

The Toy Ark

on writing with the archives at Woodbridge House

The children enter the nursery, two by two. On the floor, a wooden toy Ark. Here, the children play flood. They play cataclysm. They play *look, mother, the world has drowned... again*. Seeds are play, are planted into day. A new world emerges. Inside the Ark, the toymakers imagine that hyenas are green. What would their 19th Century minds make of the saola, the blossom bat, the Sundaland clouded leopard? We keep discovering newness on an ancient planet, how survival can go unseen. And was it not Noah who thought hyenas had no place on The Ark, that they could be recreated by coupling a cat with a dog? Old Testament playing God. How Naamah touched her husband's shoulder, said *If it's their laughter that troubles you, stop telling such bad jokes*. Within the hull, you can hear mammalian dreams encrusted with salt's lull. Here are two thylacines, a duet of dodos and a pair of hooded seedeaters. We know how the story ends for them: one extinction event replaced by another. Who will carry these boxes, these notes, these photographs aloft, above their shoulders, when the seawater returns to soak land. In this room, the small hands of smaller gods reach skyward to crest vessel on the mountaintop of a cedar cabinet. We could name this destination Ararat, and we have. But across the stretch of globe-swallowing wet, the ripples heave spores and seeds. To carry is to gladly hold, not knowing the future's worth. How an archive can bloom in an unknown room, write itself a poem. A kingfisher alights from the floating menagerie, inspects the drenched, spreads wings to swallow whole the water, its feathers turning bluer than blue. Tides recede. A dove made from light appears. Animals disembark, wonder where the unicorns are, if dragon survived. And in the damp soil, the drenched decay, germination is under way as green thoughts sprout and blossom, crops shift from one continent to the next. This is unwritten, but we fill in the gaps. After all, an archive is made from the spaces unsaid. On other days, the children escape this room, rapid through hallways. Serpentine, they cascade and fall downstairs, rush out doorway and whoop with animal calls as storm clouds rumble horizon. The archive captures

none of this.