we've looked at, for example, addressing the reader directly ('You'); using anaphora (repeating words at the beginning of lines to give your poem a 'chant-like' quality); talking about your own work or difficult tasks you have done like Michelangelo; talking about someone else in the form of an extended image/metaphor (Lawrence's poem).

And, of course, you may write a poem about the theme in your own way and in your own style!

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