

BETSEY BATCHELOR

Curb Appeal, 2019
Oil on canvas, 38 x 48 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST

CATHERINE SEGURSON

We're Not Alone

An interview with
Gina Ochsner

CATHERINE SEGURSON: Let's start at the beginning, when we first met at the summer literary seminars in Prague. So of course when we met, neither of us really had published anything at that point.

GINA OCHSNER: We had high hopes. We had dreams.

CS: I remember you were in the fiction workshop with Stuart Dybek, and I was in Valerie Martin's class. Looking back, do you think Stuart Dybek had an influence on how you approached becoming a writer?

GO: He was everything you'd hope a workshop leader would be: evenhanded with the stories, generous with students, generous with his commentary, articulate and intelligent. And I remember one thing, it's just stuck with me all these years. Somebody asked him, do you have to be a good person to be a good writer? And without batting an eyelash, he said yes. And of course, we can look at writers who aren't kind people who went on to do really well, but I think he was suggesting that how you live your life does matter. It is important how you treat people. It does make a difference. And I think it certainly can't hurt your writing. It certainly can't hurt your empathy for your characters if you yourself are an empathetic person. And again, he was so helpful to us and encouraging. When one of my first stories found a happy home, he heard about it.

He wrote me a letter, "Congratulations! A cheer went up from northern Michigan!" or something like that.

CS: Were there any other influences you had early on in your writing career?

GO: So as a student in a graduate writing program, I remember one of our instructors was Ehud Havazelet, a fabulous, truly good person who gave us some invaluable advice. We were also very desperate and angsty and anxious about getting published and being recognized and all of that. And he told us, and I thought this is really good advice, "You're in a graduate writing program. Your job is to learn the craft of writing. Your job is to immerse yourself in the art of storytelling and to love story and love words. That's your job. Worry about publication later, particularly after you feel like you've attained or have a handle on some of these craft techniques." How liberating! No longer did we need to shoulder the burden of publishing—especially publishing before we were really ready.

So I really was thinking about that after I left the program. And the beautiful thing and the awful thing leaving the program is that I had been given all this great advice and wisdom, but I wasn't wise enough to sort it all out. Some of the writing tips and advice seemed contradictory. For me it took a couple of years for the dust to settle, so to speak. Then I started to have a few aha moments when bits and pieces of instruction and advice began to clarify. I had some moments where I thought: "I think this is what it means to write a story. I think this is what the natural shape or contour of this particular story might be." I was becoming a better reader of my own work and a better reader of stories in general. Other crucial advice: read the *AWP Chronicle*, read *Poets & Writers*. Do go and see what the world of writing looks like. I subscribed to *AWP's Chronicle* and was so glad for it because each issue contained essays pertaining to craft, often one for poetry, one for fiction/creative nonfiction. Each issue contained an interview with an author doing something innovative. The back pages usually contained information about residencies, grant opportunities, and calls for submissions from various journals. That's how I learned that such journals existed and that some were not only not opposed to looking at work from new writers but actively seeking such work.

Imagine! So I started sending a few stories out. I learned quickly that I'd have to develop the skin of a rhino. Many writers talk about this, because rejection is a very real thing and it always stings a little bit, sometimes more than a little bit. But I've saved every rejection. I have a file of them three fingers thick.

CS: When you started writing short stories and sending them out after our writing conference together in Prague, it seemed to me like you were getting accepted everywhere in the beginning.

GO: I've gone through it all and calculated that for every yes, there were ninety-five nos.

CS: Oh wow. Okay.

GO: I learned, too, that I needed to research what sorts of things different journals might be interested in. When I first started sending out stories, I'd send them anywhere and everywhere, even if the name of a journal was *Fly, Rod, and Reel* or *Crochet for Kids!* or something. I really didn't know what I was doing. I decided to subscribe to about four or five journals and read them carefully. I wanted to learn about the different ways people architect story and what, if any, limitations the short form imposes on structure, content, or anything else. I discovered that by reading these journals, particularly if they contained essays on craft or interviews, I could, in a sense, extend the education I'd begun while in a writing program. And another discovery: as I read these literary journals, I felt as if I was part of a body of writers, a living conversation between writers geographically scattered, but gathered there in print. And it was so cool—still is—to encounter these different voices and visions.

I have such admiration for people who edit and publish literary journals. The hours, the work—the love—that goes into them is just phenomenal. And I'll say as a younger writer starting out, I had no idea what effort it required from the editors and assistants to bring into the world these amazing showcases of art and talent.

CS: That's also what I love about what I do as an editor for a literary journal. I feel like I'm part of the community of

writers. It's amazing to continuously discover what other writers are doing.

GO: Yes! And so when students visit me in my office and they say, "I feel so isolated," one of the things I ask them is "What is your writing community? Have you done some things to try to become part of something? Are you subscribing to any literary journals?" And nowadays with some of them being online, there's even more opportunity for writers to engage. Then I urge them to check out a writing conference. There are so many good ones out there and of course, Catamaran being one of the first conferences that comes to mind. We're not alone, as writers. We really can connect with others and find inspiration, instruction, and encouragement.

CS: That's how we met, at a writers' conference!

GO: I know. And it's been great.

CS: How many years ago was that?

GO: Oh, it's probably twenty-four, twenty-five years ago.

CS: So it's good to put yourself out there at these short writing conferences. That's what I always try to tell people, that even though the conference itself is only a week or two, the connections you make can last for a long time. Like ours did, and now here we are, still helping each other twenty-five years later.

GO: Right. You go to these things and meet others who, like you, like me, are looking for literary connections. And then you find that one person, or if you're lucky, more than one person. Maybe it was in a workshop or seminar or during a meal, and you get to talking and find, that wow—we're writing in a similar genre. We're working on a similar aesthetic. We might be good readers of each other's work. And then before you know it, you found somebody.

CS: And how did you go from submitting short stories to journals to publishing a book-length collection of those stories?

GO: I was really enthralled with Flannery O'Connor and I was reading her stories. I read that she had peacocks, and I'm, like, talking to myself while I'm washing dishes or something. A sort of talking-out-loud/praying-out-loud sort of thing, and I said, "Oh Lord, I just want to be more like Flannery O'Connor and write stories and have peacocks." My husband was walking through the hallway and heard me and in a voice like thunder said, "No peacocks!" And so then I made a hasty edit and said, "Oh Lord, please help me be more like Flannery O'Connor and write stories!" I had eleven or twelve stories at this point in time, and some of them had been out to journals, a lot of them had been rejected, and I had been reworking them. So I bundled these all up and I sent them off to the University of Georgia Press, because I'd read that they had a special connection with Flannery O'Connor and they sponsored the Flannery O'Connor Award for short fiction. I mailed those stories and totally forgot about them. And so then nine months later, the phone rings, and there's this man's voice on the other end and he's got a Georgian accent and he's asking for me. And I just thought, "That just takes the cake, these darn telemarketers. They're calling from across the country." And I hung up on him.

CS: Oh no. Oh my God.

GO: And then few minutes later, the phone rings again, it's the same man and he says, "Mrs. Ochsner, this is the series editor of University of Georgia. Do not hang up."

CS: Wow. You almost missed your chance.

GO: Yes, and I'll tell you ever since then, I don't hang up on telemarketers. There's one who's called on a couple of occasions selling this thing and that and we've had some hilarious conversations. His name is Ivan, so if you get a call from him, don't hang up. He's really, really funny. But back to the collection. They did such a terrific job and the cover art is so contemplative and pensive and glorious all at the same time. Michael Wilson is an amazing photographer. Anyway, at this point I had just met my agent. I was writing more stories, still sending out others that hadn't been part of that first collection. I really didn't think of myself as a real author yet. I was raising small

children, and I would have little Post-it notes and notepads and slips of paper and envelopes, specks of envelopes, and I would jot things down, and I almost always had a journal or literary magazine in the front seat of the car with me so I could be writing or reading always.

CS: I remember even in Prague you had a notebook that you took notes in everywhere we went. That was one of the things that attracted me to you, because I was also carrying around a sketchbook, drawing things and making notes while sitting on a bench in the plaza like you were.

GO: Yeah. I wanted to remember everything: the rose garden by the Strahov Monastery, the statues on Charles Bridge, the texture—rubbery!—of ox-tongue salad. Anything and everything went into that notebook. I've always been a notebook person. Sounds like you have been too. It was there that I think we were introduced to some amazing writers who visited to give a lecture or a reading, Ivan Klíma being one of them. And I do like his work very much. Another writer I greatly admire is Bohumil Hrabal. He wrote a book called *Too Loud a Solitude*. And I'll tell you, that book changed my life.

CS: I went to a lecture by him about the Velvet Revolution. He's incredible.

GO: Reading his book changed my life. The way tragedy is undercut with bawdy humor—the grotesque—is so finely wrought, so carefully balanced. And his lyric register is so beautiful, but it's also really quirky and he can get really philosophical, but it doesn't feel heavy or dry.

CS: That reminds me of your first book, *The Necessary Grace to Fall*, the collection of short stories that won the Flannery O'Connor Award. What do you remember most about that experience?

GO: My most vivid memory was visiting the university and there they have a special room in their library dedicated to Flannery O'Connor. And there's a picture of her, she's probably three years old, and she's looking at a book, it's like primer or maybe a fairy-tale book for young children or something, and she's just scowling at it! I love that

photo—even at that tender age she knew what she liked and didn’t like in a story!

CS: So then after that, you continued just to write short stories?

GO: I did. And I’ll say I was not one of these super-confident writers who thought, “Gee, I’m really making my way in the writing world.” I still was like, “I don’t even know if I’m a writer.” I had this feeling that probably I would be a writer and that the writing would tend toward the speculative and the magic realism. It just seemed to me like lots of fun. So I kept writing away, but it was a more realistic story that I sent to the *New Yorker*.

CS: I was going to ask you about that. I remember phoning you to congratulate you on your *New Yorker* story. Do you want to share how that happened?

GO: So a little context: I didn’t know that there was a way to do these things and not do these things. Before the first story collection came out and before I had an agent, I was writing stories and I think maybe my dad said something to me like, “Hey, what’s one of the best magazines in the world? That’s where you should send your work. Shoot for the stars.” And I thought, “Okay,” and I sent off a story and I got a little itty bitty rejection letter that said, “Thanks.” And I thought, “Hey, that’s progress!”

CS: I know people say that you can tell how much they like it by the size of the rejection because there’s the little tiny slip, the one that’s about the size of a bookmark, the postcard size, and then there’s a full letter size. I have to say, I once received a full-size rejection letter for a story I had sent to the *New Yorker*. I was proud of it in a weird way, the fact that they took the time to say they liked my character but that the ending wasn’t surprising enough. But in the end, they’re all rejections.

GO: Yes. I kept sending stories and the rejection letters started getting bigger. And then one was full letter size that said something like, “This one showed some promise. There’s something interesting happening in the middle.” And then there were initials, not a name, we were not on

a name basis yet. And the collection was scheduled for publication and about this time, my agent contacted me and we agreed we’d be a good fit. So I sent another story off. And I got a phone call, a phone message.

CS: So that’s how you found out, you got a phone call?

GO: Yes. They called me and left me a message on my phone. And it was a voice of a man and he identified himself and he says, “I cannot make any promises because we’re not taking it as is, but I would be willing to take another look at it if you would do some more work on it.” This was a very, very generous offer and I knew it and I set out to try revise the story in a substantive way. And he also said, “You can send it directly to me or send it to your agent and have her send it to me.” And that’s when I think I got clued in to the fact that perhaps some editors prefer to have things come to them through agents.

CS: Then you luckily had an agent who could send it in after the revisions.

GO: Yes, and then we got a phone call; they were going to take the story “Fractious South.” But that story was I think the twelve or thirteenth story I had sent in.

CS: How did that feel? Did you feel like you were finally a writer then at that point?

GO: I still had doubts. Isn’t it funny how doubt wants to keep wiggling back in? Anyway, that was a wonderful, miraculous sort of event and my dad was so funny! I think he bought like fifty copies and slept with one under his pillow.

CS: And your dad accepted you now as a success.

GO: Yes! Because up until then I think the general feeling among friends and family was that I was a hobbyist, a dilettante. Perhaps I was wasting my time when I could have been volunteering at the kids’ school, etc. But I do think for some writers starting out, there’s a pressure to prove yourself, to prove that your work has value. And so we put all this time and effort into these works of art,

which we love, but the world “out there” doesn’t always know what to do with our work. We don’t necessarily see a paycheck that says, “Here’s what your work is valued at, thanks for your contribution.”

CS: So then you end up with enough work for a second short story collection. Your second book was titled *People I Wanted to Be*. And I just found my copy and I noticed there was a quote on the front and on the back from Chang-Rae Lee. He said the book was “a pleasure to behold.” And then on the back of the book, he says it’s “assured and humane,” with “stories full of unexpected grace, the strange sadness of beauty, and magical possibility—tales rich with the quiet abundance of life.” So does that sum up how you feel about that collection too?

GO: Yeah. There are some tender, sweet moments, but also great sorrow for some of those characters. I tend to adhere to the Flannery O’Connor manner of letting bad stuff happen to characters. You got to love them enough to let some pretty bad things happen and then see how they will recover or if they will recover. Let them slog around in the mud and they’re going to have some raw and aching moments there. But out of that can come some great beauty. Then we see people show that humanity maybe in ways that they wouldn’t have had the opportunity to show that. So it’s in the conflict, it’s in these really hard places that something true and astonishing can bubble forth.

CS: And then it was also quoted that your stories have an Eastern European flavor. But you’re not Eastern European. Do you think it’s because of your love for these authors and how much of their work you’ve read?

GO: So I don’t know, maybe we find writers that just sort of speak to us in a way that other writers don’t. And again, it might have something to do with the lyric register, maybe it’s not the content, not what they’re writing about, but how they write. So I’m really, I guess, moved by work from that part of the world. Right now I am really fascinated by work coming out of Hungary. I thought you might be interested in, and maybe you’ve heard of him, László Krasznahorkai. Also, Magda Szabó. She’s got a really interesting

book called *The Door*, and she’s done a lot of really interesting things. Oh, Catherine, you might like this guy and somebody I’ve really just fallen in love with so much, his name is Wolfgang Hilbig.

CS: You know I love the writing from that part of the world too. I remember my inspiration for going to the writing conference in Prague was at the time I was reading Milan Kundera. So then how did you make the change from creating short stories to creating a novel? How did that work for you?

GO: Well, it was really terrifying. Many short story writers are urged to develop themselves into novelists and to work in longer forms. So I was like, “Oh no, this is terrible. How am I going to do this?” I mean, twenty-five pages for me is long. “How in the world am I going to write ‘long’ in a way that doesn’t feel just super boring?” I thought, “Okay, I’m going to have to get really clever here, I’ll have to play to my strengths.” I decided to build on characters that I already knew. I decided to develop each of their stories and their lives and then see if I could tease out some kind of longer story arc for each of them and find ways to intersect those story arcs. “The Fractious South,” the story that was in the *New Yorker*, then became my launchpad for the novel. I took characters from the story and kept developing their narratives.

CS: So those characters from the *New Yorker* story, were they inspiration for the main characters in your novel *The Russian Dreambook of Color and Flight*?

GO: Yes, yes, absolutely. And I didn’t tell anybody that that was my strategy. I thought, “I’m just going to try it and see what happens.”

CS: And so that worked out really well.

GO: Yeah, it took maybe four years of just sticking with it.

CS: So did your process change a little bit from when you were working on a novel from when you were working on stories, the writing process?

GO: Yeah, it did. I mean, discovering who these people are and falling in love with them, and figuring out what would be the questions that they would be asking—that part was the same. Figuring out their deepest longings and what was going to frustrate those—that part was the same, but we’re working on a larger canvas, so it required a little more complication and a lot more research. I found I really had to do quite a bit. But fortunately, I had friends living in Russia, so we could email, but they had to be so careful even then about what they said because their emails, even back in 2008, were censored. I remember asking about an air base that was nearby, and they were like, “We can’t and won’t ever mention the air base. Don’t ever ask us about this.” And there was a list of other things I shouldn’t ask about. But I did go visit. And same thing, people were pretty forthcoming if I asked questions about traditional beliefs, about Orthodoxy, about what was the right way to make borscht, then that was fine. But if I asked other kinds of questions—how do people really feel about the president?—then I had to be careful. And respectful.

CS: So I think I remember from when I read the book that your characters go very far north in Russia, right?

GO: The novel is set in Perm, which is near the Urals, which divide western Russia from central Russia. Then Siberia is to the east.

CS: Did you ever go there yourself?

GO: I did actually go, but I went after the book came out because I was like, “I’ve got to know, did I get this right? Did I get this right or was I totally wrong?” So a friend of mine was living in Perm, and she was like, “Come stay with me. I’ll show you around.” I took my daughter with me. We wanted to see everything and we went in December—just to see how cold it was. Ha! It was cold. The soles of my boots cracked when I stepped off the plane in Perm. It was negative forty-eight Celsius. We visited one of the last gulag camps, Perm-36, where the great writer Isaac Babel was said to be imprisoned before he was executed for treason by Stalin in Moscow. I did not know that in thirty years, over forty million people were sent to such camps.

But back to Perm, which had been a “closed” city to tourists during the Cold War era. Apparently rocket propulsion systems, among other things, were manufactured there. As far as the previous research was concerned, most of the details were correct. But in hindsight, I wish I’d visited first. I console myself with the notion that in fiction, the idea is getting to the place of emotional truth. Because you can interview three people about the same event during some war and you’ll have three different versions, and they’re all correct. Every one of them is correct. So you’re not going to arrive at a unified, clarified truth even if the same set of facts is presented. So what was the felt experience of these three people? What was their emotional truth and how do they remember it? Those are the questions I have to keep asking.

CS: So then you had a second novel, which came out in 2016, *The Hidden Letters of Velta B*. And I remember you came to our writing conference when that came out.

GO: Yes, you were very kind. Thank you. That was so much fun!

CS: And in her review of your book, Janet Fitch said something that reminds me of you the most, that the book “weaves magic from muddy roads, financially strapped dreamers, plotters, eccentrics, gypsies, failed dancers, chess masters, and philosophers—who despite cell phones and bus service, could have lived in eons past.” And so for that book, you did travel to the settings in Latvia to do your research.

GO: Yes. I made four visits to different parts of Latvia. I really wanted to try to be a more diligent researcher than maybe I had been in the past. I was like, “Okay, I’m determined. I’m going to try to meet as many people as I can from as many different walks of life, different political perspectives, religious persuasions, education, just as varied as I can possibly do. And I’m going to go from one end of the country to the other.” And Latvia is not a huge country, so it wasn’t like Russia, but I was going to go from the east to the west and just collect stories, anything anybody would tell me. And as it turned out, there was a woman working in the bookstore in our town who

learned what I was working on. She approached me and said, “I can help you. I’m Latvian. I can tell you stories.”

CS: You mean at a bookstore right near you in Oregon?

GO: Yes! She was like, “I can tell you stories and my grandmother lived through the German occupation, the Soviet occupation. I can tell you what happened to people. I can tell you about the Latvian deportations to Siberia. I can tell you about all these things. It’s part of my family experience.” And I’m like, “Holy shmoly.” How often does that happen when you go into a bookstore?

CS: It was like serendipity for you.

GO: It really was. And I was lucky to find people that were so generous. And so many people do have somewhere in their family a story like this in which something kind of big happens. It completely affected how they view the world around them. And I think that is what makes people so interesting. And I always want to know what was that thing that happened way back when? Or multiple things? And each time I went to Latvia, it was to a different part with different people. Some of them were university-educated artists of a very high degree, very well connected in the artistic community, famous really, and there were people working in cucumber fields in eastern Latvia and also working as maybe a part-time mechanic or kindergarten teacher. So I visited with a broad spectrum of folks and just tried to collect what I could—recipes, jokes, folk tales, family accounts. And once again, I was confronted with competing versions of the same historical events. Again, I decided, it’s not up to me to decide which account is true.

CS: And you’ve still been writing short stories. And we’ve been fortunate to have several of your more recent short stories in *Catamaran*. It’s so fun to see your creativity continues with the short story genre. And you won the 2020 Kurt Vonnegut Speculative Fiction Prize, first place. Right?

GO: Right. Yes. I really love Angela Carter’s work in *The Bloody Chamber* in particular, where she’ll take a fairy tale, maybe one that is familiar to the reader, maybe not.

But she’ll retell it from usually a female protagonist’s point of view or an omniscient narrator. But she’s repurposing a tale and then filling in some of the gaps, some of the things that were never answered for us. And so I thought, “Oh, that might be fun.” I wanted to do it with Hans Christian Andersen’s “Snow Queen,” which is a really long story. In the original tale, a little girl named Gerda and a boy named Kay are best friends. He’s older than she is. She’s like, I don’t know, five or six. And he’s like, I don’t know, ten or something. They’re terrific friends and often play games together and just hang out. One day, some goblins decide to show God how ridiculous he is. They carry a big mirror between them and try to fly it up to heaven to hold it up to his face. But the mirror is too heavy and they drop it and it comes crashing down to earth, throwing shards of glass everywhere. One of these little shards lodges in Kay’s eye, and it changes the way he sees everything. Now, everything fills him with contempt and dissatisfaction. And he looks at little Gerda, and suddenly she’s not a good enough friend for him anymore. He’s too sophisticated for her. He’s going to go play with the boys with his sled and whatnot.

And then the Snow Queen comes through town and captures him and takes him off to the North Kingdom. And so Gerda, who just loves him to death, is determined to save him. And so that’s the premise behind that story. And I thought, well, what if Gerda is a thirteen-year-old living in a modern-day time, and her mother is an alcoholic and her father, who’s just had enough of it, becomes infatuated with a woman outside of town? It’s the Snow Queen who has bewitched all the men in town and turned them into geese and keeps them at her mansion. Everyone left in town has fallen under some kind of torpor, a listless “so what” attitude. But Gerda, she loves her father. She’s going to save him. And like the Andersen story, it’s really a story about love. But I’m interested in unlikely love, love thwarted but renewed, hard-earned love, love tested. Love triumphant.

CS: And can you give us a teaser about the novel you’re working on now?

GO: Yes. One story “strand” is in Serbia between the First and Second World Wars. Another story strand is set in

the same region, which at this point would be considered Yugoslavia, during the early 1960s. There's also advice on how to rid yourself of a super-chatty vampire and what to do if you have a problem with house ghosts. The Yugoslavian pigs-in-space program and a theme park dedicated to President Tito all figure into the mix.

CS: You're going to be teaching a fiction workshop at the Catamaran Writing Conference. And we're calling it "Uncovering, Recovering Your Story, Your Vision, Your Voice." You're open to all types or many different types of writing besides just literary fiction. You're open to flash fiction, prose, poems, spiritual autobiographies, memoirs, travel pieces, I suppose speculative fiction.

GO: Yes, absolutely. Magic realism, all of that.

CS: Oh, that's great. I'm wondering what you've envisioned that being like, with people writing in different categories coming together to the creative process. How do you envision that?

GO: I think part of our time will be creating together a common language that we can use to talk about the different types of narratives that take different forms. Because the travel piece is about place, what's seen, what's experienced in that place. But it's also about the relationship between the person and the place and how the place changed the person. In flash fiction, and to some degree in prose poetry, we might be thinking and talking about the role of images as clues to how the story or piece accrues meaning. Or maybe, if someone is bringing in something really innovative or unconventional in terms of structure, we might talk about the natural contours of the piece. And of course, these are all questions that could be applied to any narrative form, be it a narrative poem or travel memoir, sport memoir, or short story—the list could go on! And we're asking too, what are the most useful questions to ask here when encountering this piece? How can we get into the interior, where the real story, where real narrative energy is at? And I think that would hold true for, again, those across genre kinds of questions. Yeah. So developing some common ground, some common language.

I think why pieces get stuck is the writer has a great idea, but they maybe haven't fully tapped into all the other ancillary ideas that are humming underneath like invisible undergirding. And they just need to figure out how to pull those out or pull them up and allow them, again, to shape and inform what's going on there. And I mean, some of what we do too is building that wider community of trust because we would be looking at each other's work. So we would talk about how to talk about and share work in a way that's nutritive, instructive, and encouraging.

CS: Yeah. And also maybe you can see if people have a special connection. People like me and you who will meet.

GO: Yeah, they find that one person who totally gets what they are trying to do and what they are about!

CS: And they become friends for life like me and you.

GO: Yes! It's a beautiful wonderful story that just gets better and better!

Gina Ochsner teaches writing and literature at Corban University and is on faculty with Seattle Pacific University's low-residency MFA program. She is the author of the short story collections *The Necessary Grace to Fall* (University of Georgia Press, 2002) and *People I Wanted to Be* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005). Her novels include *The Russian Dreambook of Color and Flight* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010) and *The Hidden Letters of Velta B.* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016). Ochsner has been awarded the Raymond Carver Short Story Prize, the Katherine Anne Porter Prize, the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and the Kurt Vonnegut Speculative Fiction Prize. Her work has also been published in *The Kenyon Review*, *Image*, *Ploughshares*, and *The New Yorker*.

BETSEY BATCHELOR

Catbird Seat, 2021
Gouache on board, 6 x 7 ³/₄ in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST