

“Square Cauldron”

Around midnight, at the opening ceremony
for China's five-thousandth-year exhibition,
I stand before a square cauldron
brown and a little blue
sitting on its throne in a large glass case.

Its body decorated with animals, masks,
and nipples transports me home.
My ancestors cooked in such a pot:
meat and vegetables, stones, red mud,
wild herbs, women's milk, and enemy's bones,
nurturing our bodies and our legends.

Enemies' masks and bones are hung on bamboo sticks.
While water boiled, their women were dancing around the cauldron,
naked, more beautiful than our mothers and grandmothers.
Suddenly, in one corner of the stone hall
a skinned animal is carried in
and thrown into the cauldron:
it screams in the scalding waves.

I step back and bend down
holding my arms closely to my chest
Will I be the next one dropped into the cauldron
or must I jump into it by myself
so I can swim to the other edge of time?