

# The Hill We Climb

Poem by Amanda Gorman

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*Collective Healing* - installation by Maddie McDougall (2020), Ely Centre for Contemporary Art

When day comes we ask ourselves,  
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?  
The loss we carry,  
a sea we must wade  
We've braved the belly of the beast  
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace  
And the norms and notions  
of what just is  
Isn't always just-ice

And yet the dawn is ours  
before we knew it  
Somehow we do it  
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed  
a nation that isn't broken  
but simply unfinished

We the successors of a country and a time  
Where a skinny Black girl  
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother  
can dream of becoming president  
only to find herself reciting for one

And yes we are far from polished  
far from pristine  
but that doesn't mean we are  
striving to form a union that is perfect  
We are striving to forge a union with purpose  
To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and  
conditions of man  
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us  
but what stands before us  
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,  
we must first put our differences aside  
We lay down our arms  
so we can reach out our arms  
to one another

We seek harm to none and harmony for all  
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:  
That even as we grieved, we grew  
That even as we hurt, we hoped  
That even as we tired, we tried  
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious  
Not because we will never again know defeat  
but because we will never again sow division  
Scripture tells us to envision  
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree  
And no one shall make them afraid  
If we're to live up to our own time  
Then victory won't lie in the blade  
But in all the bridges we've made  
That is the promised glade  
The hill we climb  
If only we dare  
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,  
it's the past we step into  
and how we repair it  
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation  
rather than share it  
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy

And this effort very nearly succeeded  
But while democracy can be periodically delayed  
it can never be permanently defeated

In this truth

in this faith we trust

For while we have our eyes on the future  
history has its eyes on us

This is the era of just redemption

We feared at its inception

We did not feel prepared to be the heirs  
of such a terrifying hour

but within it we found the power

to author a new chapter

To offer hope and laughter to ourselves

So while once we asked,

how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?

Now we assert

How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?

We will not march back to what was  
but move to what shall be

A country that is bruised but whole,  
benevolent but bold,

fierce and free

We will not be turned around

or interrupted by intimidation

because we know our inaction and inertia

will be the inheritance of the next generation

Our blunders become their burdens

But one thing is certain:

If we merge mercy with might,

and might with right,

then love becomes our legacy

and change our children's birthright

So let us leave behind a country

better than the one we were left with

Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,

we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one

We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west,

we will rise from the windswept northeast

where our forefathers first realized revolution

We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states,  
we will rise from the sunbaked south

We will rebuild, reconcile and recover  
and every known nook of our nation and  
every corner called our country,  
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,  
battered and beautiful  
When day comes we step out of the shade,  
aflame and unafraid  
The new dawn blooms as we free it  
For there is always light,  
if only we're brave enough to see it  
  
If only we're brave enough to be it.



**Amanda Gorman**, National Youth Poet Laureate and the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history. Gorman finished the poem, titled "The Hill We Climb," the night after pro-Trump rioters sieged the Capitol building earlier this month. "In my poem, I'm not going to in any way gloss over what we've seen over the past few weeks and, dare I say, the past few years. But what I really aspire to do in the poem is to be able to use my words to envision a way in which our country can still come together and can still heal," she explained to the *New York Times*. "It's doing that in a way that is not erasing or neglecting the harsh truths I think America needs to reconcile with." The complete remarks from Amanda Gorman at Presidential Inauguration can be see here: <https://youtu.be/2mTmTdOgv0M>



**Maddie McDougall** is an artist, activist, and educator residing in Springfield, Massachusetts, US. She uses her foundational skills as a painter and printmaker to expand her practice to encompass interdisciplinary formats, including film, installation, fibre and sculpture. This is what she says about her *Collective Healing Installation* (torn canvas with acrylic and concrete) shown at Ely Centre of Contemporary Art, that is pictured above: “After the pain exacerbated during the administration of the 46th presidency, our nation has reached a point where we must reach across divides to rebuild and heal. Our future is depending on the courage we’ll need to find rooted in togetherness and a brave optimism that is willing to listen with compassion, willing to heal our collective wounds.” [www.maddiemcdougall.com](http://www.maddiemcdougall.com)