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.