

Buried Candles
for Sean Scully

Somewhere, a boy finds himself in the fust
of an empty church, in the stale
respirations of beeswax and smoke,

runs his hand along the thinning length
of an altar candle, steals it,
and seven others beside. Home,

he wraps his haul like fish
in newsprint, buries it in his father's garden.
When the priest arrives,

to ask if the boy has anything *belonging to God*,
he listens for the mute echo of bones
igniting the earth. Now, every brushstroke

is an exhumation, an anatomy of fire—
brutal whisper with the invisible
congregations of the soul.

Fra Angelico

Swaddled in the slant apricot glow
of a low vaulted crypt,
and I suppose the Annunciation
must have occurred
to a hundred kneeling girls
before her, who mistook it

for something ordinary—a touch
of sweet tinnitus, or the whisper
of coins, spinning faces on the cold
mosaic tiles of the emperor's tomb.
Meanwhile, in a plexiglass case,
beside the door marked 'Restoration',

ten thousand copper queens
have shoved themselves in sideways,
and as we step outside,
back into the street, everything about us
bleeds pink gold: the stone, the sun,
and the smooth, stipple-hammered sky.

The Ratio

You have often heard of the famous Miserere in Rome, which is so greatly prized that the performers are forbidden on pain of excommunication to take away a single part of it, copy it or to give it to anyone. But we have it already. Wolfgang has written it down ... as it is one of the secrets of Rome, we do not wish to let it fall into other hands...

—Leopold Mozart to his wife, 14 April 1770

I'm not saying it never happened: a child,
pinching notes from shadows, folding them
inside his hat, as a silver hood snuffs
the last of the Tenebrae candles; or wish
to cast aspersions on the miracle

of mind; I'm merely pointing out
no one has ever seen the forbidden
score, scrutinized its penmanship, measured
his success: how he painted voices
from air, unpicked the proportions

of pigment to pitch: nine tongues divvied
into mirroring choirs: one with four,
symbolizing elements—wind and earth, fire
and water—and the other, adding a fifth,
embodying the alchemy that yields

transcendence, quintessence—substance
beyond substance, figured in the figuring
of frescoes, breaking the ceiling's spine
down to repetition: Sibyls to Ignudi,
minor panels to major—senses locked

in the mathematics' mute refrain, the psalm's
syllables over-egging the echoing glaze
of plaster and hue, until they merge
into something singular, indivisible—
notes no eye can get its ears around.