

Derrick Austin

Okaloosa

I like the heron best
because it has no song,
flying over the water, its mating
cry mournful, aggressive, and internal.
Seaweed and creamy foam

float on the tide's restless lapping,
licking my feet like a lost dog.
I am no master.

The Gulf collects its own scraps:
rows of hotels

hollowed out and plastered
ochre by sunsets, knocked down by Ivan
or Dennis—you lose track

after so many seasons.
Mist hangs over shoddy condos.
Beachcombers scan the quartz burrows
of ghost shrimp. A drunken couple
stumbles somewhere. Before they were expelled
Choctaw called this place Okalusa,
“dark water.”

They must have known the land and the body
are complicit in their own decay.
Our works turn spindrift in the sea.

A heron lands on a brick and will not move
as I walk past its beak,
a crusted ancient weapon.

