

"Long Division" by Tara Betts

How many decades of calendars reveal what is starkly plantation?
How wide the green fields are within the walls. Floors polished
spotless as walls sag with layers of paint older than me. It is endless
counting for the regimented lines to meals, walks within gated yards
for men on crutches, infinite uniforms to wash, dawns and nights,
but time hangs, looms for acts committed so quickly (or not). Time
lassoes anchors to their necks - most of those necks are dark
inheritors of knotted rope legacies. Moments in a classroom
with a broken window remind me of younger students, but they are
men, men who are fathers and uncles, in a place where books are
minted as rare capital. They think. I am sitting at a table full
of black and brown men in a classroom which never happens
outside these walls. The wrongness of prisons and schools collide.
The grand execution of an intentional mistake, and intentional means
a deliberate act, not an accident. An accident is not orderly rows
or an easy rhythm to follow. Recovering from accidents is easier.
The frittering away of lives behind concrete and bars punches
into registers, rings incessantly - calculated yet incalculable.