

The Art of Ekphrasis

nails

after a painting by an unknown artist from the Cunningham Dax Collection of Psychiatric Art

it's the kind of painting that leaves you with the sound of black crows fluttering frantically inside your head. consider this, a figure man/woman/child, blackrobed, handless, eyeless and barefooted, stands in the middle of a red desert, as rain slashes down in perfect italic drops. the stillness and the inertia are bad enough, but I keep coming back to the raindrops. the cruel angle of those raindrops...

it has been months now, and I have stopped asking 'what kind of story is this?' and I have started to see the so-called 'raindrops' for what they really are – not raindrops but nails rushing down from heaven, to hasten the crucifixion of the soul.

- Charles D'Anastasi

"I first saw this artwork in 'The Age' around 2000/2001. It stopped me straight away. I was mesmerized by its intensity in spite of its 'ordinariness'. The lone figure seems to exude a sense of pure alienation and resignation. Other qualities came to mind, namely stoicism and vulnerability. I wanted to capture something of the starkness of the image. That's why it seemed right to see the raindrops as nails. And also, the figure seems in some strange way to be representative of common humanity."

- Artist Statement

Further Information

Also spelled 'ecphrasis', 'ekphrasis' is a direct transcription of the Greek ek ('out of') and phrasis ('speech' or 'expression'). Put simply, it is today considered a dramatic description of art or other aesthetic objects, and is often practiced through the creation of prose or poetry. Argued by many to have originated with Homer's description of Achilles' shield in

Book 18 of the Iliad (usually dated to Eighth Century BC), it has become considered as a method of dramatically describing visual material; although, as with Achilles' shield, it is largely irrelevant whether the object physically exists, or not.

Through this technique, the writer seeks to bring to life a visual description of the work for the reader. This is often achieved by concocting emotional responses that might be derived from the work in question. The above poem *nails*, by Charles D'Anastasi, was inspired by a historic work of the Cunningham Dax Collection. A painting of a girl standing alone on a plain of red dirt and caught in a rain shower, D'Anastasi seeks to capture the girl's emotional isolation as he imagines it.

Charles D'Anastasi

nails, 2001

ekphrastic poem

The Dax Centre Poetry Collection

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