

Tiny fires

Listen.

We *butiki* slid bulbous bellies
over smooth rocks we

gentle *butanding*
turned the sea into milk.

Now Nestle carton bobs
on the fetid waters of the Pasig.
Open sewers gape like torn bellies.

Children hunt
for metal parts and plastic sacks. *Pandacan*
birthed poets, but now it sits
in the shadow of a fuel tank *ripe for disaster.*

(Unassailable evidence)

Obtuse CEOS gaze down metallic towers
cursing shanty dwellers clicking mahjong/kicking sipa/butchering pigs
in the hell below.

We bloodstain *tutubi*
wings thirty-feet spanned,
could be seen drifting between storms and songs.
We 30,000 eyes began with gills
in shallow edges
of the river. Could breathe underwater.

I tell you this because the thing is happening and you may look upon your cracked sheathes and see a thing that we were not. You may call yourself John/Susan/Kate wear Old Navy smile when someone thinks you look like Brad/Jennifer/Angelina. You may tip cowboy hats, sling guns on hips, shift the gears of German sports cars. But one day the game is up:

The ones who gave you compliments regard your eyes
detect your bloodstain wings pressing through your skin.

This is why it is important
that you listen
and remember we were not
jars of talcum powder.

Not Master Creams and syringed serums cramming
drugstore aisles.

Not teenaged strippers in red-light districts with faraway looks,
waiting for the 'Kano to take us home.

Not the Aeta woman begging at the edge

of the landfill
where tiny methane fires light up the mountains
of what the world has tossed away.

Sample poems - please do not print or publish without permission

Suture

Visiting the Exhibit on the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, 2011

Oddities. Body
parts wrapped to be sold
as souvenirs.
Cold fingers
peel mummy layers
undoing the stitch.

It is invasive,
a sort of jigsaw-
suture the way
Navajos and Igorottes,
Rajasthanis pose
with elephants
at the artificial
Pueblo Cave Dwelling.
You note the backdrop
of painted sand pillars;
that Disneyland
cirrus cloud sky.

Wool jackets rub
loin cloths. Feathers
tickle Victorian necklines.

Hands sew together
what does not belong.
One day, it will heal
into something unrecognizable
with the parts of a person:
a teratoma
with teeth, hair and nails.

Come upon these
measured feet
this list of names
without warning.
Come from thousands of miles
to witness the exhibit
of the exhibit. Come
to participate in
something, for
your own story does not
allow you to participate.

The candidness of naked
eyes, bare chests devoid
of goosebumps. The smoothness
of distance. The shadows
of the uncaptured. Something
tells you to stop looking,
but you are spun: sutured
to your subject.

Sample poems - please do not print or publish without permission

water cure: a telegraph to 1901 from the future

Get the good old syringe boys and fill it to the brim

lifesource our liason to the sea lessoned on Philippine insurgents stop

attempt to get confession force the feel of drowning stop

cause waterlung/pneumonia cause pleuritis cause adrenaline overload cause irregular heart beat
cause release of catecholamines cause heart attack stop

proven despite CIA sanitation of a formal method yes one can be scared to death stop

We've caught another ----- and we'll operate on him

if not from broken limbs or bruises if not oxygen loss if not vital organ failure stop

and under this distress one will admit to anything stop

post interrogation should one survive now fear the gentle sprinkle on a rainy day a pool a shower
anything aquatic stop

administration and united nations deem it form of torture stop

Shouting the battle cry of freedom

stop

stop

stop

wonder who the terrorist is

*Text in italics from an U.S. Army marching song written during the Philippine-American War

Catalog of Objects

It was delightful when we were tired to sit down and watch the people pass.

– Words of a visitor to the 1904 World's Fair¹

- 1 Bahag
- 1 Skirt
- 1 Beaded bag
- 2 Beaded necklaces
- 3 Carved statues of the rice god
- 1 Set of Filipino playing cards

You walk into the Missouri History museum. You see white everywhere: alabaster casts of women in Victorian dresses, plaster infused with “staff” from the Philippines. Lion heads and the columns of the Palace of Fine Arts. Victorian men and women sit atop elephants, smiling in tall black hats and mustaches and finely pressed jacket, brown men on either side. The placard marked “Labor” shows Africans and Asians bent over to build, to clean, to make the Fair grand.

You dream that night: statues a creepy feel swimming in dark waters I touch warm flesh underwater underfoot find out they're dead recently dead lots and lots of stairs two six year old boys they want me to follow them the bus is waiting I'm lagging like I don't want to go the bus is parked above lots of steps it's really hot moving slow there's a woman who likes me slippers on slippers off I can't find mine now a movie theater and behind the theater a shopping market

- 2 Bontoc Head Hunters
- 1 Visayan Girl
- 1 Geisha Girl
- 1 Esquimaux Family
- 1 Hoochie Coochie Girl

You see the daguerreotypes of Filipinos, Native Americans, Eskimos, Arabs, and Japanese, assembled in one cluster on the wall. Nearby, you see playing cards of Filipinos and a beaded Bagobo dress behind the glass case. You see your face reflected in the glass.

¹ Primary source on display at the Missouri History Museum

SCIENCE

Two college kids found Kennewick Man in the silt on the banks of the Columbia River. THE "FOUNDER OF ANTHROPOLOGY", JOHANN F. BLUMENBACH Cranial measurements were taken to determine FIRST CLASSIFIED HUMANS INTO FIVE RACES his origins. They AFTER THE FLOOD, HE CONCLUDED, PEOPLE likened his skull to the actor who played Capt. Jean-Luc Picard on Star Trek. *THE CAUCASIAN MUST, ON EVERY PHYSIOLOGICAL* Some said, "Was someone here before the Native Americans?" *BE CONSIDERED AS THE PRIMARY OR INTERMEDIATE OF THESE FIVE PRINCIPAL RACES.* AFRICANS WERE GOVERNED BY WHIMSY, and people went wild, theorizing that the white man may have been here first. ASIANS WERE RULED BY OPINION, *but these bones need proper burial, said the Umatilla, Yakama, Nez Perce and Colville: AND CAUCASIANS, BY REASON. Let's put him to rest already. CRANIA AMERICANA, 1839, DISPLAYED THE INVESTIGATIONS OF SAMUEL GEORGE MORTON but the bones need further study, said scientists. He doesn't fit the Native American profile. USING MORE THAN 1,000 SKULLS.* My father always likes to remind me: **when you were born, your head was deformed** RESURRECTIONISTS WERE GRAVE ROBBERS. **because they took it out with forceps. I said, "oh no!"** ACCORDING TO HIS STUDY **and you came out with a crooked head** FROM SIZE OF SKULL, WHICH DETERMINED MENTAL CAPACITY, CAUCASIANS ARE SUPERIOR **but then you came out fine.**²

²

Source of information in capitals is Fowler, Dan, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*.