

LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME
POETRY AND PICTURES POETRY WORKSHOP
MAY 2021: OUTDOOR ART

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Thank you for attending Ledbury Poetry Festival's Poetry & Pictures writing workshop today. It was really good to see you there and I hope you found the session inspiring.

I would like to thank you for all your lovely comments at the end of the session. I really appreciate it. My job is easy though - I give you the ideas - you do the hard work when you write your poems! It's so great that such a warm, supportive, friendly and interesting group of people come along to the sessions, it's a pleasure to be there with you all. We know Zoom presents its own set of challenges and limitations when it comes to running interactive workshops, but I genuinely feel there's a sense of connection and camaraderie between us all. Thank you. (PS: I'm not just saying this because there's an evaluation coming up next month!! ;-)

Here is a transcript of the workshop with the activities and images. Scroll down and you will have the information I gave at your fingertips. You might like to grab a cuppa!

Introduction to Ekphrastic Poetry

Ekphrastic Poetry is a form of poetry inspired by works of art. Ekphrastic poems may find new stories about art pieces. It is not simply writing a description about a piece of art. It is more about reinterpreting art works in a new and different way. It can be like having a conversation with the artist or the artistic subject. It is about looking and experiencing artworks in a sensual way and putting your thoughts, feelings, ideas and sensations into words. Information about artworks may inform your response.

EXERCISE ONE: Warm-up writing exercise: Double Word Writing

Homophones are words that sound the same (homo = same, phone = sound) but have different spellings and meanings.

Look at the lists of homophones. Write a piece/story using sets of words that can be spelt more than one way. You may want to write a poem using them at the ends of lines – you will have instant rhyming!

ad/add, eyelet/islet, manner/manor, mantel/mantle, martial/marshal, maul/mall, maze/maize, medal/meddle, meet/ meat, metal/mettle, meter/metre miner/minor, mite/might, moan/mown, moose/mousse, morn/mourn, mote/moat, mussel/muscle, nap/knap, nave/knave navel/naval, nay/neigh, need/knead, new/knew, nit/knit, no/know, not/knot, faint/feint, fair/fare, fate/fete, faun/fawn, faze/phase, feet/feat, fin/Finn, Finnish/finish, fir/fur, flair/flare, flee/flea, flow/floe, flue/flew/flu, for/four, forgo/forego, forth/fourth, franc/frank, freeze/frieze, fryer/friar, gaff/gaffe, gage/gauge, gamble/gambol, gate/gait, geezer/geyser, aid/aide, air/heir, aisle/isle, ale/ail, aloud/allowed, alter/altar, arc/ark, ascent/assent, ate/eight, bale/bail, ball/bawl, bare/bear, barren/baron, base/bass, bask/Basque, batten/baton, be/bee, beech/beach, been/bean, beet/beat, bell/belle, berry/bury, berth/birth, bite/byte/bight, seamen/semen, see/sea, seed/cede, seem/seam, seen/scene, sell/cell, seller/cellar, sensor/censor, sent/scent/cent, serial/cereal, sewn/sown, sheer/shear, shoot/chute, sight/cite/site, signet/cygnets, slay/sleigh, slight/sleight, sloe/slow, so/sow/sew, sole/soul, sore/soar, stair/stare, stake/steak, stationery/stationary, steel/steal

EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this session is OUTDOOR ART

We will focus on four outdoor artworks in the session.

1. *Northumberlandia* - Charles Jencks (Cramlington, Northumberland)

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/mar/26/from-skyspace-to-the-scallop-10-of-the-best-outdoor-art-works>

<https://www.northumberlandia.com/about/about-the-lady/>

<https://www.nwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/northumberlandia>

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



SLIDES 1-5: NORTHUMBERLANDIA - CHARLES JENCKS

As you walk up the paths that spiral this grass-covered earthwork, you don't immediately see that it's a colossal female nude. With this modern pagan monument, the artist Charles Jencks created a 21st-century answer to the chalk horses and giants that dot Britain. It will give future archaeologists headaches trying to understand our matriarchal fertility cult. (Jonathan Jones, *The Guardian*)

Northumberlandia is a unique piece of public art set in a 46 acre community park with 4 miles of footpaths on and around the landform. Known locally as The Lady, *Northumberlandia* is a stunning human landform sculpture of a reclining woman. Made of 1.5 million tonnes of rock, clay and soil from the neighbouring Shotton Surface Mine, she is 100 feet high and a quarter of a mile long. This makes her the World's largest human landform sculpture.

Blagdon Estate and the Banks Group, a development and operational company, carried out the construction work. The construction is part of the development of the adjacent open-cast coal mine at Shotton. For this project, it was decided to use part of the excavated material to make a land sculpture rather than return it all to the surface mine, as is normally done at the end of such operations.

The idea for Northumberlandia originated in 2004 when the Blagdon Estate and the Banks Group were applying for permission to dig for coal and fire clay (for bricks) on farmland near the new town of Cramlington. They recognised that there was a unique opportunity to create a spectacular art form that would provide a legacy for future generations. So the consortium contacted the internationally renowned artist Charles Jencks to see what could be done – and *Northumberlandia* was born.

In 2010 work began and 1.5 million tonnes of carefully selected rock, clay and soil was transported from the adjacent Shotton surface mine to a neighbouring part of the estate to form *Northumberlandia*. The project, called Restoration First, has provided a unique opportunity to create a spectacular art form whilst maintaining the mining process.

Once the major landscape works were complete, the sculpture was blasted with 'hydro seed' which started to transform the sculpture into a living landscape. Her face, paths and viewing platforms were constructed with a hard stone surface with every feature surveyed and checked against carefully designed plans.

Rather than become a highly manicured landscape, the park and sculpture will be allowed to develop naturally with minimal interference working within the grain of nature. The park will change with the seasons and mature over many generations.

Sixteen red list species of birds have been spotted onsite and tree sparrows are now nesting in the boxes in the woodland. Kestrels can often be seen hovering and buzzards can be spotted soaring over the landform itself. The woodland harbours many birds and spectacular fungi (in the autumn), whilst the grasslands are hotspots for butterflies and meadow flowers. The ponds attract birdlife including nesting little grebe, tufted duck, mallards and heron and also provide a home to great crested and smooth newts.

Northumberlandia was designed by world renowned architect and artist Charles Jencks. The inspiration for the landform comes from the distant Cheviot Hills, which are pulled into the foreground by the curves and shapes of the female form used for *Northumberlandia*.

We naturally look for patterns and shapes in the landscape around us and the scale of the landform means the female form is not seen as a figure all of the time. As you walk around the paths you have to use this natural recognition of the human form to pick out the shape of the figure. For much of the time it appears just as a series of graceful sweeping curves and interlocking shapes.

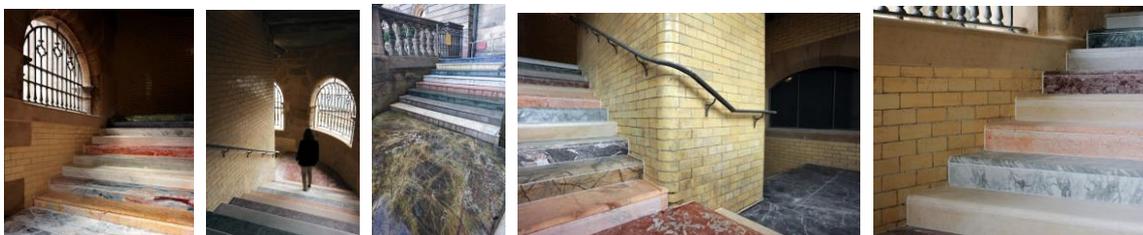
2. Work No. 1059 - Martin Creed

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/mar/26/from-skyspace-to-the-scallop-10-of-the-best-outdoor-art-works>

<https://www.fruitmarket.co.uk/scotsman-steps/>

<https://aestheticmagazine.com/a-major-new-public-artwork-martin-creed-work-no-1059-edinburgh-art-festival/>

<https://www.edinburghartfestival.com/whats-on/detail/martin-creed-work-no.1059-2011>



SLIDES 6-10: WORK NO.1059 - MARTIN CREED

You can walk up the historic Scotsman Steps, this staircase to Edinburgh's Old Town, without noticing that it's art – which is Martin Creed's point. He makes art that insists it's just another bit of the world. Yet look down and the 104 steps are surfaced in colourful marble that would do an Italian piazza proud.

Martin Creed's *Work No. 1059* was commissioned by The Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh as part of Creed's solo exhibition *Down Over Up* in 2010. *Work No. 1059* was installed almost a year after the exhibition opened.

The Scotsman Steps are an important part of Edinburgh's cityscape: built in 1899 and contained in an octagonal stone tower, they link the Old and New Towns and have historically been considered as a road. Before restoration by Edinburgh World Heritage and City of Edinburgh Council, they were extremely dilapidated, and vulnerable to misuse. The Fruitmarket Gallery suggested commissioning a public artwork for the Steps as part of the renovation, to help change the public perception of them, and to fulfil the Gallery's mission to make contemporary art freely accessible, bringing it out of the gallery to engage people where they are.

Martin Creed, with his smart response to public space, his ability to engage with materials and their surroundings, and his understanding of the creative possibilities embedded in the act of going up and down steps, seemed an obvious choice for the commission. From the beginning, he considered the Steps as a thoroughfare, proposing to resurface them with different and contrasting marbles from all over the world, each step and landing a different colour. He introduced 104 different marbles, putting the material as well as the visitor through its paces. Creed himself has described the work as a microcosm of the whole world – stepping on the different marble steps is like walking through the world. The new staircase also dramatises Edinburgh's internationalism and contemporary significance while recognising and respecting its historical importance. This is both a typical Creed idea, involving as it does the direct engagement of the public in a work whose simplicity belies its conceptual and architectural complexity, and an appropriate response to the particular situation of the Steps.

Work No.1059 sees Creed creating a visually spectacular, beautiful and thoughtful response to this historic artery. It is an exercise in adding and subtracting by degrees. To make it, Creed started from nothing, and added something. The process of addition, though immensely complicated, involving architects, planners, engineers, stone cutters, builders etc, results in an intervention whose deceptive simplicity seems almost to take the addition away (though extravagantly marble and chromatically beautiful, the steps are still only steps, after all).

Creed is a musician as much as an artist, and talks about his process more in terms of music than of art. He sees himself as the composer of his work, writing a score to which others – curators, technicians, viewers – bring their own interpretations. Music is an art form that makes itself as you listen to it, and this is important for Creed – there is often the sense that his work is making itself in front of you rather than letting you in on the tail end of a process mostly achieved in the studio.

Work No. 1059, though architecturally a complex piece of stone work and engineering that took two years to plan and achieve, is an artwork that is made and remade every time a viewer walks up or down it.

3. The Scallop - Maggi Hambling

<https://bitaboutbritain.com/the-scallop/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/feb/08/the-great-british-art-tour-aldeburgh-scallop>

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/-scallop->

<http://www.cassone-art.com/magazine/article/2011/06/sea-sand-and-orgasmic-waves/?psrc=interviews>



SLIDES 11-15: THE SCALLOP - MAGGI HAMBLING

The Scallop, installed in 2003, is a sculpture on Aldeburgh beach in Suffolk. It was created by local artist Maggi Hambling and is a 4 metre (13 ft) high monument to the late composer and Aldeburgh resident Benjamin Britten. He loved to stroll on the same wild, windswept beach. The sculpture consists of two halves of interlocking stainless steel scallop shells. One half stands upright, its sea-facing surface polished and catching the shimmering light. The other half of the shell lies prone, making a sort of platform. Cut into the rim of the upright shell are the words "I hear those voices that will not be drowned" from Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*. Britten identified with tragic stories of Aldeburgh fisherman.

The Scallop is, appropriately, a piece of audio art as well as a visual one. It has been suggested that the ear is like a shell, so *The Scallop* is an image of listening. A scallop shell often symbolises the feminine, fertility and love. It has been used as a symbol of the Goddess Venus, of pilgrims, pilgrimage and saints – particularly of the Camino de Santiago in Galicia and St James himself – and it often appears as a heraldic device.

The sculpture itself gives rise to images of wings in flight, fish and waves. When you stand close to the sculpture it accentuates the sound of the sea. It looks stunning at the end of the day when the sun catches and reflects on the surfaces and eventually leaves it in shadow on the horizon. Maggi Hambling described it as "a conversation with the sea." She sees *The Scallop* as more than just a sculpture. It was designed to also be a shelter and a seat. "An important part of my concept is that at the centre of the sculpture, where the sound of the waves and the winds are focused, a visitor may sit and contemplate the mysterious power of the sea." *The Scallop* was conceived, she says, "to be somewhere to go to be alone with the sea."

Hambling wants people to interact with it: "When somebody climbs up on it to sit down and watch the sea, or when a couple creeps in underneath it to make love, then it will be complete." It was a labour of love for Hambling. She grafted hard to pull enough money together for its construction (selling some of her paintings to help raise funds). It is a gift from the artist for everyone to enjoy.

However, the installation of the sculpture at Aldeburgh caused considerable controversy. Some felt that it would ruin the beach, or be unsafe. With regard to its opponents, *The Daily Telegraph* in 2004 reported Jacki McNeil of the *Aldeburgh Gazette* saying: "There has been so little support for this thing in the town. The depth of feeling cuts right across every section of this town, from the fishermen to people like knights and peers of the realm. It's seen as an act of sheer arrogance to place this in the middle of one of the only bits of untouched beach in the area, and a bit of coast which is very deeply loved by local people. I'm incensed by it. Who do they think they are?"

The Scallop has been vandalised several times, with people daubing expressions of distaste on it, such as "It's an old tin can" and "Move it." A local petition against it attracted several hundred signatures.

But there are also those who love it. Author Susan Hill is a frequent visitor to Aldeburgh and cannot imagine the beach without *The Scallop*. She describes it as a "glorious thing of power and beauty" that looks different from every angle in the changing light. What's more, Hill knew Britten, and feels sure that he would have approved of this tribute to him. She says in *The Spectator*: "It blends into

and is moulded with the sea, shingle, sky, the whole landscape, so perfectly that it is like a limb, and to tear it away would leave the body irreparably wounded and be an act of vandalism... From every angle it looks different, its surface changing with the changing light. A quotation from *Peter Grimes* is carved out of, not into, the steel. Through the words you see sea and sky. 'I hear those voices that will not be drowned.' Every time I read them, they mean something different, something more. I rarely go to it without finding others there too; people stroke it, tap it, photograph it, photograph one another beside it; children clamber over it and curl up inside it, dogs sniff it, and more. Last week, someone had left a small candle in a glass there."

Maggi Hambling thinks that *The Scallop* aroused so much controversy because whereas a painting contains its own space, a sculpture occupies your space and, when the space is public, some people will object. *The Scallop* celebrates the life of Benjamin Britten and this arouses opposition in some quarters of Aldeburgh, mainly because Britten was a conscientious objector during the war and a homosexual. Hambling says: "What is an icon for some is an eyesore for others".

Whether you love it or loathe it, *The Scallop*, for the foreseeable future at least, isn't going anywhere. It was made to withstand the elements and has so far managed to weather the storm surrounding it.

4. Another Place - Antony Gormley

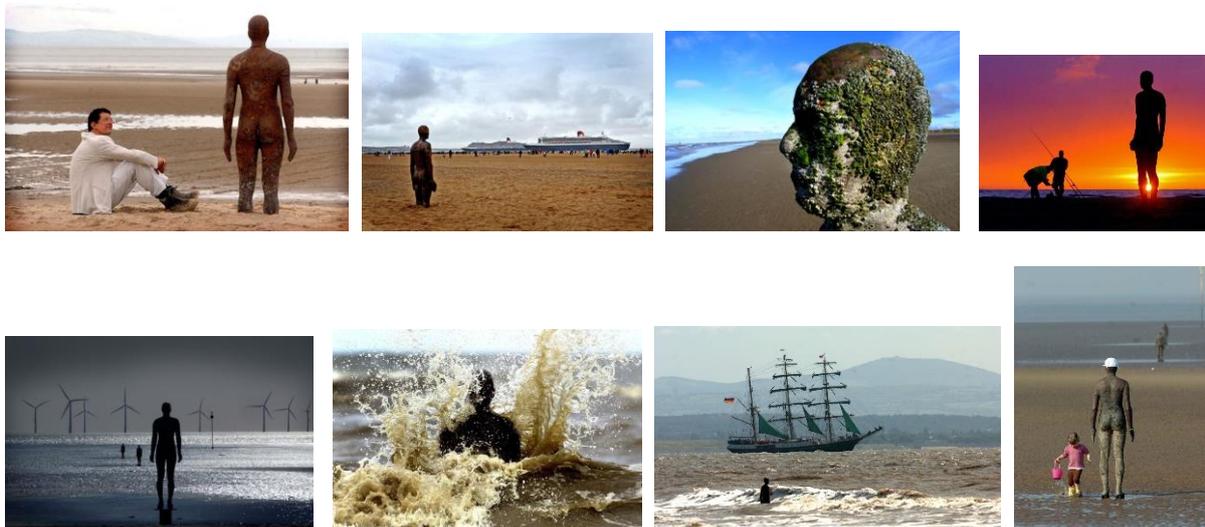
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Another_Place_\(sculpture\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Another_Place_(sculpture))

<https://www.visitliverpool.com/things-to-do/another-place-by-antony-gormley-p160981>

<https://www.antonygormley.com/sculpture/item-view/id/230>

<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/antony-gormley-talks-another-place-9533774>

<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/incoming/gallery/echo-archive-antony-gormley-statues-4713119>



SLIDES 16-23: ANOTHER PLACE - ANTONY GORMLEY

Another Place is a piece of modern sculpture by Sir Antony Gormley located at Crosby Beach in Merseyside. It consists of 100 cast iron figures facing towards the sea, staring at the horizon in silent expectation. The figures are modelled on Gormley's own naked body. The work proved controversial due to the naked statues but has increased tourism to the beach. It was put on display at Crosby in 2005.

Another Place spreads out along three kilometres of the foreshore and stretches almost one kilometre out to sea. Each figure is 6 ft 2 in tall and weighs around 650 kilograms (1,430 lb). As the tides ebb and flow, the figures are revealed and submerged by the sea, and are subject to corrosion by seawater and colonisation by marine animals.

Originally, the statues were due to be relocated in November 2007. Those who use the beach for watersports were among the most vocal in their resistance to the figures remaining, citing safety concerns. The coastguard also expressed safety concerns, fearing that tourists could become stuck in soft sand and get cut off by the tide. Conservationists, meanwhile, complained that bird-feeding areas had been compromised by the increased tourist traffic. Art lovers and local businesses, on the other hand, lobbied for the statues to stay. Gormley himself supported the proposal to keep the statues at Crosby Beach, saying the location was "ideal".

In October 2006, the local council refused to give permission for the statues to stay, prompting Gormley to criticise what he called Britain's "risk-averse culture." He stated, "When I have been down on the beach myself, the majority of people have been intrigued, amused, sometimes very moved."

In March 2007, following an appeal, permission was granted for *Another Place* to remain at Crosby Beach permanently. The approved plan provided for 16 statues to be moved from contentious areas and decreased the installation's area from 232 to 195 hectares.

According to Antony Gormley, *Another Place* harnesses the ebb and flow of the tide to explore man's relationship with nature. He explains: "The seaside is a good place to do this. Here time is tested by tide, architecture by the elements and the prevalence of sky seems to question the earth's substance. In this work human life is tested against planetary time. This sculpture exposes to light and time the nakedness of a particular and peculiar body. It is no hero, no ideal, just the industrially reproduced body of a middle-aged man trying to remain standing and trying to breathe, facing a horizon busy with ships moving materials and manufactured things around the planet.

Depending on the fall of the land, the state of the tide, the weather conditions and the time of day the work is more or less visible. The ones closest to the horizon stand on the sand, those nearer the shore being progressively buried. At high water, the sculptures that are completely visible when the tide is out stand up to their necks in water. The sculptures are all standing in a similar way, with the lungs more or less inflated and their postures carrying different degrees of tension or relaxation. The idea is to test time and tide, stillness and movement, and somehow engage with the daily life of the beach."

Gormley said in an interview with the *Liverpool Echo*: "Crosby was so good because of its history, the history of Liverpool docks and everything that came in and went out of them, and the whole relationship with America is very strong. Liverpool had a strong connection both with New York and America at large, and also the Caribbean in terms of the slave trade, but also the history indeed of bodies at sea, quite tragic history. I think it was also what a particular kind of beach it was. The fact they installed those vast offshore wind turbines off the coast of Wales that the work faces on to, and also the presence of Birkenhead with its features.

But I've also been amazed at how many people have expressed to me the consolation or the use that they put *Another Place* to, either to deal with personal loss or to just as a place that's there constantly in the changing conditions of the year, the sea, the sky, but also our moods, and that this work can become in a way a foil to or measure of our life course.

It's very encouraging and extremely moving when people find an artwork that allows them reflection and a place where big issues about what kind of future we dream of, what kind of pain we might have suffered, what kind of joy we might be experiencing, can in a way be associated with a bigger picture of life. Every time I'm there, just like any other visitor, you're encouraged to linger a bit longer seeing the tide come in and how many of them disappear. And then you're encouraged to linger further until they're revealed again."

Now look at the following poems:

Puddle and Mist from *The Stanza Stones* by Simon Armitage

<http://www.stanzastones.co.uk>

Simon Armitage was commissioned by the Ilkley Literature Festival in 2010 to write a set of site-specific poems, and the trail in the Pennines was created in 2012. Armitage wrote six poems on the theme of water in various forms: *Beck, Dew, Mist, Puddle, Rain* and *Snow*. Armitage has said that "those looking hard enough might stumble across a seventh Stanza Stone, a secret stone left in an unnamed location within the Watershed area, waiting to be discovered and read." The project was criticised by a group of rock climbers who likened it to graffiti in unspoiled places.

The Lancashire Witches by Carol Ann Duffy

<https://literarylancasterpoems2.weebly.com/the-lancaster-witches-carol-ann-duffy.html>



SLIDES 24-27: TERCET WAYMARKERS

In 2012, Carol Ann Duffy was commissioned to create a poem to mark the 400th anniversary of the 1612 Pendle witch trials. The poem, *The Lancashire Witches*, is made up of ten tercet verses, for the ten people hanged at Gallows Hill in Lancaster. Ten cast iron tercet waymarkers, designed by Stephen Raw, each inscribed with a verse of a poem and the name of one of those executed, are installed at sites along the way. Starting in Barrowford and finishing at Lancaster Castle, where the witches were tried, the walk follows the most likely route that the witches were taken, on their way to be sentenced and hanged.

EXERCISE THREE: Outdoor Art Poetry

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

- Write a poem about your thoughts and feelings as you experience the artwork. Consider the relationship between the outdoor environment and the artwork. How does it enhance (or otherwise) your appreciation / experience of / feelings about the artwork?
- Speculate about how and/or why the artist has created this artwork.
- Write from the point of view of the piece of artwork
- Write a poem from the point of view of the artist. Imagine what was happening while the artist was creating this work.
- Write a poem about your own or someone else's experience of outdoor art that has been triggered by any of the artworks we have looked at / the theme in general.

Your poem could be written in the style of a poem we've looked at, for example, using kennings (a kenning is a two-word phrase - usually hyphenated - used in the place of a one-word noun. Simon Armitage uses kennings at the beginning of his poem *Puddle*) / short poems with lots of imagery and word-music (Armitage's poems) / a series of tercets (three line verses) like Carol Ann Duffy's poem *The Lancashire Witches* / a poem leading us on a trail (Armitage and Duffy).

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

Transcripts of all the Segments and Poetry & Pictures workshops are on the LPF website here: <https://www.poetry-festival.co.uk/workshop-transcripts/>

Do check out Ledbury Poetry Festival's website <https://www.poetry-festival.co.uk> for news about the LPF Poetry Competition <https://www.poetry-festival.co.uk/poetry-competition-2021-announced/> and the current Ley Lines online submissions - details on how to contribute to this are here: <https://www.poetry-festival.co.uk/ley-hunt-ways-lines-and-tracks/>

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This workshop was only made possible thanks to public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England
Poetry and Pictures is a joint partnership with Herefordshire Mind.



Supported using public funding by
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