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Ox-Head Dot

Arthur Sze

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Arthur Sze

OX-HEAD DOT

Ox-head dot, wasp waist, mouse tail,
bamboo section, water-caltrop, broken branch,
stork leg, a pole for carrying fuel:
these are the eight defects when a beginning
calligrapher has no bone to a stroke.

I have no names for what can go wrong:
peeling carrots, a woman collapses
when a tumor in her kidney ruptures;
bronze slivers from a gimbal nut
jam the horizontal stabilizer to a jet,

make it plunge into the Pacific Ocean;
“Hyena!” a man shouts into the darkness
and slams shut the door. Stunned, I hear
a scratching, know that I must fumble,
blunder, mistake, fail; yet, sometimes

in the darkest space is a white fleck,
ox-head dot, and when I pass through,
it’s a spurt of match into flame,
glowing moths loosed into air, air
rippling, roiling the surface of the world.