

By the Tennessee River

by Jefferson Holdridge

In an aquarium filled
With fluorescent
Coralstone, a seahorse
Swam upright,
As though
By force of will.

Another bobbed by the glass,
Turning from side
To side, gazing
Into a one-way mirror,
While hundreds
Watched then passed

Its tender show of cursed
Self-consciousness,
Held at pressure
In filtered water and light,
Which an ocean
Would cloud and burst.

Inside a nearby tank
The leafy seadragon
Half seahorse, half kelp
Moved very slowly
Not to seem alive,
As it rose and sank

On currents pulsing through
The artificial realm
Of underwater
Captives, resigned
To stifled instincts
Becoming something new.