Semblance
By Jamie Foo

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“What’s that?”
“It’s nothing, it’s hardly any good, it’s…”
“Can I…”

You asked for
Art, inspiration, expression

I can only offer you
Hastily scratched out lines
The scaffolding of an artificial construct;
Chunky blocks of words
Bound together by wispy threads of meaning;
Empty
   spaces
Because there is no full stop
To the staircases of letters piling upon letters
Taking a life of their own
Reaching an end which I cannot

...see?”

I fear its collapse,
I wish I had a blade of grass to offer you instead.

See how I try to step out the shadows of other
Tower blocks of real substance
But never quite manage to;
They that have etched themselves in the skyline of our memories
So I borrow their lights
Build upon their foundations
Plaster word tiles together
In hope that maybe, just maybe,
You will be fooled by rhyme and not reason

That I am one in a million
Even though I am really just one
Of a million

“You are such a natural at poetry, it’s like you don’t even think about it!”
observations from the construction site outside my house

By Benny Chee

to construct age add
plaster lines of concrete scars
layered discreetly

sand away and reveal

successive years emaciate and emancipate
memory and space

rising from the flat land plod
plodding plan replaced
my pale view with

artificial, frail hills

construction is one of the least productive sectors in singapore
in three years they built a hospital next to the polyclinic
now they’ve torn down the polyclinic and are building a community hospital in its place

a traveller from another land spoke to me
of an image, the skyline
turning away its former self

towards a necessary end

it comes when the rust
and detritus weaken
grains of hair

now ashened uncemented
fragments of skull mixed in an
urn, the debris of all that remains

nothing besides
gravel, granite and dust

so how does one remember the past?
They call me at once builder
and destroyer, sovereign of
masonry and mass murder; as if
the two were different things.

I did not raise Judaea without learning
that every monument is simply a different design of epitaph,
that there is just something about death and construction:
The Great Wall fossilized over a million; the Pyramids
entombed, with the Pharaohs, thousands of its builders.
Hitler’s autobahns were murderous as the man himself,
every 4 miles cost a life.
I myself built splendid pools in my palaces and
drowned my brother-in-law in one of them.

Your stories accuse me of
the massacre of innocents.
Nowadays mass infanticide is
not as easy as it was in 30 B.C.;
I simply executed my progeny.
Your people must use
‘externalities’, ‘social costs’
to poison your only inheritance, carry out
the systematic killing of your heirs.

So you see, my fratricide is trivial.
Today your dams displace more people
than water; your workers fall from scaffoldings
of iron instead of wood.
This is civilization: we enshrine, preserve,
immortalize futilely.
In trying to escape death we must create
so much of it.

In my day at least genocide
got things done. Today’s tyrants build up
only their fortunes; and you indict me,
you who landmark your world with idols.
Who is the one really trying
to kill your gods here?