

## **Panel 22**

### **Ekphrasis and the Pictorial in 20th-21st Century Fiction**

#### **Ekphrasis and the Intimacy of Adversaries**

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There is a striking moment in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) when Gudrun imagines herself as "a whole roomful of women" while watching others subtly yield to the presence of her lover, Gerald—a scene that suggests less the simultaneity of individuality and collective will than Gudrun's act of generosity: a willingness to let nameless others enter into relation with Gerald in her place. Taking such moments seriously as formal interventions into the nature of selfhood and shared desire, this paper explores how the ekphrasis of bodily continuity—when a figure touches those next to them, or seems to emerge from or blur into others, such that distinct psychological presences merge into a single entity—performs a comparable narrative function. In these instances, characters are portrayed not as autonomous selves but as extensions, negations, or repetitions of one another. I point to other examples in the work of Lawrence and British-Libyan novelist Hisham Matar, focusing on how this visual logic of merging often signals the intimacy of adversaries, which, according to Matar, equals the intensity of lovers. While Matar reads scenes of physical entanglement of enemies—like David and Goliath—as symptomatic of our hunger to achieve "complete conquest" over the mystery of another's consciousness, I turn to how such ekphrastic descriptions compel the beholder-writer to perceive a field of figures not as discrete individuals but, in Michael Fried's terms, as a single intense facing object of vision, which heightens the self-consciousness of looking at a painting and being looked at. Oscillating between immersion and detachment, the collapse of visual and psychological distinction moves readers, or viewers, to reckon with the unsettling proximity of self and other, lover and rival, victim and aggressor, father and son.

#### **Biography**

Heeyeon Kim is a DPhil student in English at the University of Oxford. She recently submitted her thesis on the notion of sincerity within Cold War liberal thought. Her work has appeared in *Arizona Quarterly* and is forthcoming in *The New Centennial Review*.