Steve Gehrke reading in collaboration with Georgia Poetry Circuit

November 6, 2013

The Department of Writing and Linguistics at Georgia Southern University will host poet Steve Gehrke on Monday, November 11. Gehrke will give a reading of his work at 7 p.m. in the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Information Technology, Room 1005. The reading, cosponsored by the Georgia Poetry Circuit, is free and open to all.

Gehrke has published three books of poetry, most recently *Michelangelo’s Seizure*, which was selected for the National Poetry Series and published by the University of Illinois Press in 2007. The poems in *Michelangelo’s Seizure* are based on or inspired by art and artists ranging from Michelangelo to Robert Mapplethorpe. His other books are *The Pyramids of Malpighi* (Anhinga, 2004), selected by Philip Levine for the Philip Levine Prize for Poetry, and *The Resurrection Machine* (BkMk Press, 2000), winner of the John Ciardi Prize.

Gehrke’s awards include a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and a Pushcart Prize. Poems from his new manuscript have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Kenyon Review*, *AGNI*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Missouri Review* and many others. He teaches at the University of Nevada in Reno.

For more information, contact the Department of Writing and Linguistics at 912-478-0739.

The Department of Writing and Linguistics is housed in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, CLASS, the University’s College of the Creative Mind, prepares students to achieve academic excellence, develop their analytical skills, enhance their creativity, and embrace their responsibilities as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world.

The poem below is featured in *Michelangelo’s Seizure* and is written in the voice of Otto Dix, whose experience in an artillery unit in World War I profoundly influenced his art.

*from The Machine Gunner’s Letters*

(as Otto Dix)

How, you write, will I survive? With instinct, trigger-eye, the soldiers like turtles flipped over in the mud, limb-flail and broken shell. These thoughts move through me as I write, a telegraph tape slipping through fingers. The lumberjack, they call me, timber in the field, green blemished by red-splatter, like leaves at fall’s beginning. Behind the gun, I am eternity, I am time looking out from the inside of a clock, the click-stop finger that marks the finish line. My body, knuckle-ache and recoil, records each loss, tally-marks on the black slate of the heart. I am the vomit-taste in the mouth, what they know is watching, though they race towards me as I hand death out, a parade-master tossing candy to the crowd. Later, under star-flutter, the night opening parachutes as it falls, I have to pick, like needles from a pin-cushion, the splintered death out of me. How once, I made your body gleam, the tongued lips, boot-polish on the nipples, your skin rubbed with orange peels. I could have, then, painted beautifully. Now, even the most gentle touch dissolves, my finger harp-strumming the trigger, grenade pin held between the teeth. Love, all night the gun, cartridge oil, rivet, barrel clip, puts itself together in my mind.
It’s so quiet out there, I can almost hear the maggots trash-picking the fields, or the final woman-call a body makes. Someone should rat-skitter through the foxholes, the moonstricken thistle-bush, and close their awful, glowing mouths. Someone should, mercy-handed, swift, sew this trench-line closed. Tomorrow, more men will ladder the trench wall, mud-faced, horrible, caravan towards me in the dawn. How will I survive? I will kill one man over and over until I've killed them all.

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