

# POETRY, FILM, AND DA VINCI: BOUNDARIES & BRIDGES AT LYRA

RED wigs floating in a swimming pool. A mountain of cherry pips. Lovers entangled under an illustrated paper blanket. These moving images and dozens more were shown in tandem with poetry at the “Breaking Boundaries: New Worlds” exhibition from Lyra Festival on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March.



The screening involved two sets of short films which demonstrated the gold standard for poetry

film today. Poetry film itself is an emergent art form that has been developing since the 1980s: short films of about pop-song length containing video, sound, and poetic text (sometimes spoken, sometimes on screen). The first collection of the afternoon was from Helen Dewbery, who has self-proclaimedly been in poetic film ‘forever’. She explained that she had begun organising the films when war broke out in Ukraine, and that these external influences had ‘changed the direction I was going in, because the films I had in mind didn’t really fit with the mood of what was going on.’ Instead, Dewbery focussed on the themes of ‘bridges and borders’, highlighting that ‘so many people cross borders in war but actually bridges are destroyed, and it’s that dissonance between the two that I was really looking for in the poetry films’.

The curated films achieved their aim; mellifluous, mood-setting pieces transitioned beautifully from one to the next and drew a link across our divided times. The richness and depth of the visual images, from hand-painted animation to a seaside nude, added new dimensions to the poetry. The selection had a definite international identity, with poems in several languages and films from around the world being shown. The Ukrainian film, *As Cherries* (2014), was particularly haunting: words in a Cyrillic script were shown in an A3 notebook as the crushing of red fruit on-screen took on an eerie symbolic resonance. Mutterings of ‘really beautiful’ and a quiet ‘wow’ were heard from an absorbed audience.

The second segment of the program contained the competition entries for the first Ekphrastic poetry-film competition *Frame to Frames: Your Eyes Follow*. Ekphrasis, or “making art from art”, was demonstrated with aplomb as paintings from the Pre-Raphaelite period to Gustav Klimt were drawn from and expanded on,

and Harvey Weinstein's exploitation of power. Tremlett said 'I did feel that it might be slightly odd for people in this context, and then again I thought "well those original artists weren't sacrosanct, they weren't saints, they were artists doing a painting." I don't see why you shouldn't talk about that.' It was a powerful message, and audience-member Lottie, 19, said that such a practice 'resurrected' the paintings: 'I've been to a few art galleries in my time and I've seen those paintings before, or work by the artists, and I think there's sometimes been a bit of a disconnect just looking at them, whereas this definitely brought them to life more and was more interesting and engaging'. The winning film, *La Scapigliata – the woman with the dishevelled hair*, was made by Australian filmmaker Jutta Pryor, who utilised her film's movement and lighting to provide a complete artistic whole in response to the famously unfinished painting.

The present sense of universality across both collections was not achieved owing only to the global reach of the films, but also because – with Sign Language interpretations, closed captioning, and the multi-media nature of the pieces – they were highly accessible. Lex, a student from the University of Reading, spoke about its importance: 'The video, I think, is a very accessible medium. I'm autistic and I struggle with video-sound-visuals, but having subtitles and sign language was really helpful and really inclusive'. This was a sentiment echoed by Dewbery, who said 'Most people that came here today are interested in poetry or film, but I think poetry film is really good for people that aren't interested in either of those, and it's reaching those people'.

Though it is often easy for people to dismiss art-film in general as at best experimental and at worst nonsensical, the Breaking Boundaries collections demonstrated how poetry and film can find a direct line to their audience, especially when combined. The synthesis of media can present strong messages – both poetic and political – at a time that we need to hear them most and, for that, the audience was grateful.

**If you'd like to explore poetry film further please visit:**

Poetry Film Live: <https://poetryfilmlive.com/>

Liberated Words: <https://liberatedwords.com>

**For more live poetry events go to [www.lyrafest.com](http://www.lyrafest.com)**