

# Finding titles for your artwork

## How important is a name?

### WHY ARE TITLES IMPORTANT?

- Naming things (and creations) gives them an identity and a place in the world. *You name your children, your pets, sometimes even your plants or cars.... So take some time and name your artwork!*
- Once a piece is named, it becomes an entity and takes on a life of its own, existing in relationship to others.
- Titles give the viewer a way in – especially if the work is abstract. It gives a nudge in a certain direction without limiting their interpretation too narrowly. Your title should open up possibilities.
- Titles can be a conversation starter, helping viewers engage with your work, and also gives galleries a structure to help talk about your work with a customer.
- Obscure or surreal titles can be fun and encourage people to ask questions, BUT they can also be off-putting, causing viewers to feel lost or out of their depth.
- What is your personal style? More formal? Playful? Don't force "cute" or "catchy." Don't rely too much on slang or contemporary catch-phrases that will be forgotten soon enough. Unless your work is consciously provocative, think carefully before choosing confrontational titles.
- Many people feel that naming a work "Untitled" implies that the artist didn't care very much about their work, or is basically saying "No comment" when asked a question. It seems stand-offish and disengaged.
- That said, This is your creation. And your title. This is what feels right for you.

### WHAT IS YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS?

- Do you start with a title, and create a work in response to that?
- Do you start a work with no clear idea of what the work will become, much less what the title will be, and let the title emerge along with the work?
- Do you finish a work and still have absolutely no idea of a title?
- Do you resort to a simple description, or if you're feeling really desperate, do you blurt out something, **anything**, just to fill the gap and avoid the dreaded "Untitled?"

- Until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, most art work titles were simple descriptions of the subject:  
“Portrait of xxx”, “Still Life with Peonies”, “Altarpiece xxx”, “Landscape with Trees”

>>examples on slide 3<<

**Andy Warhol, David Hockney**

- Contemporary artists are increasingly using titles which are evocative or suggestive, and which invite the viewer to have an insight into the artist’s thoughts and process.

>>examples on slide 4<<

**Jean Michele Basquiat, Marlene Dumas, Magdalena Gluszak-Holeksa , Calo Carratala, Pierre Yermia, Richard Petty, Romain Langlois**

~ ~ ~

***Notice the mix of simple descriptive titles and the more poetic titles in these examples. Always ask yourself what fits your piece. Sometimes a simple description is the perfect choice.***

***Titling your work is a creative act – separate from, but in conversation with – the artwork itself.***

***The title isn’t just describing what’s there, it’s offering a doorway, a whisper, an invitation to see it in a certain way.***

***It is a tiny story that goes hand-in-hand with the artwork.***

## David Hockney (1937 -



Portrait of an Artist (...  
1972



The Splash  
1966



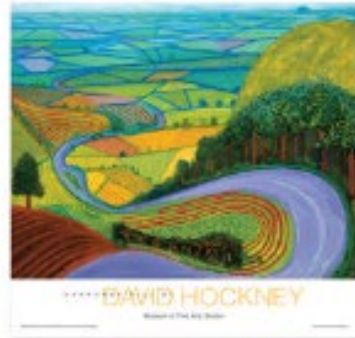
A Bigger Splash  
1967



Mr and Mrs Clark an...  
1971



The Arrival of Spring ...



Garrowby Hill



American Collectors ...  
1968



My Parents



Red Pots in the Garden,



The Big Hawthorne, 2008

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Hockney](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hockney)



# Andy Warhol

(1928-1987)



Campbell's Soup Cans  
1962



Marilyn Diptych  
1962



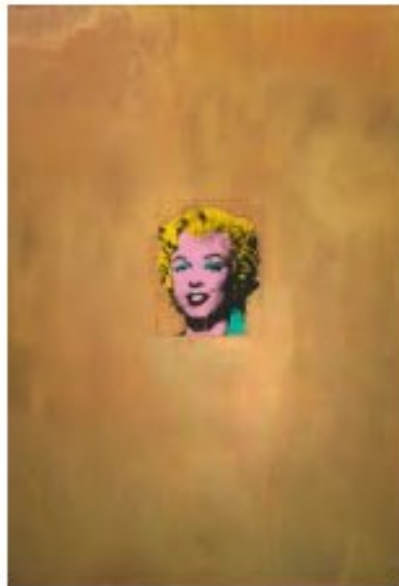
Shot Marylins  
1964



Campbell's Soup I  
1968



Brillo Box  
1964



Gold Marilyn Monroe  
1962



Camouflage Self-Portrait  
1986



Coca-Cola  
1962

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy\\_Warhol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy_Warhol)

## Jean-Michel Basquiat (1962-88)



Untitled  
1982



Riding with Death  
1988



Warrior  
1982



Hollywood Africans  
1983



El Gran Espectaculo...  
1983



Untitled (Boxer)  
1982



God, Law  
1981



In Italian  
1983

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Michel\\_Basquiat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Michel_Basquiat)



## Marlene Dumas (1990-



**The Painter**

Marlene Dumas • 1994



**The Wall**

Marlene Dumas • 2009



**The Kiss**

Marlene Dumas • 2003



**The Fog of War**

Marlene Dumas • 2006



**Evil is Banal**

Marlene Dumas • 1984

<https://www.marlenedumas.nl/>

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/marlene-dumas>

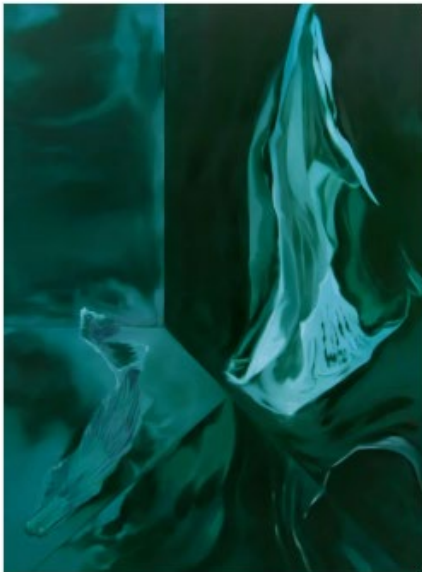
Magdalena Gluszk-Holeksa (1990-



Thin places



Certain exchange  
Paintings - 15.7x11.8 in



I'll spread the weight evenly



The imitator

Calo Carratala (1959 -



*Everything is moving towards its end V, 2021*

<https://artistics.com/artist/>

- \*THIN PLACES
- \*CERTAIN EXCHANGE
- \*THE NOMAD'S ROOM
- \*THAT LITTLE TENT OF BLUE, WHICH PRISONERS CALL THE SKY
- \*IN THE MIDST OF WINTER FLOWERS PREPARE TO BLOOM
- \*MAGNOLIA IN THE ATTIC

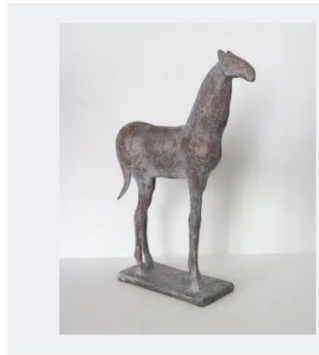
<https://magdalenagluszak.com/paintings>



Horse XV  
71 x 60 x 17 cm



Small Horse V  
52 x 41 x 13 cm



Small Horse IV  
32 x 28 x 8 cm

## Pierre Yermia

Horse XV, Small Horse V, Small Horse IV

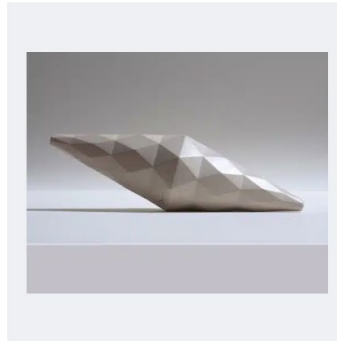
<https://artistics.com/artist/pierre-yermia/>



Mooncrag  
70 x 72 x 70 cm  
ROCKS



Crab  
26 x 34 x 26 cm



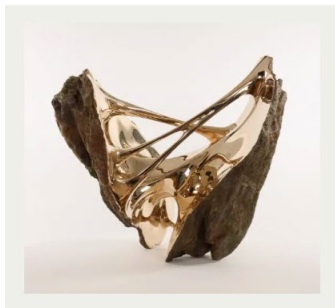
Star 1  
17 x 17 x 60 cm



## Richard Perry

Mooncrag Crab, Star 1

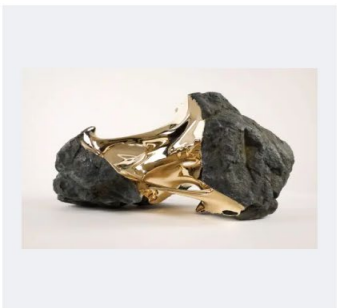
<https://artistics.com/artist/richard-perry/>



Chronos  
64 x 66 x 50 cm



Alchemy  
34 x 44 x 27 cm



Kairos  
28 x 53 x 28 cm



## Romain Langlois

Chronos, Alchemy, Kairos

<https://plainmagazine.com/nature-inspired-sculptures-romain-langlois/>

<https://artistics.com/artwork-category/contemporary-sculpture/>



Your title doesn't have to explain everything. It can be oblique. It can add mystery. It can even seemingly contradict the image—that creates interest!

**Think of it as the first line of a story that you're inviting viewers to complete.**

The best titles often **make viewers pause and look again, creating a slight cognitive shift.**

"Oh, I see—that's not just a chair, it's about *waiting*"

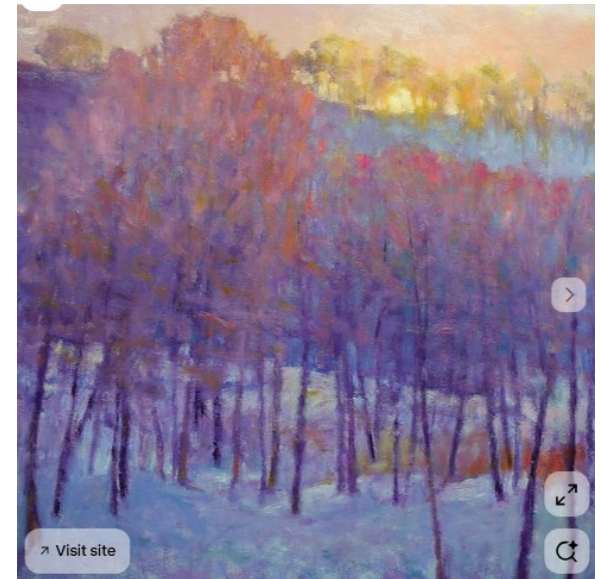
"This landscape is not about a place, it's about *a memory*."



Literal: "Trees"

Slightly Better: "Blue Trees"

Evocative: "Waiting at Twilight"



Literal: "Woman Reading"

Better: "The Reader"

Evocative: "Between Worlds"



Literal: "Flowers in Vase"  
 Better: "Spring Arrangement"  
 Evocative: "What Remains of April"



Literal: "Cup of Coffee"  
 Better: "Morning Ritual"  
 Evocative: "On the Road Again"



Literal: "Spring Flowers"  
 Better: "Early Promise"  
 Evocative: "Grandmother's Quilt"

# CREATIVE APPROACH TO CREATING TITLES

## \*\* LOOK FOR CLUES IN THE ARTWORK \*\*

Words have many associations, besides the literal meaning.

Use color, value and mood cues in the artwork to nudge you toward a title...

**Color:** Instead of **red**, try **crimson or claret** or **vermillion** / **blue**, try **indigo, peacock** / **green**, try **avocado, olive**

**Value:** **Light:** radiant, illuminated, luminous, glowing **Dark:** Somber, muted, inky, leaden, shadow

**Mood:** **Melancholic:** Elegy, linger, whisper, fade, abandoned, solitary / **Energetic:** Blaze, collision, riot, pulse /

**Mysterious:** Enigmatic, hidden, cryptic, secret, mysterious / **Temporal:** Before, Almost, Again, Once

**What other choices for color, value and mood can you think of?**

**EVOCATIVE WORD PAIRINGS:** Temporal (time) + Emotional (mood):

A landscape with dramatic clouds: "Before the Quiet"

Abstract with warm/cool contrast: "When February Forgets"

Action (movement) + Abstraction

Still life with wilting flowers: "Keeping Vigil"

Portrait with downcast eyes: "The Leaving Hour"

Contradition/Tension

Chaotic urban scene: "Studied Chaos"

Serene water: "Restless Calm"

Sensory Crossover

Monochromatic piece: "(Blue) Arithmetic"

Textured abstract: "Where Silence Gathers"

Borrowed Poetry

Figurative work: "The In-Between" or "What Remains Unspoken"

Nature scene: "The Long Now" or "Evidence of Spring"



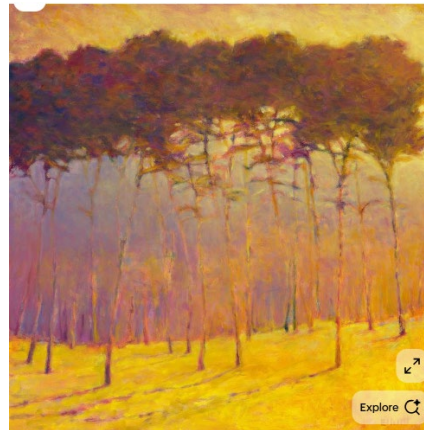
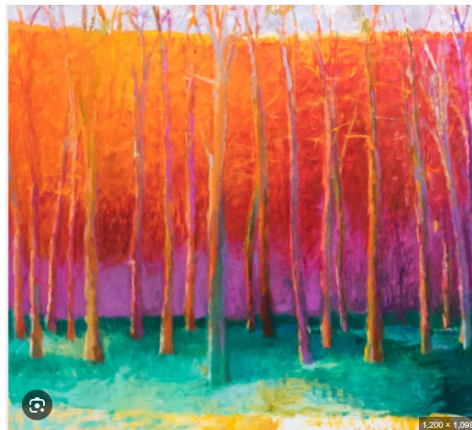
## TITLE THESE WORKS

- How does color affect the mood of the painting?
- Is there a hint of a time of day? Is that important? What about the props (furniture, clothing?)
- How does the pose of the reader affect your impression the painting?
- Does her stillness imply waiting, or resignation, or contentment? Or...?
- What underlying emotions do the values and color palette bring up for you?



## TITLE THESE WORKS

- How does color affect the mood of these painting?
- Is there a hint of a time of day or of season?
- Movement signals certain emotional responses .... What is the energy in the scene and what are some words to describe that? (Tranquil, wind-swept, storm-tossed...?)
- What underlying emotions do the values and color palette bring up for you?



## START A WORD HOARD BOOK

A “word-hord” in Old English was a traveling poet’s internal collection of words and phrases to be called on in performances. “Hord” means ‘treasure.’

Collect a resource of possible titles to use later for inspiration. While keeping the search for potential titles in mind, set aside a little time to read poetry, and peruse old dictionaries, newspapers, etc.

- Poetry
  - Catalogs (for clothing, etc)
  - Magazines
  - Crossword puzzles
  - Dictionaries, thesaurus,
  - Race horse betting forms
  - Song lyrics
  - Overheard conversations
  - What other sources can you think of?
- 
- Write words and phrases down even if they aren’t “quite right”. The Word Harvest is about having a resource for inspiration later (for when that entry deadline is looming) . Sometimes – just like when you are creating your piece – you’ll get an inspiration that is related to that word or phrase.



**ACTIVITIES:** **Pass out :** sources for ideas: crosswords, poetry, song lyrics, catalogs

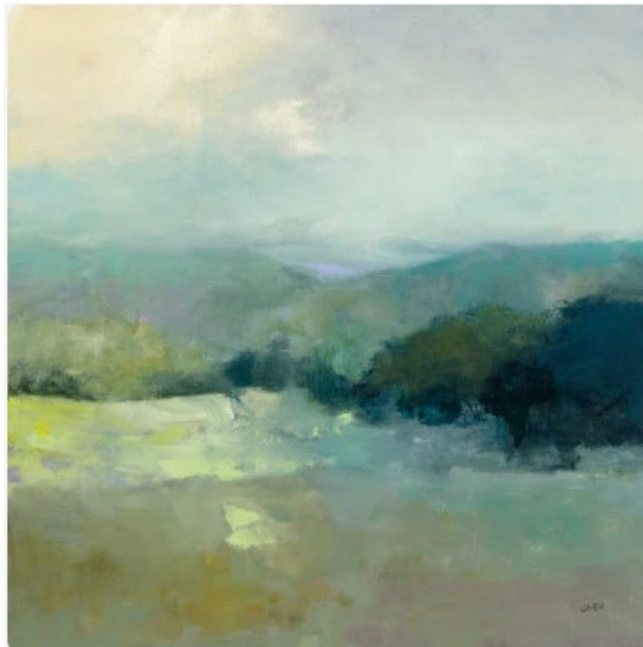
>> **COLLECT WORDS for your WordHord. (Word Harvesting).**

Start flipping through some of these resources. Don't think too much about it – just write down words and or phrases that are evocative for you. Do not try to match these words and phrases to any work you have now, or to your usual style and subject matter. **WRITE THESE IN YOUR BOOK/ON YOUR PAPER**

>> NOW ..... **COME UP WITH TITLES FOR THESE SAMPLE IMAGES** *(the actual titles are on the final credits page)*



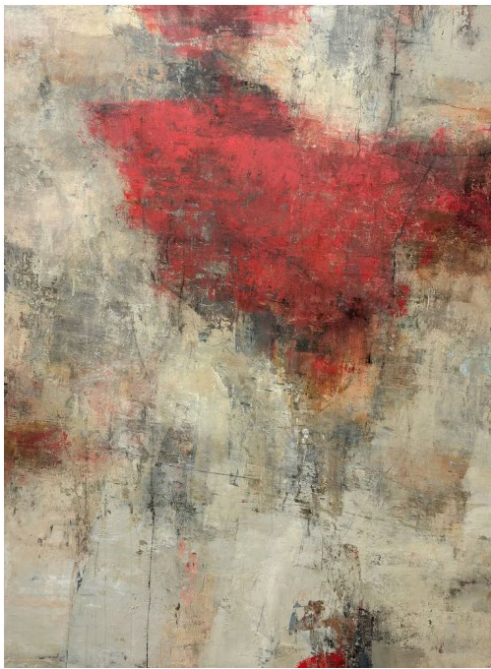
L-R: Samira Aldo , *oil on canvas*  
<https://www.samiraaddo.com/>



Julia Purinton, *oil on canvas*  
<https://juliapurinton.com/landscape/>



Jerry McLaughlin, *cold wax on panel*,  
<https://www.jerrymclaughlinart.com/>



Rebecca Crowell, *oil on canvas*

Phoebe Scott, *ceramic*

Sam Michelle, *oil on canvas*

Ulrike Zerzer, *porcelain sculpture*

<https://www.rebeccacrowell.com/>

<https://www.phoebescott.com>

<https://www.sammichellepaintings.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/ullizerzer/>

# NOW FOR THE HARD PART! TITLE YOUR OWN WORK!!!

## >> **PULL UP one of your works on your phone.**

**FEELING FIRST:** What time of day does this feel like? What season? What's the temperature? What's happening just outside the frame? What is the mood? Is there a story behind this work? What other feelings or thoughts pop into your head (now or when you created it)?

**USE A THESAURUS!** Sometimes we have an idea but it sounds dry, or over-used. Check a thesaurus for other words that you might use instead.

**THREE-WORD LIMIT:** Force brevity. Sometimes this gets you to focus on the key elements about the piece. (Blue, cold, sad // Yellow, hot, summer) Then use these ideas to find words or phrases in your Word-Hord.

**BAN OVERUSED WORDS** (for this session): Blue, red, sunset, morning – unless these are paired unexpectedly. Later, these words may be perfect, but don't rely on them as a first choice.

>> **PAIR UP and show your partner one of your works.** Sometimes others see connections that you might miss, and sometimes having a conversation not only helps you find a title, it also prepares you for having a conversation with one of your viewers at the gallery opening.

## >> **SHARE YOUR BEST TITLES WITH THE GROUP**



## GENERATING TITLE FROM ONLINE “TITLE GENERATORS”

**CAUTION:** Can create pretentious “art speak” word salad

**Prompt:** Create an interesting title for an abstract encaustic monotype in red, black and white



<https://artisthu.com/artwork-title-generator/>

*(note: all the comments in parentheses were created by the generator)*

- Crimson whispers on Bone Canvas (evoke a sense of mystery & intrigue)
- Monochrome Inferno (highlights the color palette & intensity)
- Ruptured Silence: An Encaustic Study (emphasizes the texture and process)
- Redacted Ritual (intriguing and suggestive, plays on the limited color scheme)
- Flux and Fracture: A Dance of Encaustic” (captures the dynamic nature of the medium)

<https://capitalizemytitle.com/name-generator/artwork/>

- Whitefire Resonance
- Obsidian Pulse Drift
- Crimson Veil Echo

<https://www.foundmyself.com/tools/art-title-generator>

**THIS ONE USED AN UPLOADED IMAGE OF THE WORK.**

- Ash & Ember Bloom
- Quiet Eruption
- Charcoal Tide with Crimson Veil
- Liminal Crater
- Petal of Smoke
- Residual Pulse
- Black Lace Shore
- Afterglow Fossil
- Subterranean Blossom
- When Coal Dreams of Roses

*Gather words that resonate with you from any and all sources, including generators*  
**BUT USE CAUTION.....** Often these title generators create a ‘word salad’. It *almost* sounds like it makes sense, but.....

## Thank you to EMILY HARVEY (THE CURIOUS PRINTMAKER)

The initial idea of this workshop was taken - with her permission – from Emily’s excellent blog post “Finding titles for your prints”.

<https://thecuriousprintmaker.co.uk/titles-for-prints/>

Emily is a very talented artist and very generous and inspiring teacher.

Check out her work , her classes, and her blogs here: <https://thecuriousprintmaker.co.uk>

**SLIDES 5-8:** All artists are credited on the slides that display their work. David Hockney, Andy Warhol, Jean-Michele Basquiat, Marlene Dumas, Magdalena Gluszk-Holeksa , Calo Carrtala, Pierre Yermia, Richard Perry, Romain Langois

- |                  |  |  |  |
|------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>SLIDE 9:</b>  | (Reader): <i>Apologies to the artist. I cannot find attribution, even though many people have posted this painting on various social media sites. If anyone knows who this artist is, please let me know. I would like to credit them.</i><br>(Trees): Ken Elliott | “Blue Wish”  | <a href="https://www.KenElliott.com">https://www.KenElliott.com</a>  |
| <b>SLIDE 10:</b> | (Still life): Albert Marquet,<br><br>(Photo): Rhonda Raulston<br>(Landscape): PastelBrushArt.com   | “Pivoines Dans Un Vase de Verre<br>and Paris, Rue Monge”<br><br>“On the Road Again”<br>“Fields of Color”                                     | <a href="https://FineArtAmerica.com/">https://FineArtAmerica.com/</a><br><br><a href="https://RhondaRaulston.com">https://RhondaRaulston.com</a><br><a href="https://PastelBrush.com">https://PastelBrush.com</a>  |
| <b>SLIDE 12:</b> | (Left): Ollie LeBrocq<br>(Right:) !! Sold on Etsy (NewCanvasHomeArt) and <b>no artist attribution given!</b>   | “  | <a href="https://ollielebrocq.com/work/">https://ollielebrocq.com/work/</a><br><a href="https://www.etsy.com/listing/">https://www.etsy.com/listing/</a>   |
| <b>SLIDE 13:</b> | (Top L): Mike Salven<br><br>(Top R:) Henry Percy Gray<br>Bottom L:) Wolf Kahn<br>(Bottom R): Ken Elliott   | “Four Color Landscape Study<br>Painting of Cedar Island, North Carolina”<br>“Untitled” (Cypress Tree)<br>“Red Trees”<br>“ Gold Progressions” | <a href="https://salvenstudios.com">https://salvenstudios.com</a><br><br><a href="https://collections.montereyart.org">https://collections.montereyart.org</a><br><a href="https://www.sothebys.com/en">https://www.sothebys.com/en</a><br><a href="https://www.KenElliott.com">https://www.KenElliott.com</a>                                   |
| <b>SLIDE 15:</b> | Samira Aldo<br>Julia Purinton<br>Jerry McLaughlin  | “Zandra Rhodes”<br>“Misty Valley”<br>“Adobe y Negro”   | <a href="https://www.samiraaddo.com/">https://www.samiraaddo.com/</a><br><a href="https://juliapurinton.com/landscape/">https://juliapurinton.com/landscape/</a><br><a href="https://www.jerrymclaughlinart.com/">https://www.jerrymclaughlinart.com/</a>  |
| <b>SLIDE 16:</b> | Rebecca Crowell<br>Phoebe Scott<br>Sam Michelle<br>Ulrike Zerzer   | “The Land of Contrasts”<br>“Janus”<br>“Ammobium Jigsaw”<br><Title not listed>  | <a href="https://www.rebeccacrowell.com/">https://www.rebeccacrowell.com/</a><br><a href="https://www.phoebescott.com">https://www.phoebescott.com</a><br><a href="https://www.sammichellepaintings.com/">https://www.sammichellepaintings.com/</a><br><a href="https://www.instagram.com/ullizerzer/">https://www.instagram.com/ullizerzer/</a> |
| <b>SLIDE 18:</b> | Rhonda Raulston  | “Dreams of My Past”  | <a href="https://www.RhondaRaulston.com">https://www.RhondaRaulston.com</a>  |