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*Exhibits from the*

Maritime Museum

*&*

*The City*

BECCA DRAKE

## About the project

Housed in the old Dock Offices building at Victoria Square, Hull's Maritime Museum sits in the middle of the city. Across the street, Queen's Gardens fill the space that used to be Queen's Dock, until it was filled with concrete in the early twentieth century. The museum's south-facing windows open onto docks no longer in use, and past them to the shores of the Humber, where wading birds fish for worms in the mud. Beyond, Spurn Point is the last piece of land before the North Sea.

Inspired by the objects, history and surroundings of the Maritime Museum, these poems explore how people, animals, and plants become objects behind glass. They invite you to question how the city exists in the same space as nature, by viewing exhibits from the museum side by side with exhibits from the city and its surrounding natural spaces.

## The Museum

In passing this is aquarium  
light, a question of fish, bones  
and shadows silvering casements  
in silt, of letters pooling the page.

## *The City,*

where octopus limbs, undulating,  
grow up from mud  
where salt-gnawed branches  
claw at the lock  
where Zimmer frame & breathless  
plastic lung form  
imprints  
swept away.

## Mermaid

My maker held me in his arms.  
A meeting of land and sea  
beyond the wanting mouth.

He stitched me at the neck.  
He twisted of fish tail and primate mask  
this skeleton of wires, stretched the net,  
stuffed me full of sailor's stories,  
and called me a body. A piece of land  
above a slip of sea.

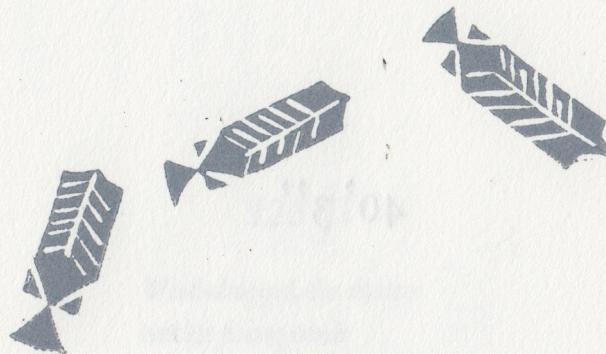
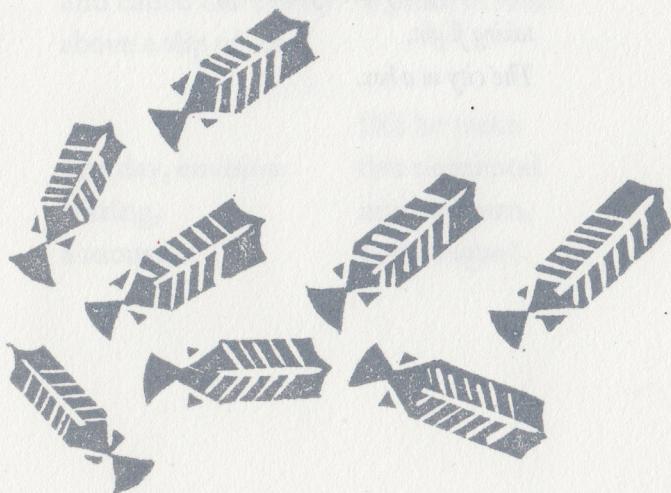
Did he wake  
one day, envision  
tearing,  
a monster,  
this elemental  
myth reborn,  
a grotesque?

## Eel grass

*Waving tower blocks.*  
*Subaquarium bottle-green.*  
*Gelatinous fingers, buried hands — among*  
*skim silver fish in skeins.*  
*Humber's shadow.*  
*Fleeing sands.*  
*Wind-dragged.*  
*S c a t t e r i n g*  
*A littoral littering,*  
*Pole-snagged plastic fluttering,*  
*taking flight.*  
*The city in a box.*

## Questions

I spy a flock of answers, folding  
in on themselves, sea-foaming,  
and back to the lodestone, soaring  
home, then out to question again.



## & Answers

*At the docks is  
gulls' chorale of:  
STOCKFISH! STOKFISH!  
STOKFFYSSHE! STOKFISSHE!*

*And the calling  
screech of cars is:  
STOCKFISH! STOKFISH!  
STOKFFYSSHE! STOKFISSHE!*

*And the creaking  
slippered footsteps:  
STOCKFISH! STOKFISH!  
STOKFFYSSHE! STOKFISSHE!*

40' 3"

of *balaena australis*:  
half line by half line, bones meet,  
in metre obsolete ----- in measured & sutured  
sounding words, which seek to work  
a whale.

128 ft

Wind-dragged, the shadow  
catches fleeing sands

from the lighthouse, darkened,  
where his evening stands.

## Lord Line Trawler Building

At the end of the line, the old Lord windows wide. This wizened hoarder folds shadows in his gap-tooth smile. They vine into letters, words, sentences, which parenthesize (crumbling brick), inscribe grass in wild-flowered ash, rewrite sea; shadows silt the walls with words. These unuttered cacophonies chafe catacombs from the old man's hardened shell and out he spits them, one by one, thieves off in the night licking his gap tooth's whistle from their fingers.

behind glass.

224

, if this is a beach, and called

insect *midarrow* waves, rasping against shingled

These unwanted indentations are drawn in the text.

Infinite small

walls

## Teredo Navalis

, all is left

5

are

wormed

6

1

E

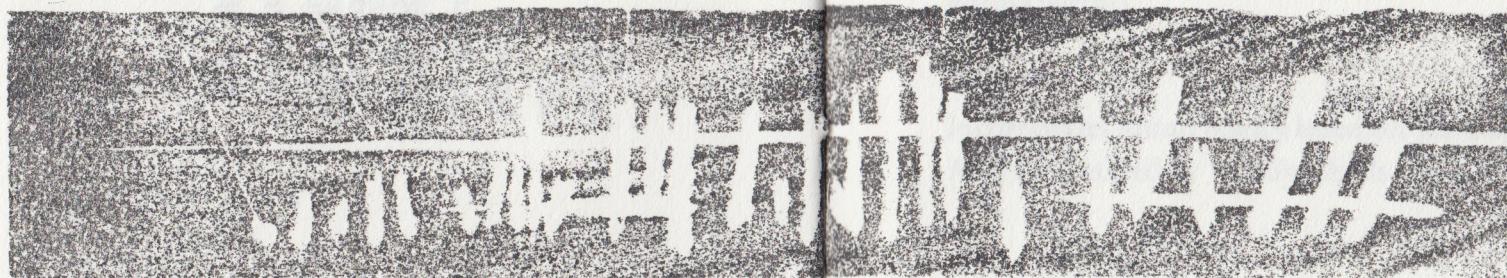
Figurehead  
of H.M.S. Albion,  
1842

Regarding the open sky, it might as well be ocean,  
she lies supine, her back against a crate,  
cresting concrete. This is her  
new prow, the smooth rock of the city  
her new sea, of which the keeled caress, her profile,  
forms keen incisors, rocks to scythe ocean floor.  
She could be petrified.

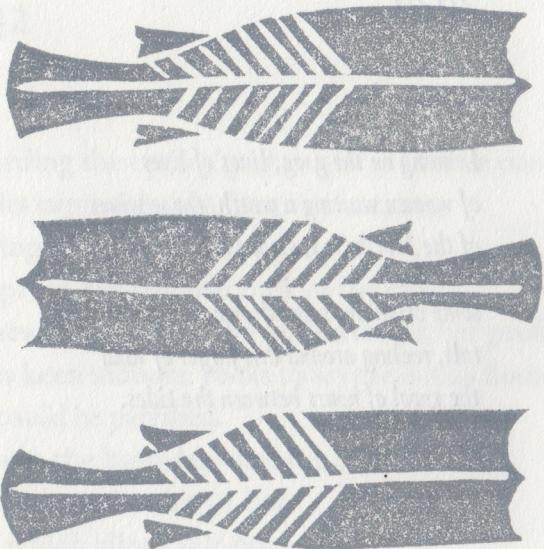
Perhaps, the long days seeking over  
the seas have hardened her  
skin, which glints, salt-burnished  
like the shells of barnacles, withholding  
her worn and weathered heart,

Figures of wood  
at Spurn Point,  
2020

Leaning on the grog, lines of lives  
of women waiting a watch, those wives  
of the North Sea, stooped. Some fall,  
some crumble, some drown, and some stand  
tall, reeling around this finger of land  
the spool of hours between the tides.



Figurehead of HMS Albion



## Findings

The following items are taken from the 1956 *Catalogue of the Maritime Museum, Kingston Upon Hull*.

40' 3" —

25. Skeleton of young female Southern Right Whale, *Balaena australis*, 40' 3" long, captured off the southern coast of Long Island, New-York, USA, near the village of Wainscott.

Figurehead —

250. Figurehead of HMS *Albion*, 1842 (exhibited outside)

Questions —

277. Lodestone, which has the property of attracting iron. When suspended was used by mariners (primarily Chinese) to give a rough indication of magnetic north,

*Teredo Navalis* —

427. Piece of wood, bored by *Teredo navalis* (a marine boring worm)

Answers —

Incorporates found poetry based on *The Customs Records of Hull, 1453*, edited by Wendy Childs.



This chapbook has been created as part of the *Hull: Yorkshire's Maritime City* project.

It was set by hand in Spectrum metal type, and was printed letterpress on a Golding Jobber No. 6, at Thin Ice Press, University of York.

Jointly funded by Hull City Council and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, *Hull: Yorkshire's Maritime City* is a transformational project that seeks to promote and protect Hull's incredible maritime history, architecture and collections.

TIME



1. The following are the names of the  
members of the Board.

2. The Board has the power to  
make regulations for the conduct of  
its business.

3. The Board may, by resolution  
of the Board, make rules for  
the conduct of its business.