

**BLAGOVESTA  
PUGYOVA**

## Circus Octopus

—Translated from the Bulgarian  
by Ilya Kaminsky and Eireene Nealand

I am an octopus balanced on eight  
tentacles, which I clench like tree roots  
to stay afloat; I'm fine like this:  
when one tentacle trembles,  
I cling to the other seven  
and manage to remain afloat.  
When friendship, shaken, drops out,  
when my career goes away, along with money,  
I realize hunger is not dead in this city,  
and lean toward my love of children.  
This, too, however, shivers—leave them to grow.  
God, forgive me, they'll improve on their own.  
Listing into romance, I slowly tip toward it.  
Do you love me when I tremble? I lean in slowly,  
knowing when you leave, you'll be replaced by others.  
Yet, my parents are shaking—get used to it, that happens,  
what pleasure isn't empty? Such dreams we had . . .  
it happens . . . you can definitely get used to it.  
Though as humanity is slowly plucked from me,  
this unsuccessful circus octopus  
sinks into the water and goes.

**Blagovesta Pugyova** is the founder of Podarete Knigi, the Give a Book Foundation, which matches orphans with adult mentor-friends who share favorite books on their visits to orphanages. This work has won her multiple awards, including Human of the Year and the Contributor to Freedom Award, and it has been a strong influence on her poetry.

**Ilya Kaminsky** was born in Odessa, Ukraine, and currently lives in San Diego, California.

**Eireene Nealand** was a 2014–2015 Fulbright Fellow in Sofia, Bulgaria. Her most recent book, *The Nest: Tales from Bela Rechka*, documents a village revival project in northwest Bulgaria.

**DAVID FLEMING**

*Our Checkered Path*, 2018  
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in

