

Stalker

Heinz Chapel, Pittsburgh

The chapel seemed an enchanted
Zone, suffused – I wanted to say –
with god instead of air. Outside, a sign
stood guard, its bulletlike letters

admitting mourners only.
Inscrutably, this let me pass,
turning elsewhere to repeat the one message
it could think to express.

Inside, the organ hushed.
It was time for words, for names, if names
can attach to dissipating things, that fracture
into memories.

And so each storyteller
grasped their segment of the mammoth,
called it “mammoth”, and tossed it on the heap
behind the podium.

The heap remained a heap
of ungarbed bones. I turned to my neighbor,
but she could feel the proboscidean’s
hot breath condensing in

the chilly air around her.
I knew then why the place felt strange:
the room was full of minds made palpable
by grief, the weight of each

pressing down, and down,
filling the empty, unfeeling space
I occupied, inhuman, cowering
behind my bootleg eyes.