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In the Surgeon's Museum of Hands ·
Sandra McPherson

Touch behind glass! Those who can still feel
The doctor's glove searching them
Leave by this less public backdoor to the hospital
And encounter something pentecostal—

An enscallopment of human castings
That wave like handprints whisked in a cave
By flashlight. Capillaried fingertips
And fine-grained backs, cobbly knuckles belong

To the best in their fields: a President, a plump
Guitarist, Disney with two rings,
A physicist's chewed nails, and two miniatures—
Rockwell's palms as tiny as Shoemaker's.

The fameless, the hamhanded, come to view them there
Between the waving walls. If the drug-scented
Whiteness of an intern sweeps apart the trance,
Hands crawl back over when he's gone.

Because you guessed me to ask for feeling
You took me through this crowd of frizzed
Black bronze, palms raised as though drowning,
Afloat in a longing for arms.

Now a coat hook in a distant hospital
Where my rainy shawl hangs and grows medicinal
Reminds me how one hand waits there upturned,
The only buddha. It had visited the moon.