

Bone, Antler, Stone (Museum Pieces)

The long bones of sheep spliced and made into hundreds of pins, pulled from the animal and put to use, long buried but now under glass,

The palmed cups of stone lamps, scooped-out bowls for oil still rimmed dark from prehistoric flame,

The unknown unfinished bulbous forms of worked stone, the shape of a seated figure or a mountain, others random growths, or star-shaped and hand-held, all of them a mystery,

Polished pieces of bone, no bigger than a fingernail, polished absentmindedly, grooved and smoothed by idle hands, precious now as any tool, the working of some familiar mind,

Bones made into beads, bone bits the size of teeth perforated with bone drills and strung through and worn, bone jewelry atop garments of skin, all covering our own skin, our own bone,

Pottery fragments like serrated sleeves of dried and sand-buried papyrus, pottery lips or jagged bases closer to dug up skull or brain case, pottery the memory holder, broken-edged ancient teeth welded to Neolithic gums,

A scattering of blackened pieces of pottery, earth-buried and soil colored or charred, now laid out on a dazzling white shelf like two dozen islands thrown to a glittering sea,

A bowl made from a whale's vertebrae: and what handles, what depths, and how to eat when it's the container that fills you with awe, a link from the sea monster's spine now in your lap, steaming or cold, or some central cauldron for all to pull from—or perhaps it's just expected when one's neck or wrists are hung with beads of whale teeth, Leviathan's mouth now holding the head high or just juggled in the hand like dice, or shaken and left in the pocket for luck,

Carved antler points, worn from use or burning, hollowed and perforated points and curves of bone for handles, for music, for wearing,

Stone cleavers, mattock heads of whale bone or rock, the stone point of a prehistoric plough, or shovels smilingly made from shoulder bones: all pulled from earth or peeled from skin to work the earth and feed our skin, this small glass case just some stone age shed, sweat and muscles in their remains, spring and summer work or salty from the sea, fragmented but content from the long restful millennia in the ground.