

Tall Yellow Poem

(after *Tall Yellow Man*, 2003, Stephen Bird, Wollongong Art Gallery)

1.

in the long blue
from the mud of southern Iraq
he made prototypes to test

before god made adam
[take clay in hands, cup]
scapular, anvil, flexor.

though glazed & fired, he never
propped by the Dulux tins & rakes
they never wondered

said the necessary verbs, so
unensouled
what it was to be made.

2.

put the Ma pot atop the Da pot
a cup for great great gran-da
now lies abed in Acacia Creek

firm feet on the cloudplate
stack ancestor urns accordingly.
glazed in Queensland dust, sheepstation ruin
a bullet shaped to a forehead.

3.

I touch earth
the shimmer of water
iron oxide sludge
Imperial yellow of China

creek-bed of memory
the glitter of zirconium
tin-glazed majolica
17th-century Staffordshire slipware.

coathanger shoulders
woman-bowls
rich as rice pudding.

bobble-heads. Lustre of
frowns & brows

*for a lovely bowl / let's arrange these flowers...for there is no rice.*¹

fit finches in a gravy boat
sons learn the songs of their fathers

boisterous singers *beep, meep, oi! a-ha!*
with little variation; daughters don't.

bird muses in
& for eyes
sees: a hardwood floor
a blue sink (disconnected)

green whorls
a jade cup
changing frames
that Duchamp may have
appropriated

a butter dish
a fire extinguisher
from the Men's room.

4.

take whatever's to hand —
newspaper slogans
creation won't wait
squalling & rolling

kitchen stuff
a sweater from the floor.
it leans to life
onto the page

nouns
cutting through cawl
in a bloody rush.

5.

the exit/street is a surprise
construction sites men cursing

traffic, brilliance
the heat of *La Nina*.

the afternoon build-up

¹ Matsuo Basho (1644-1694)

the city, as if we've taken whatever's to hand —
bricks eucalypts a yellow fascia a fountain a teapot
— & left it there for someone else to read.

4th draft – 21 Dec.