

## Under Painted Stone

He waits in the shallows  
on jointed sticks for feet.  
Curving above the gray tasseled breast  
a neck better scaled than feathered  
hides a spring  
wound with iron force.

In hours of patience  
he is painted stone,  
not living.  
Then the spring bursts—  
one fierce instant  
perfect in measure  
drives his bill, steady  
as an amber lance,  
into the water.

Before the fish  
even rounds his long gullet  
the ripples are flat,  
the spring has coiled,  
all is painted stone  
and denial  
that the savage flash ever was.

by Aron Bernstein