

The Running of the Bulls

They hide in darkness
except at sunset for a few days
around the winter solstice,
when robed men with torches reach deep enough
to light the sacred walls.
And then the massive herds
of equine and bison and stag
but most of all the bulls—
the magnificent aurochs who rule
the caves of Lascaux—
all spring to life
to race again across the plains
they once called home,
returning, moments later, to their darkened crypt.

Perhaps it was to ensure their reappearance,
when the snows receded
and flowers once again filled the valley,
that their hosts bargained with these beasts
to exchange their shadows for an imperfect immortality.
Maybe it was to teach the youngest
the dangers and opportunities of the hunt,
or even to compile some ancient Almagest
in pictorial form
anticipating the menagerie of constellations
racing across our skies.
But most likely their hosts
simply had no choice.

-- Larry Stiles