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POETRY | FALL 2018

## **Bodies Revealed Exhibition**

By Joanna White

*Our exhibitions have over 200 actual human bodies  
and specimens meticulously dissected and respectfully displayed*

We snake past the glass case of the musician, see  
the death lock of his orbicularis oris, permanently

pressing reed to ebonite. We cock our heads, can almost  
hear the gold-throated wail of his bari-sax, sniff

the smoke rings whiffing up spotlight cones, feel  
the nightclub thrust of his pelvis. An evening it took

for his jazzy riffs to dislodge the melancholy  
from his listeners, curled on their bar stools,

but a whole year for the plastic to infiltrate  
his body in the vacuum chamber, turning him

to rubber. I snake through the exhibit, each body  
silicon-polymer-preserved in its final action: a clutch

round a softball never thrown, a crouch  
for the race that would never begin, dancer held

at the pinnacle, a curled fetus that never left  
its womb. Years later, my grown daughter

does not remember this museum visit  
but there she is on its front steps, preserved

in my photo album with a grin  
for the camera. This before the month her third

grade teacher calls to say that my girl  
turned in a blank quiz about the body

and when I ask my daughter why? *The  
body is too gross. Look, I tell my children, back*

at the exhibit when they ogle the frozen bicyclist,  
kick to mimic the soccer player, *at all the things*

*the body is made to do*, but they know; they have not  
yet learned shame. My long ago childhood full

of medical terror, I do not sleep the night before  
Bodies Revealed, but am quite safe until

I reach the final room, keeping an eye  
on my children so I almost miss the vertical

case against the back wall, do not see its label,  
but recognize instead the suspended

shapes, two fist-sized kidneys attached to spindly  
ureters. I always pictured kidneys as small

as beans, objects so tiny that one's absence  
from a child could be overlooked, but a fist

cut out could leave a hole  
the shape and size of a human heart.

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**Joanna White, who studied poetry with Robert Fanning and Jeffrey Bean, has works in The Examined Life Journal, Healing Muse, Hospital Drive, West Texas Poetry Review, Temenos, The MacGuffin, Measure, Sow's Ear Poetry Review, Earth's Daughters, Dunes Review, KYSO Flash Anthology No. 2, and the Poetry and Medicine column of The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), among others. The music professor has performed her poems recently in Michigan, Florida, and in Iowa at the Examined Life Conference. [joannawhitpoet.com](http://joannawhitpoet.com)**

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