

# Writing In the Museum

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One of WITS writer Maryann Gremillion's most effective writing prompts takes place in front of the largest piece of art in the Menil Collection – Cy Twombly's *Untitled (Say Goodbye Catullus to the Shores of Asia Minor)*. An entire room in the Twombly Building is filled by this monumental canvas, which measures more than 13 feet high and 53 feet long.

First, Gremillion walks with her students through the other six rooms in the Twombly gallery and asks students to respond to the lines and colors -- what they notice and how they feel. They also talk about Twombly and how he worked. Once they are seated on the floor in the large room with the Catullus painting, Gremillion explains that Catullus was a Roman poet who wrote about love and loss.

She asks the students to sit quietly in front of the painting, paying attention to the splashes of color on the right and the absence of color on the left, the words that are written on the piece, and the various marks on the canvas. They talk as a group about their responses to the work. Then Gremillion tells the students that for her, the painting is a visual poem of strong passion, love and loss.

She then asks the students to choose from one of the following prompts:

- *Shining white air trembling* — The students are asked to write these words from the painting

at the top of their page and continue to write freely. They are asked, “What does the phrase lead you toward? Respond with a story, an image, a memory or a line.”

- *Away* – Students are asked to use this word any way they want. They are asked to think about their first thought or memory when they hear the word *away* and create a poem, a story, a list, a letter, a memory, or a character.

Students write for ten minutes or so about either of the prompts and then share their work aloud, if they choose. “They connect with the colors, the whiteness, and even the scribbles on the piece,” said Gremillion. “The resulting writing is always amazing.”

## After Cy Twombly

DIEGO A.

I see it, a white thing  
and suddenly I am blind.  
Next is love and an economy  
drop. Then yes, she  
left me. Where I came  
from. Off to deeper shores  
of loneliness. Silver gray  
glows onto the clouds  
unto the end.