“...these fragments I have shored against my ruins...”

And turning toward the window, should say: “That is not it at all, That is not what I meant, at all.” (T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland and Other Writings*)

Hamartia is the best way to speak about writing about art, or “making” words about art: a mortal, yet unavoidable flaw, as its failure is intrinsic to its essence. When Catherine Parayre and I spoke about **Visual Appropriations and Rewritings**, failure was a river flowing through our conversation. As Slavoj Žižek, appropriating Samuel Beckett, urges: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No Matter. Fail again. Fail better.”

I appreciate (oh, let us be honest, I savour) the irony of being the arts writer / critic who declares this. But I’m not original here, whatever that means, in these post-modern / late modernist capitalism days (daze?). I solely echo Doris Lessing: “I don’t know why I still find it so hard to accept that words are faulty and by their very nature inaccurate.” In that same excellent novel, *The Golden Notebook*, she also succinctly defines literature as “analysis after the event.”

But I don’t say this just with glibness, but also grimness: “Every phase in evolution has been marked by the different kinds of ideas for which men tortured one another. Society today is composed of distinctly different human strata – heirs of the different ideas for which men tortured one another” (Mina Loy, from *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*). Words – ours, others – are dangerous.

Perhaps that’s why we know how “[s]peaking in my own voice is a tedious chore, one that the forces of law and order are all too eager to impose. They want to make me responsible, to chain me to myself... But forgetting myself, speaking in others’ stolen voices, speaking in tongues: all this is pleasure and liberation. Let a hundred simulacra bloom, let a thousand costumes and disguises contend” (Steven Shaviro, from his effusive and excessive *Doom Patrols: A Theoretical Fiction about Post Modernism*).

But I don’t decry the use of language, but perhaps just its undeserved primacy: language is naming, and naming is power, and who gets to name (Adam, but not Eve) is always a concerning fracture. There’s no neutrality in true writing. But it is better than the alternative, even if it offers innocent possibility: “The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point” (Gabriel Garcia Marquez, from his lyrical *One Hundred Years of Solitude*).

In responding to the writings of the contributors to this exhibition, I will pay them the best compliment of which I am capable, and that seems apt: I’ll conclude by adding their

words to the others I've appropriated (stolen?) here. It is not so much theft as coveting of their fine contributions to the unyielding hamartia that started this tangent.

"Let us not forget what is unwritten and sublime / Our timid, filtered visions are painted." (Anjelica French)

"Symmetry and chaos, oblivion in pools of colour: a void." (Tyler Adair)

"Innocence is subdued by strategically placed blotting / Censorship has been compromised with transparencies." (Dylan Perego)

"Markings seem obsessive and crazed; the paper is not damaged enough to reflect the full emotional appeal / We will shade specific words and layer the materials, blending them almost too well." (Kevin Murray)

"We have lost the narrative thread in the absurdity of something whole / We are confronted with the feral, the untamed / Our inert gaze is detached yet intrusive." (Asta McCann)

And all I offer here, in musing about writing rewriting appropriating reappropriating about art is "a wound in a fragmented story" (Bria Surtel). I should have been able to be so evocative, at this age (or even now – "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas," to return to Eliot's *The Wasteland*). Let us be jealous of these fine words and claim them for our own, and make them new (or the same, with our own addition to the mix). Let us fail more and better.

Bart Gazzola