

John Gould's Hummingbird House

However many of you John Gould ordered to be killed
to fill his Hummingbird House, let's believe
there are still more of you free in the New World.

Let's leave those unnamed. Your miniature sylphs
he also hung on the walls - hundreds of lithographic plates
of blowpipe-shot or lime-stuck, or netted *murmurers*,

bourdons, tinkerbells, and in tomes where your shot
silk colours are captured in lacquers and oil glazes
over goldleaf, lemon gold, silverleaf living jewels.

Imagine a library of hummingbirds pressed into pages
of blanched forests, along with their minuscule homes
of walnut-shaped nests, or teardrops suspended by cobweb

from an aerial root. I've tried entering the kaleidoscope
hall of Gould's Hummingbird House, its doors
lured me into a mirror-room, glass sphincters of rain

closing after me like camera shutters. I breathed
arsenical soap that meant I'd never decay,
my ruby-emerald dream-skin forever intact.

Dear comets and sunangels, hermits and firecrowns,
dear brave ones who face off grown men, your wings
whirring so fast their decibels might crack bone -

whoever returns to the hummingbird house of their
ransacked childhood must bear to have their feet wired,
their wings silenced and stilled while open,

their eyes replaced by tiny beads, their narrow
needle bills forever about to drink from silk orchids.
They must wake knowing their hearts are straw.