

Two Poems

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“Appeal to the Great Spirit”

after Dallin’s sculpture

The museum’s chief sits outside
on his bronze pony in the rain,
arms outstretched, palms up
to the sky, his brave’s headdress,

here in Boston, Huntington
Avenue’s crown. And inside all
the other dry and guarded art,
the city’s children, class by class,

are bussed to stand in front of,
walk by. Even now when I want
to remember that elementary
day we were guided back to

our line of yellow buses, idling
in the rain and how one of us cried
(Was it me?) because he didn’t know
that green Indian, who wasn’t moving,

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wasn't real. That he couldn't stop
his prayer (*appeal* Dallin named his casting)
to the Great Spirit, couldn't climb off
his horse and come inside with us.

To wander for a day among the portraits
and bowls, tapestries and polished
gold, before a guard would move us
to the door and back outside. So we

(I was too young to know I could
bring the God of Rain down from the sky)
would see him lifting his bronze face,
to this day, beside the wet and naked street.

Fit for Eternity

For years I have seen
my friend, John, the Florentine
art historian, here at the health
club, rowing toward God,
those plate glass windows in front
of him looking out to the Otter Creek
brewery and beyond to the Adirondacks.
For years I thought to ask him if,
approaching the afterlife, we'll
see a machine God or the Fallen Angel
has ready for us to keep stepping,
running on, rowing, in order to stay
fit for eternity. In order not to
forget those bodies we once were,
Michelangelo rowed out of stone,

Fra Angelico saw and pulled, drew
out to the canvas of a wet wall.
So a priest, and now we, would have

something like us to fall to our knees
in awe of. To remember how sweat
comes to be prayer, how we aren't

here to save ourselves for anything,
anybody else. Not even the artist
in his own century who waits to

make a heaven from a mountain
of empty cans, a hell from the heart's
beating and uncountable miles.