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The Fish Plastique (after Elizabeth Bishop)

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The Fish Plastique

(after Elizabeth Bishop)

We had a fish who died
from cold, motionless waters,
but we found another
to take its place at home.
This new creature slept
in my hand, serene,
hard as rock, still.
Two pairs of lateral fins,
pale and bleached orange.
The face was plastic in response,
a small smile imbued
with a "Mona Lisa" glint.
Cow eyes of egg white circles
In an egg shaped body
rest in a clear glass grave,
the water in the bowl.
No gills to breathe oxygen,
nor organs for food, nor heart.
More a clock inside for a beat,
fed by batteries and electrons,
hidden by mottled scales,
the brown of earth and chestnut
and orange peel for its shell.
The little propeller spins

like a windmill without a breeze,
and the fish lives dead.
The incision at its middle opens
and the aperture of life descends-
a screwdriver that fails its task-
and the fish lies dormant,
without sight, sound, and smell.
Only feeling as the egg descends,
the triangle of a fin quiescent,
the waters without ripples,
the fish floats, bobs, and is still
on the surface of the tank.
Another fish dead, yet it remains.
No jar to clean food from
that reeks of refuse -or hairspray-
depending on the scent visible.
Still, the motionless body sits,
bobs on the surface of the bowl,
and I stare at its orange frame,
its zombie-like gaze, vacant mouth,
-tasteless, unappetizing, silent, forlorn-
like the fish that swim in sand,
the beaches covered with their dead,
motionless on a shelf in my room.

Alex Huperts, 2010