

## SHERIÉ FRANSEN

*One Note from One Bird*, 2014  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 57 in



COURTESY DOLBY CHADWICK GALLERY

## DAN WHITE

# Stories of Displacement

Fiction writer  
Molly Antopol  
and the making of  
*The UnAmericans*

**M**olly Antopol spent a decade working on her first short story collection, *The UnAmericans*; but the hinges in her fiction, the moments of revelation, came to her effortlessly. A young couple discovers a vault of hidden paintings that reveals a dead relative's secret infidelity, with grave implications for their own relationship. A father makes a rash decision to sabotage his daughter's efforts to honor him. A boy commits an impulsive act of theft to honor his blacklisted and disgraced father. Those moments are crucial in her stories, which are set in Israel, the Soviet Union, and America. She tells the stories of people who have lost their place and the young people who inherit the displacement. Long hours of preparation, drafting, redrafting, and research help her achieve these all-important moments; but the answers rarely come when she's sitting at a keyboard. They come when she's as far removed from her work as possible: taking a walk somewhere or swimming alone in a lake. Effort and preparation, including travel, interviews, multiple drafts, and intensive research, make such moments possible, and yet they feel received and mysterious.

Antopol is getting high praise for *The UnAmericans*. She received the National Book Foundation's 2013 "5 Under 35" award in the fall of 2013 (Karen Russell and Téa Obreht are past honorees), and was longlisted for the National Book Award. But her vision and the seriousness of her intent were present from the beginning.

Antopol earned her BA from UC Santa Cruz in 2000. The fiction writer, memoirist, and UC Santa Cruz literature and creative writing professor Micah Perks was her first writing mentor. "When Molly was my student, I was struck by her ambition and her willingness to work hard," Perks recalls. "I remember her coming to office hours often to talk about writing and books, and I remember how carefully she read Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants,' and how she then went on to experiment with subtext and dialogue in her own fiction. When you see a student reading like a writer, it's always a good sign. Even as an undergrad she won a literary magazine prize for one of her stories. At that time she was writing moody relationship stories, and I was surprised and gratified that her work took on deep historical dimensions in *The UnAmericans*."

This winter, Antopol spoke with *Catamaran* about her passion for fiction and teaching (she is a Jones lecturer at Stanford), her trouble with happy endings, and the roles of discovery, fate, and chance in the creation and development of a short story.

—Dan White