LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME
POETRY AND PICTURES POETRY WORKSHOP
OCTOBER 2020 : TROMPE L'OEIL ("deceive the eye")
© Sara-Jane Arbury

INTRODUCTION
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 a piece of art may inform your interpretation or feelings about it.

Look at the photograph of the shark. How do you feel when you view this picture? Now I'll tell you that it's a Greenland shark that is 393 years old this year. It was located in the Arctic and has been wandering the ocean since 1627. Look at the picture again. Have your feelings for the picture changed? How has your response changed?

EXERCISE ONE: Warm-up writing exercise – Alphabet Stories
Alphabet Stories are a fun way to exercise the brain!

Write a 26 word short story where each word follows the pattern of the alphabet.
Follow these steps and rules:

1. Write out the alphabet.
2. Compose a story that follows the alphabet using one word per letter.
3. You may use punctuation and character/place names but they must follow the alphabetical rule.
4. You may use a word that begins with EX when you reach the letter X.
5. The story must make some kind of sense, follow a thread or theme, have a sort of through-line. It is not a list of random words.
6. Give your story a title (this can be anything - it does not follow a special pattern).

Some examples:
A baby calf definitely enjoys fresh grass; however I just keep lambs myself, near open pasture.
Quick! Run! See their udders vibrate with X- rated youthful zeal.

Abigail buys chocolate daily. Every Friday George hops into jumpers. Kirsty likes making nutritional oatmeal pies. Quarrelsome Ruby sometimes tells Ursula vile words. Xavier yells, "Zits!"

After breakfast, Christine does exercises for getting healthy, including jogging, karate, leaping. Meanwhile Norman opens paper, quietly reading Sunday Times until vexed wife eXplodes, "You zombie!"

Now try writing another story from Z-A!

EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this writing exercise is Trompe l'oeil ("deceive the eye")
Useful websites:
https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/art-history-101-trompe-loeil

Trompe-l'œil (French for "deceive the eye") is an art technique that uses realistic imagery to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects exist in three dimensions. It is an art historical tradition in which the artist fools us into thinking we're looking at the real thing. Whether it's a painted fly that we're tempted to brush away, or an illusionistic piece of paper with curling edges that entices us to pick it up, trompe l'oeil makes us question the boundary between the painted world and ours.

Although the term gained currency only in the early 19th century, the illusionistic technique associated with trompe-l'œil dates much further back. It was (and is) often employed in murals. Instances from Greek and Roman times are known, for instance in Pompeii. A typical trompe-l'œil mural might depict a window, door, or hallway, intended to suggest a larger room.

An ancient 5th century Greek story concerns a contest between two renowned painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, to determine who was the greater artist. When Zeuxis unveiled his painting of grapes, they appeared so real that birds flew down to peck at them. His rival, Parrhasius, then asked Zeuxis to judge one of his paintings that was concealed behind a pair of tattered curtains in his study. Parrhasius asked Zeuxis to pull back the curtains, but when Zeuxis tried, he could not, as the curtains were included in Parrhasius's painting—making Parrhasius the winner. Zeuxis said, "I have deceived the birds, but Parrhasius has deceived Zeuxis."

A similar anecdote says that Zeuxis once drew a boy holding grapes, and when birds, once again, tried to peck them, he was extremely displeased, stating that he must have painted the boy with less skill, since the birds would have feared to approach otherwise.

A fascination with perspective drawing arose during the Renaissance. Many Italian painters began painting illusionistic ceiling paintings, generally in fresco, that employed perspective and techniques to create the impression of greater space for the viewer below. The elements above the viewer are rendered as if viewed from a true vanishing point perspective.

In architecture in particular, trompe l'oeil moved onto an ever-grander scale with decorated ceilings that conjured up the illusion of infinite space – the ultimate test of a master's skill. In some cases, buildings appear to continue upwards to great heights, while in others the heavens themselves seem to open up.

Other artists added small trompe l'œil features to their paintings, playfully exploring the boundary between image and reality. For example, a fly might appear to be sitting on the painting's frame, or a curtain might appear to partly conceal the painting, a piece of paper might appear to be attached to a board, or a person might appear to be climbing out of the painting altogether—all in reference to the contest of Zeuxis and Parrhasius.

Trompe l'oeil reached new heights in the 17th century, particularly among Dutch artists, who achieved new levels of realism. One of these, Evert Collier, specialised in trompe l'oeil paintings, or "deceptions" as they were known, and produced many for the English market. His illusionistic letter racks are so convincing, they provocatively tempt us to reach out for the well-thumbed papers tucked behind the leather straps – until we look closer and realise we've been fooled.

Trompe l'œil, in the form of "forced perspective", has long been used in stage-theatre set design, so as to create the illusion of a much deeper space than the existing stage.

Fictional trompe-l'œil appears in many Looney Tunes, such as the Road Runner cartoons, where, for example, Wile E. Coyote paints a tunnel on a rock wall, and the Road Runner then races through the fake tunnel. This is usually followed by the coyote foolishly trying to run through the tunnel after the road runner, only to smash into the hard rock-face.

Today's most frequent employer's of trompe l'oeil are perhaps street artists. Bringing the powers of illusionism to a broader audience, they often use trompe l'oeil to startle and stop passers-by in their tracks – whether it's the illusion of a crater cutting into a city pavement or, in the case of Banksy, painted figures interacting with the fabric of our urban environment.

Look at the attached images - from L to R clockwise on the single sheet of six pictures:

1. Roundstone Street, Trowbridge, Wiltshire by Roger Smith
Located in Roundstone Street in Trowbridge, UK, this trompe l'oeil is thought to be the biggest in the country. The realistic house design, created by artist Roger Smith and Wiltshire Steeplejacks, was installed on the blank wall in October 2003 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Trowbridge Civic Society.
https://www.gazetteandherald.co.uk/news/7301699.house-mural-attracts-lots-of-second-glances/

2. Escaping Criticism, 1874 by Pere Borrell del Caso
Pere Borrell del Caso (1835 –1910) was a Spanish painter, illustrator and engraver, known for his trompe l'oeil paintings.
There is an interesting article about this painting by writer, Amelia Smithe, from *The 8 Percent* magazine here:
https://the8percent.com/artwork-of-the-week-escaping-criticism/

3. Camera degli Sposi: Ceiling Oculus, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, Italy, c.1474 by Andrea Mantegna
Andrea Mantegna (c.1431 – 1506) was an Italian painter and a student of Roman archaeology.
Scroll down to read about this piece of art here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camera_degli_Sposi

Mantegna's playful ceiling presents an oculus that fictively opens into a blue sky, with cherubs playfully frolicking around a balustrade to seem as if they occupy real space on the roof above. Breaking with the figures from the scenes below, the courtiers who look down from over the balustrade seem directly aware of the viewer's presence. The precarious position of the plant pot above, as it rests uneasily on a stray beam, suggests that looking up at the figures could leave the viewer humiliated at the expense of the courtiers' enjoyment. Mantegna's exploration of how

paintings or decorations could respond to the presence of the viewer was a new idea in Renaissance Italy that would be explored by other artists.

4. Trompe-l'oeil with a Partial Portrait of Maria Theresa of Austria, 1762–63 by Jean-Étienne Liotard
Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702 – 1789) was a Swiss painter, art connoisseur and dealer.
One outstanding feature of Liotard's paintings is the prevalence of smiling subjects. Generally, portrait subjects of the time adopted a more serious tone.
Liotard enjoyed great renown as a portraitist. But in later life, he made a group of trompe l'oeil paintings with a more mischievous edge, showcasing his virtuoso skill at evoking different textures and creating convincing visual illusions. Made for his own delight rather than as commissions, these baffling works demonstrate Liotard's technical mastery and his eccentric tendencies.

17th-century Dutch art was much admired by Liotard, and may have inspired his own trompe l'oeil paintings; he produced around ten. In this work, Liotard deepens the visual puzzle by incorporating real wood. Half the panel is left unpainted, apart from a small painted sculptural medallion that makes it look like a cover revealing the portrait beneath. It's a clever and sophisticated conceit that calls to mind the famous curtain painted by Parrhasius centuries earlier.
More info about this painting can be found here:
https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/art-history-101-trompe-loeil

5. Le Radeau de Lampedusa by Pierre Delavie
Pierre Delavie created this hard-hitting piece (translated as "The Raft of Lampedusa"), in collaboration with the French Reception and Support Office for Migrants in 2017. This trompe l'oeil depicts a boat of refugees capsizing in the River Seine and aims to alert Parisians to the urgency of the situation of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. The original image was taken by the Italian Navy in 2016. Delavie explained that he was extremely touched by the events in the Mediterranean and that when he saw the image it upset him. He cut it out and kept it, then eventually recreated it on the wall of the River Seine.

6. Tunnelvision by Blue Sky
Blue Sky née Warren Edward Johnson, Postwar / Trompe-l'oeil American, b. 1938
This dramatic piece is 50 ft x 75 ft and shows a craggy portal leading to a fantasy moon. Created by local artist Blue Sky, who has more work in the area, it can be found in a parking lot in downtown Columbia. The artist does regular touch ups to make sure it stays as realistic as possible but despite tales to the contrary it has not been crashed into by any confused local drivers.

Images 5 and 6 can be found here, alongside other examples of trompe l'oeil art:
https://www.creativebloq.com/art/trompe-loeil-12121498

EXERCISE THREE: Trompe l'oeil Poetry
Look at the following poems:
1. *Trompe l'Oeil* – Mary Jo Salter
https://poetryarchive.org/poem/trompe-loeil/

Info about the poem here:
http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-trompe-loeil/#gsc.tab=0
Mary Jo Salter's poem "Trompe l'Oeil," which provided the title for her 2003 collection 'Open Shutters', describes an artistic style found in Genoa, Italy, and throughout Europe: that of painting realistic murals on the outside walls of houses and buildings, so real that people passing by are

fooled, at least briefly, into mistaking the painted images for the things they represent. Salter uses this particular style of painting to spark a meditation on the nature of reality and the arts in general, finding insincerity in both the fake shutters that stand beside a real window and the French word "oeil" itself, which can be considered deceptive or a lie because it presents a final "l" to the eye but not to the ear (it is not pronounced the way it is spelled if one assumes each letter stands for a specific sound).

Stylistically, the poem shows the deft control of rhyme, off-rhyme, and rhythm that readers have come to expect of her words. Salter's technical elegance is balanced with a light sense of humour that makes the most of ordinary ironies, such as the contrast between laundry piled up inside the house and imitation clothes hung to dry on a painted clothesline on the wall outside. The poem manages, in just a few lines, to treat readers to a new way of looking at the world and of looking at how artists depict the reality that others simply experience.

2. *Trompe L'oeil* – David Chorlton
Read the poem and his short commentary here:
https://thirdwednesdaymagazine.org/2020/07/19/trompe-loeil-david-chorlton/
David Chorlton, a frequent contributor to Third Wednesday magazine, said, "These are strange times, and sending messages-as-poems out from home seems a way of breaking out of social distancing. These poems have spent some time in isolation themselves, but they stood out on my revisiting unpublished work as having a silence or atmospheric note that echoes where we are in March of 2020."

Choose an image to work with.
• Write a sentence or two about why you chose this picture, how it makes you feel, what it makes you think about / stories / memories
• Next, write a description of details in the picture. Include words that indicate size, shape, colour, light/shade, objects, figures, positions etc.
• Finally, write a poem in response to your picture. If you need inspiration, look back at your answers above. Remember, there are many different ways to go about this. Here are some further approaches:

• Relate the work of art to something else it makes you think of.
• Write about the experience of looking at the art.
• What is being revealed and what concealed?
• Speculate about how or why the artist created this work.
• Imagine what was happening while the artist was creating this work.
• Speak to the artist of the painting, in your own voice.
• Write in the voice of the artist.

Your poem could be written in the style of one of the example poems (three-line verses / using rhymes and half-rhymes / one long continuous piece).
And of course you can write anything in your own style.