

castle writers goes digital

NORWICH CASTLE MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY



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Welcome to Castle Writers - online! Our monthly creative writing workshop, inspired by items in the museum's collection, has gone digital. The following pages have been designed in partnership with author and tutor Amanda Addison, and are for you to use at home. There are several writing prompts for you to choose from - you can do as many as you like.

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Happy writing!



June 2020

A Portrait in Words

This month we'll focus on **characterisation** within prose and poetry, using portraits from the Castle's collection as inspiration. Authentic characterisation is vital when writing creatively. A believable fictional character whom we can connect with is often what propels us to read on, as we enter their inner world.

Aliza Nisenbaum, *Susan, Aarti, Keerthana and Princess, Sunday in Brooklyn* (2018), painting
(C) The Artist



Writers who've taken inspiration from art include Tracy Chevalier, whose novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring* was based on Vermeer's painting of a servant girl, and Grace Nichols, who drew on Picasso's *The Weeping Woman* for her poem *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*. This month, we have selected three portraits from which to develop a fictionalised portrait in words.

Writing Exercises

Interrogating a Portrait

- 1 Select one (or more) of the portraits as a starting point. Take time to sit and stare at your chosen portrait. Create a word bank and find as many words as possible for each of the following:

FACE	HAIR	CLOTHING	BODY LANGUAGE	SETTING
e.g. looks at viewer	unruly	casual, ripped jeans	upright	homely

Then write a few paragraphs using your word bank to describe the person in the portrait. Try to include a comparison or two – eg: her hair falls around her shoulders like a lion's mane OR his hair is an exclamation mark

Backstory

- 2 Backstory is the imagined past of a character's life. It's useful to know your character's backstory even if the details won't appear in your writing. Much of what we enjoy about novels is entering someone's inner world.

To help develop a backstory, answer the following questions about your character, as quickly as you can. Set a timer for five minutes - it will help force your mind into action!

What did they have for breakfast?
Favourite childhood toy?
Favourite relative?
Worst fear?

Darkest secret?
First love?
Favourite outfit?
Favourite book?

Try and
answer these
questions in
only five
minutes!

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- 3** Combine the sentences and answers to the questions to create a short prose piece or poem based on your chosen portrait. Here's an example:

***The English Way*, by Amanda Addison for the EACWP Flash Fiction Contest, 2019**

Out of habit, rather than cold, she wraps a beige Marks & Spencer's cardigan over her colourful shirt. Back in the early 60s, the city's cold and rain – and the loneliness – had almost driven her crazy. This gated house in Wilmslow, with footballers' wives for neighbours, is climatically controlled and never drops below 25 degrees – a spring day in Lahore.

Maryam lays out a platter of deep-fried savoury snacks on a silver tray for her grandson. She stops herself from spooning sugar into the tea. He drinks it the English way: no sugar and a dash of milk.

About the Artists

Aliza Nisenbaum

Aliza Nisenbaum is a Mexico-born contemporary artist whose colourful, intimate works are concerned with social justice and with the visibility of different groups in society. She also teaches art at Columbia University in New York.



Gwen John



Welsh artist Gwen John lived and worked mainly in France, where she studied under Whistler and modelled for Rodin, before converting to Catholicism and becoming more reclusive. Overshadowed in her lifetime by her famous brother Augustus, her quiet, unassuming intimist style has gained in influence since her death.

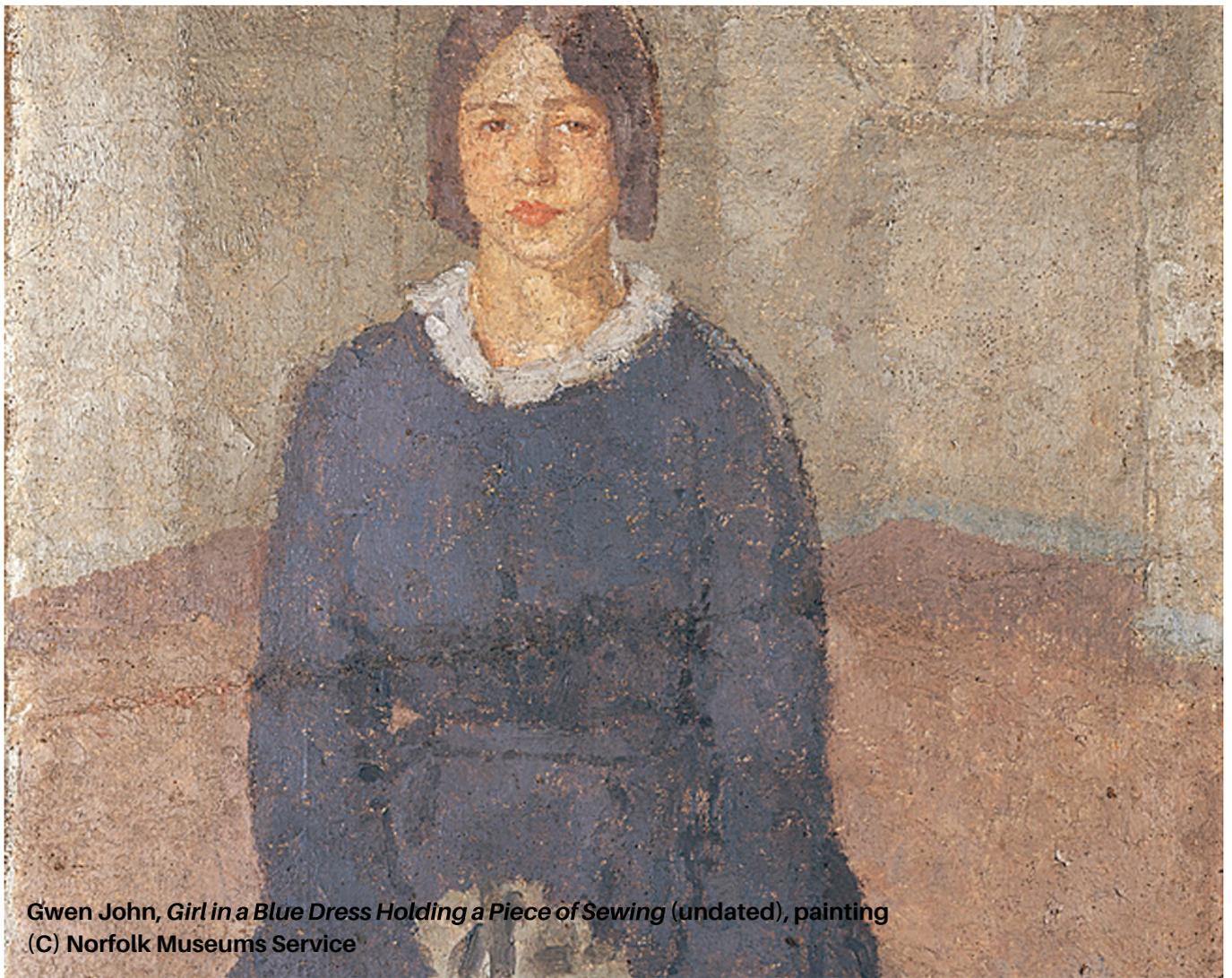
Frances Kearney

Norfolk-born photographer Frances Kearney has been widely exhibited in the UK, including at Norwich Castle. Her works are carefully planned and staged, giving them an unusual quality between the formality of a portrait and the casual air of a photo snap.

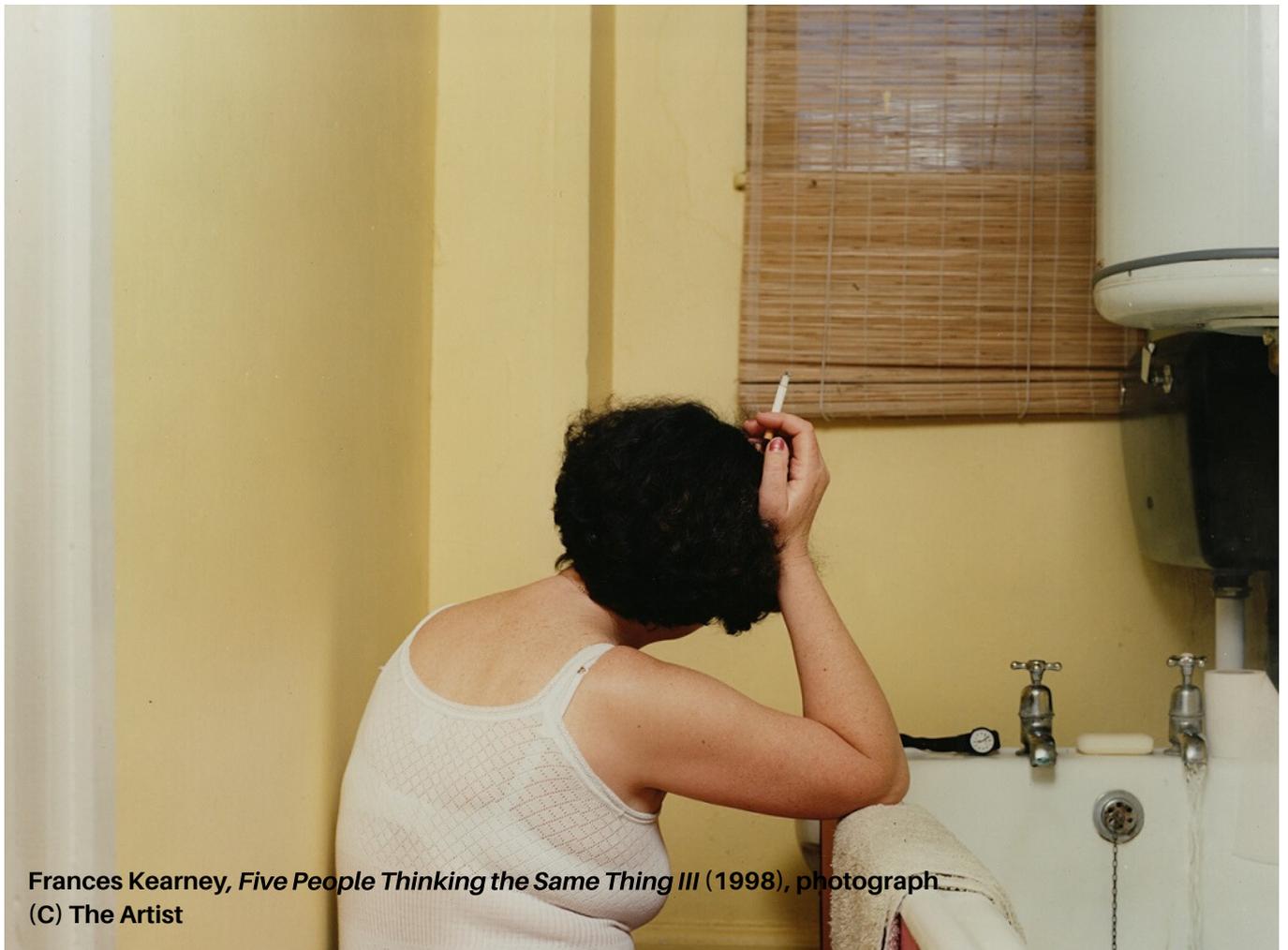


Want to share your work? Join the conversation online using the hashtag #NorwichCastleWriters

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Gwen John, *Girl in a Blue Dress Holding a Piece of Sewing* (undated), painting
(C) Norfolk Museums Service



Frances Kearney, *Five People Thinking the Same Thing III* (1998), photograph
(C) The Artist

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Enjoyed this Resource?

Perhaps you're new to creative writing, you regularly attend our Castle Writers workshops with Amanda, or are looking to develop your writing skills in lockdown - we'd love to hear from you if you've used this resource!

Developing new, digital ways of engaging with our community is really important to us at Norwich Castle - we're learning everyday about how we can best support our audiences and your thoughts are really important to us.

If you have suggestions for improvements for this resource, or simply some feedback on your experience of using it, please let us know. You can chat to us on Twitter [@NorwichCastle](https://twitter.com/NorwichCastle), or email norwichcastle.bookings@norfolk.gov.uk.



Norfolk Museums Service is a partnership between Norfolk County Council and Norfolk's District Councils, funded through council tax, earned income and grants.

