

## HOW IT BEGINS

My mother watched me  
make papier-mâché worlds  
from newspaper strips

soaked in flour and water  
wrapped around  
an inflated balloon

dried, hardened,  
a melon-sized oval  
the texture

of a hornets' nest.  
Already stung by the hornets  
infesting the center of the world,

my mother  
smoked cigarettes  
looking out the kitchen window.

I rubbed the wet brush  
on the button-shaped colors  
painting over the flaky

headlines and newsprint  
in my version  
of the world's colors and shapes:

square house,  
stick figure family,  
my mother expressionless with

the two black dot eyes  
and flat red mouth  
I could manage at six.

Rather than look at my world  
she stared out the window  
at her own that she fled at six

(how could I even  
comprehend it) Poland,  
Brest Litovsk, 1933

local workshirt  
thugs with clubs  
widening paths

for the coming Nazis  
who carried off  
her mutilated grandparents

aunts, uncles, cousins  
to feed the larvae  
of the master race.

Today, in America, face-masked ICE is kicking in  
grandparents' doors, rounding up  
factory workers from the auto plant,

farm workers from the harvest,  
students as they leave  
apartments or compact cars

to hurry to class, and stuffing them in  
complicit prisons. National  
Guard troops

with automatic weapons  
infest cities like locusts  
in green and beige fatigues.

Scared children peek from windows.  
Husbands and wives  
whisper into the night.

No one sleeps.  
*This is how it begins*  
I imagine my mother saying

even though she hardly ever speaks,  
cigarette smoke forming  
grey curtain over white curtain.

I remember sometimes  
I would crush  
the papier-mâché —

ripping and squeezing  
shards as if from a hollow  
hatched egg.

Someone is always  
tearing the world apart  
with nothing but malevolent bare hands.