Nineteen Thirty-Four

Radiant, in the Paris sun, the clustered chairs and canopies, the clustered leaves, one and one and one—and down the boulevard, the circus tent in a blowsy park, the Hospital, boulangeries, the Institute where Curie turns, then takes in her blackened, slender fingers a finger-shaped tube of radiation. And the blue Atlantic, radiant, the American shore, the gold-flecked palette Paul Cadmus lifts. It is a midday and sundown in March. He will paint on the flank of an acrobat a gilded skin. She will stroke down the test tube a ticking wand. There is sunlight on their sleeves, as the equinox shifts and the pale-bricked house of Physics throws open its smallest doors. Radiant, the boulevards and shorelines, the peat fields, polders, steeple tops, the Appalachians, Pyrenees, the river-etched terraces of Warsaw. And the circus tent with its acrobats, stern-faced and gilded, circling the ring on their parallel horses. Radiant, their sudden shape, like fission's sudden pyramid: one on the shoulders of two, two on the shoulders of four, four on the eight pumping, glistening haunches, and the sixteen polished hooves, mute in the swirling dust.

Poet Linda Bierds is author of eight books of poetry, most recently, First Hand. A 1998 MacArthur Award winner, she teaches at the University of Washington. Artist Anne Bradfield is a floral designer by trade and lives in Seattle.