



EKPHRASTACY

Artists Speak + Poets Respond

SEPTEMBER 24

*Emergent and Spotlight:
Olatunbosun Akinyelure*

Michelle R. Smith

Eddie Macak

Abigail Raley

Quinn McGuire

**WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO THE
Heights Writes Community Team:**

John Burroughs, Ray McNiece, Amy
Rosenbluth, Michelle R. Smith,
Catherine Wing

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ABOUT THE EXHIBITIONS

EMERGENT

Emergent celebrates the next generation of Northeast Ohio artists, bringing together a diverse group of creators in the early stages of their artistic journey. Representing a wide range of educational backgrounds, lived experiences, and independent practices, the exhibition reflects the vitality of a region where creativity continues to grow. Working across textiles, glass, printmaking, painting, sculpture, and mixed media, the artists showcase a range of distinctly personal approaches.

Summary

- Emergent features up and coming artists from the region.
- The exhibition features a wide range of mediums including textiles, painting, glass, and ceramics.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITIONS

Spotlight: **Olatunbosun Akinyelure**

Olatunbosun Akinyelure is a Nigerian visual artist based in the United States whose work explores African identity, cultural memory, and the richness of everyday life through contemporary painting. With more than thirty years of artistic practice, he employs a diverse range of media and techniques to create expressive works that celebrate heritage, leadership, movement, resilience, and community.

Summary

- Olatunbosun Akinyelure is an artist from Nigeria creating textured paintings using a palette knife.
- His work explores themes of heritage, culture and African identity.

[Explore the exhibitions](#)



Michelle R. Smith

Heights Poet Laureate

Michelle R. Smith is a writer, poet, educator, cultural facilitator, and native Clevelander. She is the 2025-2027 Heights Poet Laureate, Programming Director for Literary Cleveland, and author of the poetry collections *Ariel in Black* (2015) and *The Vagina Analogues* (2020). Her work has appeared in *The Normal School*, *The Gasconade Review*, *New Note Poetry*, *Merge Magazine*, and *io Literary Magazine*, among other publications. She is also the creator, co-producer, and director of *BLAX MUSEUM*, an annual February performance showcase for Northeast Ohio artists open to all forms and dedicated to honoring notable Black figures in American history and culture.

Summary

- Michelle R. Smith is the Heights Poet Laureate
- She is a writer, poet, educator, and cultural facilitator from Cleveland.



Eddie Macak

Featured Poet

Eddie Mace is a Christian spoken word artist from Cleveland, Ohio, whose work blends sharp lyricism with personal testimony. His style is raw, reflective, and rooted in faith—using poetry to share how God’s presence has shaped his life. Through each piece, Eddie seeks to teach, inspire, uplift, and remind others of the redemptive power of Christ.

Summary

- Eddie Macak is a Christian spoken word poet.
- His poetry is often about his faith and hopes to inspire and uplift others.



Abigail Raley Featured Poet

Abigail Raley is a writer from Bowling Green, Kentucky. Her work has been published in *The Offing*, *Hanging Loose Press*, *HAD*, *Identity Theory*, and elsewhere. Abigail is a 2024 Pushcart Prize nominee and a 2026 Ragdale artist resident. She holds an MFA from the University of Montana and is currently pursuing her PhD at Case Western Reserve University. Their debut poetry collection, *Wet Specimen*, was published with Sundress Publications in 2026.

Summary

- Abigail Raley is a writer from Bowling Green Kentucky who is currently pursuing her PhD at Case Western University.
- She published her first poetry collection *Wet Specimen* in 2026.



Quinn McGuire Featured Poet

Quinn McGuire, creatively known as Q in the Stu, is a spoken word artist and writer based in Cleveland, Ohio.

Originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Quinn's life in Ohio began when he attended Kent State for a Bachelor of Science degree in Architecture, graduating in 2021. Since then, Quinn has worked professionally as a project designer for DS Architecture in downtown Cleveland. Quinn began using writing as an exploratory tool for design early in his collegiate career. As a designer, Quinn believes that there is no such greater importance to a space than the people it serves.

Summary

- Quinn McGuire is a writer and spoken word artist based in Cleveland.
- He graduated from Kent State University in 2021 and is currently working as project designer for DS Architecture.

Thus, their stories, as well as the spaces', are just as valuable a benchmark for success as the metrics, specifications, and budgets typically used to describe these projects. Today, as a performer and teaching artist with The Sparrow's Fortune in Cleveland, Ohio, Quinn writes with an aim evoke a passionate human response to the world around us. He uses poetry and storytelling to observe, document, teach, challenge and inspire those audiences it might reach.

Summary

- Quinn is currently a performer and teaching artist at The Sparrow's Fortune
- His work aims to evoke a passionate response from those it reaches.



How to Follow Along

Each poem is written in response to an artwork in the gallery. The following is a list of the speaker order.

You will see:

Speaker Name

Poem title

The artwork that inspired it

A short visual description of the work.

PROGRAM

Rachel Bernstein

Opening Remarks

Arleigh Savage

Opening Remarks

Michelle R. Smith

Opening Remarks

Abigail Raley

"Black Toad"

After: *Black Toad* By Ryan Cermak



A wetland scene featuring a large black toad with a glowing orb in its throat. Under the water, a group of tadpoles in various stages of development swim towards the surface.

Abigail Raley

"The Last Rainbow Trout of the Seventh Seal"

After: *The Last Rainbow Trout and the Seventh Seal* by Ryan Cermak



A smiling figure in a red shirt and blue cap holds a large rainbow fish to his side. A banner unfurls from the fish's mouth reading "I can show you the truth".

PROGRAM

Quinn McGuire

"The Head of St. Strawberry"

After: *The Head of St. Strawberry* by
Ryan Cermak



A painting of a large strawberry on a silver platter in the center of the composition, held up by a green hand.

Scout Bach

Artist Remarks

Eddie Macak

"Lovers"

After: *Lovers* by Scout Bach



Expressive red and blue painting of two abstracted faces, layered with geometric and crosslike shapes.

Eddie Macak

"I'm Not Too Old To Play"

After: *I'm Not Too Old To Play*
by Scout Bach



Large mixed media piece on canvas with line drawings of a face, a hand holding a spray paint can, and a tandem bicycle along the bottom

PROGRAM

Abigail Raley

"Was it Something I Said?"

After: *Was it something I said?*

by Gabs Rataiczak



A colorful portrait on a black oval background showing a person holding their head with their hands.

Romy Anderson

Artist Remarks

Quinn McGuire

"Intro to Building Structures"

After: *Class* by Romy Anderson



A rectangular woven textile made of blocks of yellow, red, blue, green, and brown fibers.

Emma Gatzulis

Artist Remarks

PROGRAM

Michelle R. Smith

After: *December 2011* by Emma Gatzulis



A square print in shades of brown depicts four people standing together in front of a train car.

Michelle R. Smith

After: *Me and Mom, July 2003* by Emma Gatzulis



A light blue rectangular print depicts an adult holding a small child on a beach. The image is soft, with tonal shading.

Abigail Raley

"Happy Birthday"

After: *Happy Birthday* by Layla Davis-Branner



A sculpture of a birthday cake mid collapse, pink and white piped icing contrast with areas of dark green giving the appearance of decay.

PROGRAM

Eddie Macak

"The Bigger Picture"

After: *The Bigger Picture* by Layla Davis-Branner



A mixed media sculpture surrounds a black and white framed collage with thick layers of white wax-like material.

Quinn McGuire

"September 3rd"

After: *Untitled* by Layla Davis-Branner



Nine square sculptures of rounded bubble-like forms in pink, yellow, and orange

Jazzee Rozier

Artist Remarks

PROGRAM

Quinn McGuire

"Counting Blessings"

After: *god's in my breakfast right now*

by Jazzee Rozier



A colorful yellow and orange painting depicting a family eating breakfast together. A young child in pink sits at the table looking into a red bowl.

Abigail Raley

"They are Always Watching"

After: *They are always watching* by

Annie O'brien



A small semi-transparent glass figurine of a clown with a hat, exaggerated frown, and oversized shoes.

Olatunbosun Akinyelure

Artist Remarks

PROGRAM

Michelle R. Smith

After: *Lady with the Beads*
by Olatunbosun Akinyelure



A close up portrait of a person looking directly at the viewer against a dark background.

Michelle R. Smith

After: *Kekilomo* by Olatunbosun
Akinyelure



A close up black and white portrait of a person looking directly at the viewer. Their hair is styled in neat braids, pulled back from their face.

Michelle R. Smith

Closing Remarks

Rachel Bernstein

Closing Remarks

COMING UP!

Saturday, October 3 | 7:00pm

Gallery Concert: Kirsten Docter and The Pandan String Quartet

The Pandan String Quartet joins violist Kirsten Docter, Associate Professor of Viola at Oberlin and former member of the Cleveland-based Cavani String Quartet, for a program featuring Haydn "Sunrise" quartet, Dvorak "American" quintet, and Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate's Pisachi ("Reveal").

(Free, RSVP required)

Tuesday, October 13 | 6:00pm

Public Art Bike Ride and After Party

Join Heights Arts and the Heights Bicycle Coalition for a leisurely riding tour of our new murals along the Lee Road corridor! Then, meet us in the gallery for a mixer featuring light refreshments, a cash bar, the opportunity to meet the artists, and words by Cleveland Heights Mayor Jim Petras.

(Free, RSVP required)

COMING UP!

Saturday, October 16 | 5:00pm

*Last Look: Emergent and Spotlight:
Olatunbosun Akinyelure*

Join us for the closing reception of Heights Arts Fall exhibitions. Come to view the exhibited pieces, meet the artists, and be part of what promises to be a vibrant, well-attended celebration of contemporary art
(Free, RSVP Requested)

HEIGHTS ARTS
25TH ANNUAL *holiday store*

**NOVEMBER 6 -
DECEMBER 30**

**Opening Reception:
November 6, 5-8pm**



**OPEN
EVERY
DAY**

***Featuring 120+
Local Artists,
Poets, and
Musicians***

COMING UP!

HEIGHTSARTS OPEN CALL



**HEIGHTS '27-'29
POET LAUREATE**

Application Opens Oct. 1st!

[Learn More at heightsarts.org/literary](https://heightsarts.org/literary)

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED WITH HEIGHTS ARTS

VOLUNTEER FOR A HEIGHTS ARTS COMMUNITY TEAM

Heights Arts has a long history of inviting the community to share their passion and expertise to help the Organization develop and present its public programming. Three ongoing Volunteer Community Teams are charged with facilitating the strategies and action plans for Heights Arts core programming in the literary, musical, and visual arts disciplines. The purpose of Heights Arts' community teams is to expand community engagement in developing and presenting the programs of the organization and to tap the significant expertise that resides in our community. We invite poets, musicians, artists, and other members of the community to work with us to select and showcase the region's visual artists, poets, and musicians in our literary, musical, and exhibition programming.

To read more about our community teams and submit an application, visit us [HERE](#)

BECOME A HEIGHTS ARTS MEMBER

Now more than ever, we appreciate your consideration to give to Heights Arts by becoming a member. As a member of Heights Arts, you receive discounts, special invitations, members-only events, and perks from our community partners. Your membership is tax-deductible and you have the opportunity to say you are helping to support local artists, musicians, creative writers, and public art in the community. You'll have your finger on the pulse of all things Heights Arts.

Join us today! Membership information can be found on our website [HERE](#)

ROLLING CALL FOR POETS

If you are a poet in Northeast Ohio, we welcome your application to perform in future Heights Arts EKPHRASTACY Series. Cleveland-area writers are invited by the current Poet Laureate to view the installed artworks and respond with a poem.

[Click here to get started with your application](#)

Join our mailing list for the latest updates about Ekphrastacy and other programs on the guest list at our door or at the bottom of our home page.

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