



4-1-2004

Museum of Ancient Life

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Recommended Citation

Hicks, Michael (2004) "Museum of Ancient Life," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 43 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol43/iss2/8>

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Museum of Ancient Life

A leaf grins in a rock's face
as if concealing secrets:
the quiet of tree hardening to stone
or amber cupping light, careful
as water in a child's hands.
The shelves of debris proceed
by age—Pleistocene, Eocene,
Paleocene—a glass geometry cooled
by the fluorescent hum of
the Ice Age. Beside them a version
of a bird leans from his pedestal,
wings canopied as if caught in
the updraft of the past tense.
As we walk the gallery, I am
holding my son's hand the way
homonids do in this mural of a family
crossing the Bering Straits,
trudging from one era to the next
on the complicitous ocean.
They totter on feet still learning
to bear the upright beast all
the way to this place where today
my boy ascends the carpet slope
toward a forest of bones with
wonder still blowing through them,
here, where unpronounceable
names struggle to survive.
Where could Eden ever have been
but here, with no map but
ourselves, here, where the only
cost of remembrance is death.

—Michael Hicks

This poem won first place in the *BYU Studies*
2003 poetry contest.