

## **If These Walls Could Speak: The Blanton Poetry Project**

When exploring a museum or gallery, we may stroll past dozens of paintings, sculptures, or installations, then suddenly feel one of these works of art luring us back. In a lazy mood, we may say to a companion, "That painting speaks to me," and our companion may even tolerate the cliché. But if we are attentive poets, such moments demand that we press beyond the easy response. We listen to what the work is saying and consider why it attracts—or disturbs and confuses us. We say something back in an ekphrastic poem.

Opening in the spring of 2006, the Blanton Museum of Art issued an ekphrastic invitation that was too rich to hoard. Brilliant works from the Mari and James A. Michener, Latin American, Suida-Manning, and other collections finally had the home they deserved, and they called not only to us, but to all home they deserved, and they called not only to us, but to all poets, particularly those with Texas connections. We decided to get the word out. With the enthusiastic support of museum staff, we initiated "If These Walls Could Speak: The Blanton Poetry Project" in the fall of 2007 by inviting more than one hundred Texas poets to visit the Blanton, write an ekphrastic poem on any item in the permanent collection, and send it to us. In the early months of 2008, dozens of fine poems arrived; some inspired poets sent four or five poems. That spring, the Blanton hosted a reading by twenty poets to launch the Poetry Project, and its galleries continue to display more than forty poems next to the works of art that inspired them. Other poets and poems are featured on the website: [http://blantonmuseum.org/interact/poetry\\_project.cfm](http://blantonmuseum.org/interact/poetry_project.cfm)

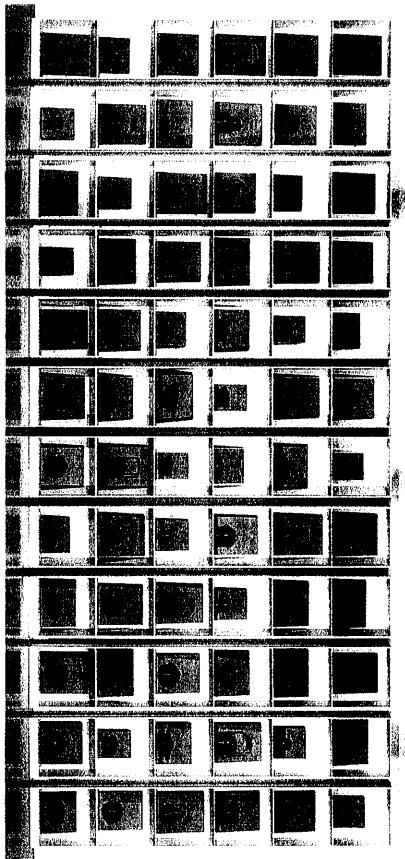
With this issue of *Borderlands*, we delight in publishing even more poems, many that have not yet been seen or heard. The following insert features sixteen poems, each paired with a color image of its corresponding work of art. Meanwhile, the Blanton walls still speak; stop by for conversation.

*D'Arcy Randall and Kurt Heinzelman*

## Insomnia Chiaroscuro

—After La Vigilia by Josefina Guilisastri

A jar, a pan, a pitcher, a teapot, a bowl, a pot, a tin, a jug, a saucepan, a boiler, a colander, a mug. I wake to exaction, stay up all night, imagine a brush rustling against aluminum like a live tail. In the wild kitchen where I hold her, the infant wails: her throat stops like a gutter and fills. Water collects in these things, dark water boiling, water like a hot salve beading in the air. I think: the object and its memory breathing in relief. I think: sleep turns the day to black vapor. The child cries; a chalky cup floats to nudge the edge of the pot with a tap. Water swoons on the stove, an inky bowl, a restless lake. The baby opens her mouth white with thrush. Does the screaming teapot wish to incandescence, will light wink in the pan through the night? A sick child aches to hush. A jug, a mug, a colander, a tin, a boiler, a pitcher, a pot, a bowl, a saucepan, a jar, a teapot, a pan. I stand among these in the dark and look. What must I write to put such ordinary things to rest? What must I write to fill them?



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## La Vigilia

2001