A Requiem
Sam Hickford

For my sister, Amber.

"What can I say? Some people have princesses and fairies. Others have the Amber Room." - Professor Eichwede

 Mosaics of lizard-claw, or wilted tree
fall, or have fallen, & sailors puzzle over
the mosaics they're aflame with: eternities
 in relics, whole memories of supernovas

or fragments that the forest meant to leave
 behind - as small, faint prints to mark itself -
before it sank into the Baltic Sea
 with only brittle stories left to tell.

One architect had longed for cities, built
  from every imprint that the waves consumed
of amber-work. These dreams subsided, then distilled
  into the private, contemplative room

of Catherine, whose meditations filled
  every inch of fragile panel, fears
departing, leaping out against the stilled
 breath-shadow, or crystallised as regal tears

haunting the final tsar when he was quelled
 & lineages bled into the lines
of primal sense. Thus, later, when the Nazis shelled
 Leningrad in murderous rampage, they were kind

to the ghost-room, which they carefully compelled
 into the particles which made it up
and took it to Köningsberg. & when the Russians
 swept into that ambered town, they took

no such care, burning every shard of sculpted dream
 in auto-vengeance; burning the German castle down
which cradled those mosaics, burning every gleam
 of Russian treasure, kept within the proud

fortress of a false and bourgeois queen.
 I am trying to find one hint of you

here, but it was torched to smithereens
 and nothing remains - not ash or any residue -

though when I search enough, a tactile sound
 swirls, & strokes the gutter; although no trace
of the room that you dismantled can be
 found, something survives of the embrace.

and so I mark a new room every day
 and dwell within that anechoic chamber
for a moment; watching you quickly fade
 hearing your silent voice becoming fainter:

 a room made out of whatever, at all, became
  'treasure'; broken plastics; bits of twine,
wattled in some image of your name,
   destroyed, before I ever stay inside.