

Poet-Artists

For centuries, artists from Michelangelo to Picasso have written and published poems. Artists who are fluent in the visual and literary arts are able to select the creative medium that best expresses their ideas. In some cases, paintings and poetry are displayed together to more deeply communicate a theme, emotion, or thought.

Exploring Themes in Art and Poetry

William Blake, one of the most prolific artists and poets of the Romantic period, united the two sister arts—painting and poetry—most effectively in his “illuminated books.” Recalling medieval illuminated manuscripts, these richly illustrated books addressed large themes such as religious hypocrisy, poverty, inequality, and human existence. Blake’s books represented the marriage of painting and poetry through carefully etched poems and accompanying images. His best-known works are *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, two illustrated collections of lyric poems that were combined into one volume in 1794.



[Zoom in](#)

William Blake favored the medium of watercolor, as in *Satan Exulting over Eve*, because of its transparent qualities. [Learn more about this work of art.](#)

In both his visual and literary works, Blake explored contrasting states—innocence vs. experience, the rational mind vs. imagination, good vs. evil. In his drawing *Satan Exulting over Eve*, a heroic and glorified Satan prevails over Eve, who clutches the apple that resulted in her loss of innocence. The serpent who tempted her with the apple in the Garden of Eden is shown constricting Eve—reflecting literal and metaphorical dominance. Although Blake most frequently turned to the Christian Bible for inspiration, his poetry and works of art reflect his own personal visions.

View a reading of William Blake’s “The Proverbs of Hell” by Marilyn Manson:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xghpb_myA0E

Art and Poetry

Background Information

Poet-Artists

Love in Art and Poetry

Another example of an artist who was also known for his poetry is Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He was most recognized for his dreamlike, single-figure portraits of his lover and muse, Elizabeth Siddal. She was the subject of over 60 intimate drawings and could be credited with inspiring a prolific output of poetry. The content of poems such as “[A Last Confession](#)” and “[The Blessed Damozel](#)” have been linked to aspects of Rossetti’s relationship, including the deep sorrow he experienced when Siddal died in 1862. Intimately familiar with the extremes of love and loss, Rossetti represented the expanse of human desire in his work.



[Zoom in](#)

Portrait of Elizabeth Siddal Resting, Holding a Parasol is one of dozens of works that Dante Gabriel Rossetti created featuring his muse. [Learn more about this work of art.](#)

Fantasy in Art and Poetry



[Zoom in](#)

In *Saint George and the Dragon*, Lewis Carroll staged the legend of Saint George, the English patron saint, who slew a child-eating dragon to save a princess. [Learn more about this work of art.](#)

Rossetti’s contemporary, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (more commonly known by his pseudonym Lewis Carroll) also used visual art and poetry as vehicles for expression. His work as a writer, poet, and artist reflects his deep interest in fantasy and children’s stories. As a poet, he played with the English language by inventing words and creating puns. In his novels, he commonly included poems and songs. He made skilled pen-and-ink illustrations to complement his writing and also worked in the medium of photography.

An accomplished portraitist, Carroll made pictures of children in fantastical scenes. His interest in whimsy and humor drove him to expand the genre of “literary nonsense,” leading him to publish his most famous piece, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

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Visual Poetry

Like Lewis Carroll, Kansuke Yamamoto pursued both poetry and photography and created unexpected and surprising works. His poems emphasized discontinuity through **rhythm** and tension, and like Carroll, he often manipulated grammar to experiment in a language of his own. However, for Yamamoto, poetry did not necessarily depend on the written word; his photographs could be considered poems themselves.

Yamamoto made **plastic poetry**, as he and his colleagues called it. Through these dreamlike photographic collages, the Japanese **Surrealists** brought a poetic sensibility to the creation of visual art by juxtaposing or layering different images to evoke complex and symbolic meanings. Yamamoto and other Japanese Surrealists defied the restrictions of the written word and of creative categories, blurring the line between poetry and art.

