

# The Art Room

By Shara McCallum

for my sisters

Because we did not have threads  
of turquoise, silver, and gold,  
we could not sew a sun nor sky.  
And our hands became balls of fire.  
And our arms spread open like wings.

Because we had no chalk or pastels,  
no toad, forest, or morning-grass slats  
of paper, we had no colour  
for creatures. So we squatted  
and sprang, squatted and sprang.

Four young girls, plaits heavy  
on our backs, our feet were beating  
drums, drawing rhythms from the floor;  
our mouths became woodwinds;  
our tongues touched teeth and were reeds.

Notes:

The epigraph of this poem was originally omitted in the changeover to the new website. Because of this, reciting the epigraph is optional for the 2019-2020 Poetry Out Loud season.

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Source: *Song of Thieves* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003)



Shara McCallum was born in Jamaica to an African Jamaican father and a Venezuelan mother and moved to the United States with her family when she was nine. A professor of English and the director of the Stadler Center for Poetry at Bucknell University, McCallum is the recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her work considers the intersections of race,

gender, history, and personal identity; in an interview, she noted that "poetry helps me explore the ways we understand complex notions of identity, whether that's personal, familial, or cultural."

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