

Eleni Sikelianos

From *Now I Tell What I Knew*

sun befall me Sinai
sad in rainbow sleaze and
happy sparkle bunny Sarawak
and in Germany the wall had fallen so we collected bits
of rubble
and in Morocco the Arab Spring huddled at the hotel bar
where I was asked not to speak against the king
or risk knowing disappearing too much
ghetto nature war unicorn Alabama Madonna in a cage
skeleton genes Eugene South Dakota Qatar there I go
and know a thing but
never pass a face that is my face
in Evansville North Dakota Fez Algiers Kandy and
Carlsbad
The candidate was there with his billionaire saying
I will show you
Divination by rats
Which rat do you choose
Stroke its fur
Which rat do you choose now
Rub its head

This big rat (big as a guinea pig) tells me
“You will move smooth through the world
Your limbs will be oiled and elegant
 rolling softly in their sockets
You will take a rattling bus to Lefkas
in the honeymoon’s ruin of Greece
where the nation bifurcates
between where you can get
 & what you can’t”

Rat, rat, rat a tat
Soft-furred, shiny
Eat dandelion, sweet rat
 [...]

Slept late like a rat.
 [...]

In my ear I hear it writ in King I
drape clouds across our many faces (dark and light stars
shining in dark sky)

thus the ground of my experiment, I
what I
say & see

& think
to know or
don't I
don't
seem to have any way to see
what I
don't know and throw
the web over my head as if
it were a knowledge net but
still can't see the holes

The men

are in the trees outside my window I don't know why
they are "the" men or the window "my" but I
see them I see them saw
the tree

"mud," "lake," "sky," "red," "sad," five,"
"to split," "to see"

will make a world if you swirl them

and Kansas is composed of corn and spinning jennys

This excerpt is from Sikelianos's new book, *What I
Knew*, published by Nightboat, spring 2019.

Eleni Sikelianos is the author of nine books of poetry (most recently *What I Knew*) and two hybrid (anti)memoirs. Sikelianos has received many awards for her poetry, nonfiction, and translations, including two National Endowment for the Arts awards, a Fulbright, and the National Poetry Series, and her work has been translated into 20 languages. Dedicated to the many ways poetry can manifest in communities (in public schools and prisons or in collaboration with other artists), she joined the Literary Art faculty at Brown University in 2017.