

What the Next Cornell Box Might Contain

--After seeing the Joseph Cornell boxes at the Art Institute of Chicago.

A soap-bubble pipe,
Its shank snapped.
Turning out from the bowl:
A ballerina in pirouette.

Lithium batteries stacked
Like nickels. A coin slot
Riveted to the box's back:
Your fortune, 5¢.

A Cornell family portrait:
His brother Robert
On a tricycle,
Not in his wheelchair.

Shards of a phone screen,
An internet search, frozen:
"Ballerinas of Our Time"
Caught in the glass.

Two *foosballs*, dirty
From too many games:
Three holes in the floor
Labeled Joseph, Robert, Mother.

A dollhouse wheelchair—
A doll in it, facing away.
His straw boater
With a grosgrain ribbon.

An amber vial
Without its childproof cap:
Three pills stuck
To the bottom like stars.

From a screen in the top:
The scent of *parfum*,
Worn by his mother
Who lives in this box.

A photo of Robert smiling
On his brother's back:
Carried by Joseph.

Charles Israel, Jr.
cisraeljr@gmail.com