

What We Keep in Clay



Photograph: "Clay Hands" by Heshani Sothiraj Eddleston. "What We Keep in Clay" was written by Hannah Siobhan for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, August 2016, and selected by Eddleston as the Artist's Choice winner.

BY HANNAH SIOBHAN

Memory has a habit of metastasizing and flooding
this house with the scent of your espresso. I called

your mother yesterday and we sat listening to
the injustice of our own ungrateful lungs still filling.

What we call dust is really flesh, and vice versa,
which is to say warmth is subjective and you and I

are eternity. I touched a hand that was not a hand;
I reached in vain for a hand that was. Like Adam

on the chapel's ceiling, a finger extended to a
tenderness I'll never reach. You are only in

photographs now. (Not photographs of you. Every
photograph.) This is my least favorite type of

ghost story. This is a haunting that reaches with
brittle fingers and tugs like a child at my sleeves.

According to some, there is a parallel universe
where Michelangelo painted the connection of

fingertips, which means in another world, Vatican
City is always smiling. All the light from God's

grinning teeth leaks like smoke from the door; you
can see the glow from space. Which is to say

there is a universe where what we call dust is
just dust. Which is to say somewhere, you can't

touch me. And I, with my own crumbling palms
reaching like sunflowers to a sky that is not the sky,

live a life that is solely mine. I eat popcorn. I brew
coffee. In photographs, I see only own soft wrists.

