

Spring 2019

## Five Poems After Art

Jack Christian

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Christian, Jack (2019) "Five Poems After Art," *Yalobusha Review*. Vol. 29 , Article 11.  
Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr/vol29/iss1/11>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Yalobusha Review by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

# FIVE POEMS AFTER ART

Jack Christian

After "The Dam, Loing Canal at Saint Mammes," by Alfred Sisley 1884

Held out from River Seine,  
I stole into morning

hoping boredom might accrete  
into worship if I could be

uncalculated as any breeze.  
This aim muttered irreverently

until true, and no urge did guide  
the brush, making me mesmerized

by any thing, by boaters  
on their errand near the lock,

beneath clouds we dreamed ourselves,  
water mirroring less than obliged,

village grave pastel  
common to the cutbank

grown of glyphs, my life,  
my spirit, uncertain stipple

of unseen, homes swaybacked  
and rotting like who gives a shit.

Not me, fled from the parlor  
into the plain air, bleating

through midday until

the canal was sky, too.

**After “Spring at Bougival” by Alfred Sisley, 1873**

Maybe I’ve missed it again, been beleaguered  
by bugs, by weather, with no direction

to approach my lostness, so crawl  
and call it back. Box easel, field easel,

new whoop of the trivial. On the path,  
my father holds his arms wide, walking

with one leg surer than the other,  
inviting and cancelling oblivion

for which neither of us can account,  
much less stop and hug. In a tyranny

of flowers he’s telling me life is like  
a ribbon someone ties and then removes

the finger. That’s him, he’s saying. That’s me  
in turn, a bow wrapped to nothing.

For a moment we’re blameless in the blooming,  
content to let the trail meander,

our day darkened by petals beneath  
clouds that are also blooms, beneath a sky

we don’t know. The two of us, the flimsy trees.

**After “Nocturne in Black and Gold” by James Abbott McNeill Whistler, 1875**

If I'm longing I'm painting.

I'm 200 miniature suns

against the stinginess of evening.

Cinder plume in the neighborhood

that stank of salt. Great difficulty  
of happening into, and sure ecstasy

of joining. I tried to hold all these selves,  
our tide, great jab of palaver, smoke

figured in sand, another night  
arriving in blue. This one. That one.

The suckiness of leisure, making me  
complicit, and beside myself,

and afraid of getting older. Each step  
a shore, spark of the instance

I tried to paint into permanence, what dark  
exploding, what dark I couldn't see.

**After "Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville" by James Abbott McNeil Whistler  
1865**

Earth ends here,  
not with a scream

but with a tourist  
lost against an ocean,

making the beach  
a scene to see.

He's not real.

He's just this dude

stuck happily  
in a microwave:

Measured yelp  
and evocative poster-print,

see-through wish  
for pretty death

as if from a catalog.  
Or else no death,

sailor coat and woven hat  
sold separately,

the superstition  
death won't come

while we watch  
a pretend flaneur,

as if salvation  
were in accounting,

and in keeping-track  
an error-code into heaven.

Keep looking  
it's all terrible:

Translucent fucker  
locked down in the gloss.

For my next trick  
I will monetize

this hopelessness.

**After “Peaceable Kingdom of the Branch” by Edward Hicks, 1822-1825**

Come see the white kid  
doing miracles roadside

with his fat face  
while beneath his arm

the brown lion naps.  
See the white kid making magic

where the creek is white.  
The white kid honored first

with jungle animals  
and of-late with laser-lights.

The white kid scribbling plans  
for a precious gems, dinosaur bones,

old cars, dead soldier  
wax museum, all to commemorate

his being so white the lion  
doesn't shred him — His being so white

Dixie sycophants buy tickets,  
not so much for the miracle

of the bridge the creek made  
as for the Confederate-sympathizing

laser-lights. The creek babbling  
for all time. The creek thinking:

of course laser-lights

are what this roly poly

holy toddler has been on about.

The creek thinking, but then again

it's in the presence of this brat

I become a thinking creek.

While the lion naps.

The lion yanked from Africa

so the kid could halt

its first communion with the sheep.

JACK CHRISTIAN is the author of the poetry collections *Family System*, which was selected by Elizabeth Willis for the 2012 Colorado Prize, and *Domestic Yoga* (2016, Groundhog Poetry Press). His poetry has appeared recently in *The New York Times Magazine* and *jubilat*.