Beastiary (found poem)

Michael Taekens*
Wild yellow irises.
Beautifully weathered

skull with parts
jaggedly missing. Strip

the calcium phosphate
and the bones become

flexible—enough so that
one can literally tie them

in knots. 128,000
pairs of legs

had been turned in
for bounty. And they

lived, and stood upon
their feet, and exceedingly

great host: snail shells,
clams, turreted seashell,

crinoids, coral, deer
pelvis, thinble-sized

mouse skull. How I bore you
on eagle’s wings and brought

you unto myself. Crushed
and finely ground, used

as feed for stock, as fertilizer,
and as a nutritional supplement for humans. They can assess which threats are real, which are not, and respond accordingly.

Their bones dissolve until at last the creature is floating, Precambrian, unicellular: trickster, earth mother, hag, journey, flying saucer, lock and key. Plumes. Purple mountains' majesty. Bone black—a fine charcoal made by burning animal bones in closed containers, used in refining sugar. they sheltered themselves from the rain under fresh skins. My country 'tis of thee, sweet visage duplicated on seals, coins, quilts, totem poles, mastheads, buffalo hides, weather vanes, flagpoles, Boy Scout ribbons and post office doors. Most eighteenth century Americans had seen an eagle. Such indifference is the eagle’s usual policy.