

## Reading & Writing Workshop

The following passage from Patricia Hampl's memoir *Blue Arabesque* describes the profound impact a painting had on the narrator. As you read the passage, consider situations from your own life when you were mesmerized or influenced by an artistic work (e.g., popular music, art, photography, movies, theater).

I was hurrying to meet a friend at the Chicago Art Institute, a place I didn't know. We had agreed on the museum cafeteria, and I was directed by a guard through a series of connected galleries to a staircase. I was late—of course. Rushing—of course—paying no attention to the paintings on the walls as I hurried to get where I was supposed to have been five minutes earlier.

Then, unexpectedly, several galleries shy of my destination, I came to a halt before a large, rather muddy painting in a heavy gold-colored frame. But that's wrong: I didn't halt, didn't stop. I was stopped. Apprehended, even. That's how it felt. I stood before the painting a long minute. I couldn't move away. I couldn't have said why. I was simply fastened there.

I wasn't in the habit of being moved by art. I wasn't much of a museum goer, and I thought of myself as a person almost uniquely ungifted in the visual arts. I couldn't draw, couldn't see how to lure images from eye to hand to paper.

Maybe only someone so innocent of art history could be riveted by a picture as I was that day. Being spoken to by a picture? I couldn't deny it. One way or another, ever since that uncanny day in the museum, when I was searching not for art but for the cafeteria, I've been staring inwardly at that painting of the thoughtful woman who stares, in turn, at a goldfish bowl. I couldn't explain what the picture expressed, what I intuited from it. But that it spoke, I have no doubt.

Adapted from Patricia Hampl, *Blue Arabesque*. © 2006 by Patricia Hampl.

Write a response about a time you experienced emotions similar to the captivation that the narrator describes feeling in the passage. In your response, use your own words to describe your experience, how you responded to it, and how your life is different now. You may include references to the passage or other texts you have read.