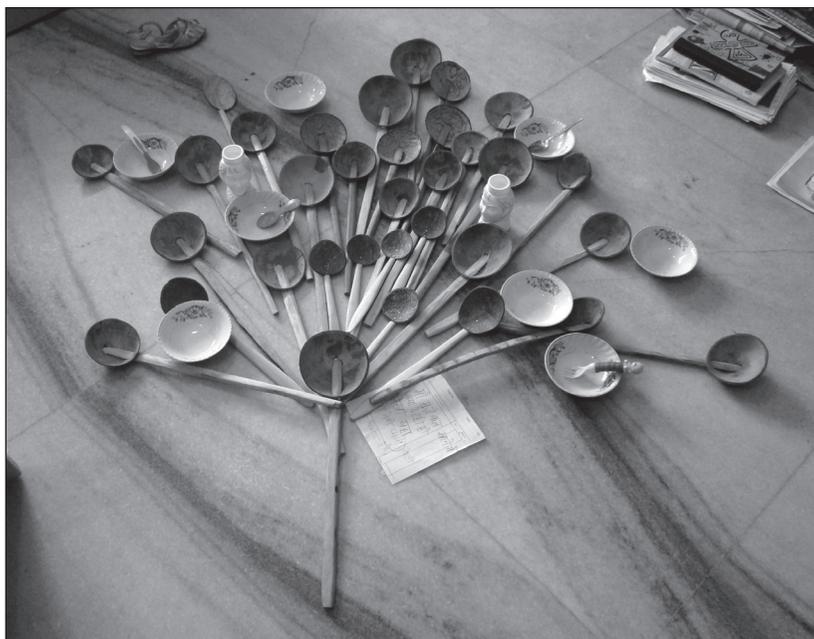


Folio



*Ruchika Wason Singh, "Home is Where the Heart is — III," (Project Home In/ Out), 2010,
Found objects from the kitchen and my daughter's room, size variable.*

Editor's Notes

It's a great pleasure to feature Joelle Biele in this issue of *Folio*. Joelle Biele is the author of *White Summer* (Southern Illinois University Press) and *Broom* (Bordighera Press) and the editor of *Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker: The Complete Correspondence*. Her essays, fiction, and book reviews appear in *American Poetry Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Harvard Review*, and *Kenyon Review*. Her play, *These Fine Mornings*, was first read at the University of Chicago with the support of the Poetry Foundation. The recipient of awards from the Poetry Society of America and the Maryland State Arts Council, she has been a Fulbright professor in Germany and Poland and taught literature and creative writing at Goucher College, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Maryland. Her new book, *Tramp*, will be published by Louisiana State University Press.

Biele's verse is widely admired for its lush lyricism and formal rigor. Poet Susan Mitchell has praised Biele's work for the "incantatory surge of a music rare in today's poetry." David Baker, poetry editor of the *Kenyon Review*, observes that the poems in *Broom*, Biele's second poetry collection, are "equally tender and candid, secured by the rigors of their formal designs and the watchful hand and eye of the mother."

In this selection, readers will encounter rich domestic tableaux that illuminate the complex relationships of parents and children without sentimentality. Her affinity with literary heroine Elizabeth Bishop is evident in her stunningly precise observations of the natural world rendered in carefully modulated registers of emotion.

Whatever the experience that captures her attention—an event that's joyful or significantly less so—Biele's gaze remains unflinching. The painful loss of "Miscarriage" is set against the backdrop of a seemingly pastoral scene. The

chance sighting of three floating swans—an emblem of poetic beauty—veers toward a darker truth; Biele’s measured lines recreate the sudden onset of disaster, zeroing in the moment when the current pulls a cygnet under, “It went/fast,” she observes, “The mother, she reared up, fanned/her wings, she made a sound I did not hear.” The image conveys the shocking recognition of maternal helplessness and sets off another surprising rhetorical turn as the speaker reflects on her own stunned response to the loss: “Love,” she writes, “when you came home I asked you/to clean the bathroom floor. Forgive me./I wanted it to happen to you.” With vivid detail, “Apologia” captures the scope and depth of emotion felt by new mothers who simultaneously encounter unprecedented joy and physical exhaustion:

...I only had a vague idea of what
mothering would be, that it hurt, that
I was tired, that I wanted it to stop,

that some part of me thought I could
stare death in the eye, yank it from the corners.

Biele’s vision—one where a sense of wit and wonder coexist in delicate balance—shines in finely-honed miniatures where a child’s actions prompt bemused meditation: a fourteen month-old, testing her mother’s patience as much as the laws of gravity, tosses a cup to the floor “[t]oo see if it will fall, and if it does,/how far,” probing if the resulting impact “will rage like a lost penny/or ring like a Chinese gong—” (“To Katharine: at Fourteen Months”); a toddler who whisks a broom through leaves in the backyard becomes a “drum major/or majorette, pendulum or metronome,/^h” as he begins to “swing to a waltz Strauss never knew” (“To Andrew: at Seventeen Months”).

Though Biele’s poems embody an intense interiority, they nonetheless reflect a greater historical resonance, as seen in “Birthday Poem,” where the speaker muses on the context of her own birth into a world where “Americans were bombing/Cambodia while the Vietcong was bombing Saigon, the sea/had not yet begun to rise though temperatures had, and the Grateful Dead/played the Fillmore the first of four nights.” Biele’s descriptions of a ’60s-era medicalized birth (father absent due to work, mother “shaved, put under, not to meet me/ until the next day when the nurse entered the room, muttering,/^h“Poor thing.”) build to powerful insights about fate, daily life, and the way memory—private or shared—forms a necessary stay against the shifting currents of time.

In an interview for *Balancing the Tide*, Biele describes the act of writing about motherhood as a “feminist act.” “Women must define it for themselves,” she observes, “otherwise it will be defined for them.” At the same time, poetry is

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deeply intimate, a correspondence which grants a mother the freedom to speak frankly to her children and “to show them the world with as much complexity as I can.” Biele’s commentary—part of poet Molly Sutton Kiefer’s illuminating blog interview series with writing mothers—offers a lively glimpse into the artistic process and can be read in full here: <http://www.balancingthetide.com/2015/07/joelle-biele.html>.

—Jane Satterfield