

CARLOS LLERENA AGUIRRE

Ultimus Tribus, 2012
Woodcut, 25 x 12 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

BRANDON
KILBOURNE

Dioramic Idylls

I.

Building dioramas
rigid and resonant,
deft hands stage untouched
wildernesses like requiems
for guttering species:

Returning from the bamboo understory, the red
panda balancing on a thinning branch of canopy.

Following the riverbank below the escarpment,
three takins navigating Bhutanese mists.

These facsimiles of living
anatomies motionlessly evoke
a nature unscathed
in our visitor eyes—

Swept by the museum’s alcoves
homing carefully arrayed wax
leaves, croppings of mangroves, gleanings
of cloud forests, mounted skins
of floe-berthed walrus and scree-dennd pika,
we press a relic
dream upon animal faces:
pockets of earth escaped
intact, harmony rippling

from advancing girders and asphalt,
vanguard clearings for farmland.

Hermetic behind their glass pane,
we find the addaxes exotic, their coats
candent against Libya’s red sands,

yet we know innately

the ecology of vultures:

a zebra’s rigored limb jutting
from their throng, their raised wings
veil their gore-riddled beaks.

The hyenas stalk their frenzy.

II.

October 17, 1912
Faradje, Belgian Congo

We negotiated the ransacking’s trails—
the train bypassing rock-thrash
rapids, the small stations stringing
coastal Boma to Stanley Pool;
the steamboat chugging up the horizon-
flood river, anchoring evening
explorations en route to Stanleyville;
the seven-month trudge alongside porting
shoulders, black torsos made filing
packhorses to bring us to far-off Faradje.
Availing ourselves of inroads for felled ivory,
we skirted like puddles yesterday’s
blood wrung out by charnel rubber:

Bodies peeled to sap and bone,
the numberless number:

hands littering the dirt like
bullet casings, stumps

shrieking for fingers
and palms piled in baskets—

Bodies flayed to sap and bone, the numberless number:	behind the camera than behind the rifle’s sights. Photographing one of our hunters proudly posing beside the hulking carcass, I can’t help but feel the architect of death, yet I know the photo of a mountain of bison skulls, the buffalo skinner posed on its summit, boasting from its bone-stacked height of our natural talent—
bloodletting vines of <i>chicotte</i> , iron vines dangling from neck	
to neck, flesh devoured by civilizing cannibals—	
Bodies flensed to sap and bone, the numberless number: colony’s agar.	
Coffers and cargo holds brimming demand a wilderness reduced	Cuvier only deduced extinction in 1796. In little more than a century, we have already mastered it.
to piano keys, chess pieces, ink pad stamps, figurines of saints, trophies, erasers, tires, hoses, gaskets, stoppers for bottles, ornate inlays, curios from a romanticized continent.	III. The snatchings pane-sealed of Congolese rainforests, Kenai taiga, Iguaçu cataracts, Namib dunes and outcrops transport us. Carcasses hand arranged from field notes resurrect the world without handprint smokestacks, usurping pasture, knots of highway, pretend we haven’t devoured the Earth, leaving our eyes to probe their glass eyes. Their thick skins’ presence dissolves the distance, anchors in the firsthand fauna of photographs and nature films— this herd of elephants in low light, admiring their wrinkled trunks, tapered ivory, we forget that we march them dwindling to join sea cows, sea mink, the hapless dodo.
	IV. The origin of the wolverine: My idling taillights color the roadside snow,
We stampede horns and claws, tusks and pelts to the perished menagerie of quagga and bluebuck, passenger pigeon and great auk— Simply even to know this continent, bring its darkness under science’s ken, a smear of blood sets in the creases of our palms. * In the kerosene’s sallow light, rain thundering upon our tent sprawl, the day’s achievement eyeless stares back at me: our third and final example of the northern white rhinoceros, its hide salted and drying beside bundles of tall grass, rolls of undeveloped film, collected insects to shrink a habitat down to an alcove. I’ve always been more comfortable	

highlight its fur with embers’ red.	scales stretched over a body shaped from twine and wood-wool,
The clouds sift their burial of stocky limbs returned to a habitat fragmented	to the right
by macadam, logging saws, and summer cabins. Here, where once they ranged southerly, bereft	three hides fitted over plaster-cast sculptures, long horns capping their snouts –
of their footprints, the snows speak their elegy. I gauge its body half-	the small pangolin and the crash of rhinos posed in still stand-off awkward, drama of armor and lances.
frozen—the skull crushed, but the skin without puncture, specimen-worthy.	Behind their glass exists no desire for false cures of ground horns and scales.
A truck passing in bluster of motor and exhaust outpaces	The meticulous details overawe us: two leaning egrets lost in the wallow’s engineered reflection.
adaptation, reveals evolution’s lacking foresight: Pleistocene-honed	IV. Boreal vestige: atop its bluff, the lone wolverine surveys the cratonic vista: sparse trees and the greys of extinct volcanoes splayed to the horizon – the rose of twilight culminates in the air, the haze as pristine as one perfected only in frescoes.
snowshoe paws, shear-edge carnassials are useless in the advent of barreling	They comfort the return visitor – these habitats that never change: idylls for the wrecked Earth.
crankshafts, headlights overwhelming retinas. With late remorse of the prodigal	
species, I salvage the body, belly setting with ice, and place it in the trunk of my car.	
V. We can only achieve the dead harmony –	
Cloudbanks storm-tinged, malachite canopies lie in the background’s oils above a swath of ochre brushstrokes melting into Uele tall grass ringing the foreground;	
at the center	
a small wallowing hole,	
to the left	

Originally from Louisiana, **Brandon Kilbourne** is an evolutionary biologist living and working in Berlin, Germany. The beginnings of his poems often emerge from the collections of natural history museums, with poems also sprouting from the incidents and particulars of travel and fieldwork. He has previously published in *Sky Island Journal* and *Third Street Writers’ Beach Reads*.