

Richard Siken

Still Life with Skulls and Bacon

A thing and a thing and a thing held still—
you have to hold something still to find the other
things. This is speculation. You will die in your
sleep and leave everything unfinished. This is
also speculation. I had obligations: hope, but hope
negates the experience. I owe myself nothing.
I cut off my head and threw it on the ground.
I walked away. This is how we measure, walking
away. We carve up the world into feet and minutes,
to know how far from home, how many hogs
in the yard. My head just sat there. Fair enough.
A map without landmarks is useless. Science
dreams its dreams of knowledge—names it, pokes it
with equations. The crucial thing is not fifty
times whatever but how we got these notions: how
much, how many, how far, how long. It's good
to give explicit answers, showing all the steps,
necessary and sufficient. Finding the dots,
connecting the dots. An interrogation of the dots.
A pip, a point, a seed, a stone. This is philosophy.
These are suppositions. If one has no apples,
one has zero apples. There is, you see, no shortage
of open problems. We carve up the world
and crown it with numbers—lumens, ounces,
decibels. All these things and what to do with them.
We carve up the world all the time.