

Vox audita perit

Voices perish
But script survives. *Littera scripta manet.*
Roman sages instruct us
to write histories
 lest truth enter a compacter,
 number-crunched into a chi-square stat,
 or power-pointed into graphs,
 transformed into official Guideline tracts.
Write stories of jealousy, zeal, and struggle
with names, locations, temperatures, and odours.
Read stories of Natasha, Emma, and Marcel
with spleen, caress, deception, and remembrance.
Art is long, but life is quickly fleeting.
Write down your heart, and heed what you are reading.

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thought, who are self-reliant and independent. Too, people of her generation often possess a deep confidence in their own physicians. But hardiness and loyalty alone could not explain her reluctance to come to hospital. There must have been an element of denial, surely. Though I didn't ask, I also wondered if all the media coverage of ER crowding had discouraged her from seeking help.

As it turned out, a plain x-ray demonstrated patchy irregularities in the left side of the pelvis, indicative of metastatic cancer.

And while cancer of the breast was a possibility, the physical examination did not support this diagnosis. The chest x-ray revealed the lung as the likely source of the primary malignancy.

"Mrs. Johnston, the x-rays don't look so good," I said, looking into her eyes, hoping to find trust reflected back.

"Oh?" she said, turning away from my gaze, pain visible on her brow.

"I'm afraid not. There is something in the bones around your hip that

shouldn't be there, which is causing all this discomfort." I waited, watching her face, and wondered if the thought of cancer had occurred to her, if perhaps the fear of it had prevented her from seeking help sooner. She seemed to understand that I had avoided labeling her condition, yet she did not ask me to

elaborate. I realized that she wasn't ready for me to confirm her apprehension; I held my tongue.

"I'm going to admit you to hospital. Looks like we haven't controlled that pain yet, so we'll give you some more medication in the intravenous. You'll receive a regular dose of strong painkillers to keep you comfortable. I'll speak to our doctor-of-the-day. She's very nice and a good family doctor. You'll like her."

"Oh, I hope so."

As the day proceeded, Mrs. Johnston rested on her stretcher. I checked on her later to find that she was numb with morphine. Eventually, this elderly woman with death on the tip of her

tongue, her life in flashes before her eyes, was pushed to the back of my consciousness. The team, the nurses and I, carried on with the work at hand. She was still in the department long after I left for the day.

A few weeks later, I ran into the physician who had been assigned to her care. "How is Mrs. Johnston?"

"Well, she seemed to go along okay, initially. I excised one of those subcutaneous nodules, which confirmed a primary lung carcinoma, a large-cell."

She had been switched to oral morphine and anti-inflammatories. Arrangements for a consultation at the cancer clinic were made to see if palliative radiation was an option. She never made it. One morning, practically the day after the diagnosis was confirmed, she woke up and announced she was no longer interested in eating. She died within a few days.

But she was comfortable, apparently, right to the end.

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Lifeworks

Soul searching

There's an inevitable intimacy that develops when one looks at the photographs of Andrea Modica. Perhaps it's the luminescent quality and small scale of her prints that force the viewer to bond with her images. Or perhaps it's the dotting attention she gives to her subjects that enables us to lose ourselves in their stories. Either way, whatever the subject, her images always engage us in narratives that allow us to share in a wider vision. This blanket of intimacy extends into Modica's recent work, *Human Being*, which premiered at the Edwynn Houk Gallery in New York City from May 10 to June 30 this year.

Working alongside scientists, Mod-

ica spent over a year photographing skulls unearthed on the grounds of the Colorado Mental Health Institute in Pueblo, Colorado. In 1993 prison inmates breaking ground for a new hospital wing discovered the skeletons of 100 people secretly buried in a mass grave a century ago. A monograph accompanying the exhibition includes descriptions by forensic anthropologist Michael Hoffman of the skulls' evidence of syphilis, dental abscesses and mental retardation. Although Modica's artistic examination is equally precise, it takes a dramatically different direction.

To make her images, Modica uses an 8" x 10" view camera; this cumbersome equipment, and the slow working

pace that it requires, compliments the thoughtfulness and contemplative imagination with which she approaches her subject. Paradoxically, Modica has noted that it was because of the formality and precision of her images that the skulls began to take on a more human aura. This humanness is in striking contrast to the scientific language used to describe the skulls. The forensic description of *A15: male, 56 years old*, for example, tells us that there is a lesion involving the bone above the left front teeth, "probably the result of an abscess." However, Modica's image stares in quiet contemplation. There is a desperation in the sad tug of the eyes. This is a portrait, not a record of physi-