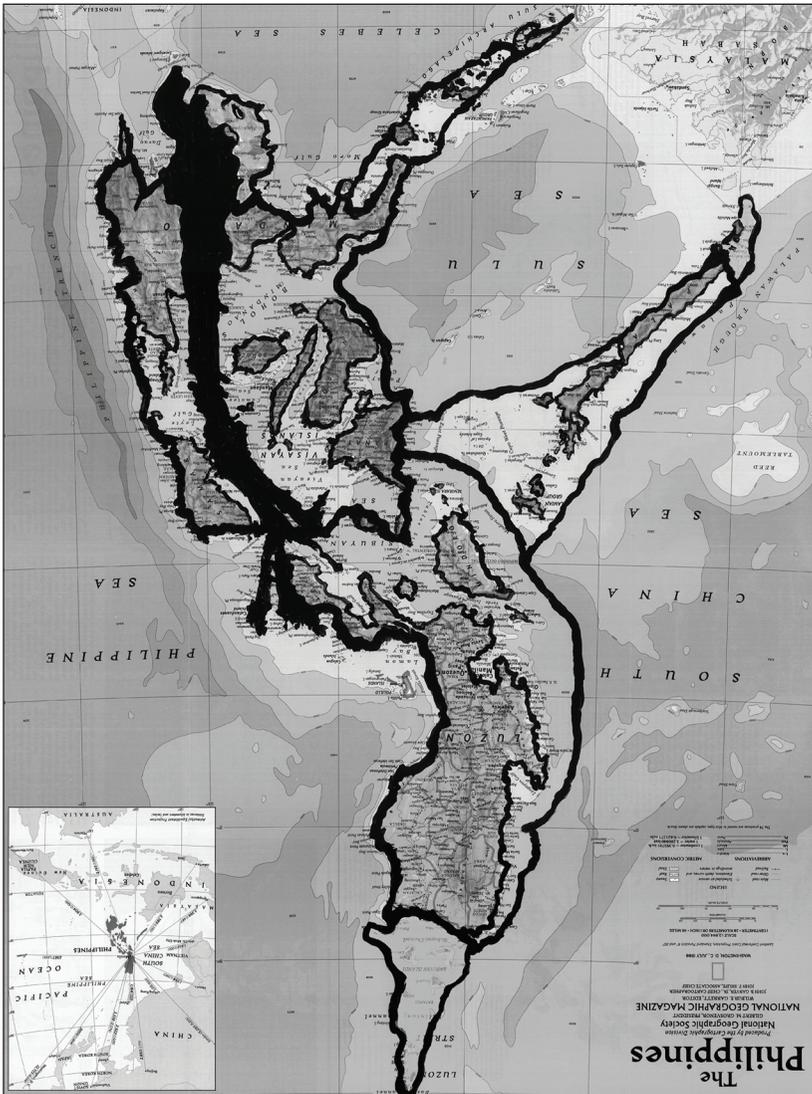


Folio



Ingrid Dabringer, "Phillippines," 2010, medium, paper map and acrylic, 20" x 27".

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Editor's Notes

It's a great pleasure to feature new poems by January Gill O'Neil in Folio.

In this selection from *Little Misery* (currently under review), the experience of mothering is viewed against the backdrop of divorce with its attendant disruptions to domestic life. We encounter a mother's attempts to come to terms with the dissolution of a marriage and an equally compelling imperative—to shape the rough material of life into art. In “The Year in Review,” the speaker describes her neighbors splashing in their new hot tub, a vivid scene that inevitably conjures the memory of the spouse who “displaced us as freely as water.” Looking back at her struggle to salvage the marital bond, she recalls how “the word ‘maybe’ pivoted/like a turnstile in the middle of our fights,” all effort leading to a “soul crushing” recognition that “everything alive in the world survives by adapting.”

O'Neil probes the smallest moments of domestic life, capturing the tender exchanges between mother and child in closely observed scenes. Whether shampooing a child's hair or making a late dinner as her children look on, the poet finds laughter and, at times, a measure of grace. “In Never Let Them See You Cry,” we encounter the familiar struggle of mothers to shield their children from emotional pain. Here, the mother's gardening becomes a source of solace and a means of redemption. The backyard she works to transform may be a stony ground with “tulips choked by rot underneath” but any tears she sheds at her losses, the poet suggests, can be buried in the yard along with “everything else/you hope might grow.” Her hard work ultimately yields results, as when her shears “clip forsythia branches/for the dining room table.” Beauty may not come easily, O'Neil observes, but it is a gift that can be steadily cultivated.

There's wry commentary and good-humored reflection in O'Neil's poems

about the challenges of sustaining an artistic vocation while fulfilling the myriad duties that fall to a divorced mother. She imagines how her children, once grown, might portray her in books of their own, and considers her desire to fill “the world with words/because like seashells/you can never have too many.”

Elsewhere, O’Neil writes frankly about race, particularly those circumstances in which she must confront societal response to her children’s biracial identity. “Don’t be surprised/if the other kids/wonder what you are,” she warns as she prepares her son for kindergarten. Confident that with her guidance, her children will “claim” their own “place in the world,” the poet in her must also imagine the awkward exchanges to be faced: the school children “who don’t know/it’s impolite to ask/ ‘Where’s your mama?’” remain oblivious to the fact she stands there, right next to her son, “cautious as a nanny.” About the poems in *Little Misery*, O’Neil writes, “My goal always is to temper the emotion with craft, and make the best poetry I can out of heartbreak.” A poet who is not afraid to confront life’s difficult questions, O’Neil describes the art of poetry as a quest to “make something out of nothing, and of making the ordinary extraordinary.” Hers is a vision of resilience and hope.

January Gill O’Neil is the author of *Underlife* (CavanKerry Press, 2009). Her poems and articles have appeared in *North American Review*, *The MOM Egg*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Ouroboros Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Callaloo*, *Literary Mama*, *Field*, *Seattle Review*, and *Cave Canem* anthologies II and IV, among others. *Underlife* was a finalist for ForeWord Reviews Book of the Year Award, and the 2010 Paterson Poetry Prize. O’Neil has received a Money for Women/Barbara Deming Memorial Fund grant and was recently featured in *Poets & Writers* magazine’s January/February 2010 Inspiration issue as one of its 12 debut poets. She is board member/planning committee member for the 2012 Massachusetts Poetry Festival. A Cave Canem fellow, January is a senior writer/editor at Babson College, runs a popular blog called Poet Mom (<http://poetmom.blogspot.com>), and lives with her two children in Beverly, Massachusetts.

—Jane Satterfield