

## ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

### Safe Keeping

It's for your good, the guard  
insists, your own good

we protect you from each other  
and the world from you.

Our fingernails are filed,  
hair cut like nuns'.

Who needs forks or knives  
for soup and stew and bread.

As if a spoon  
could not gouge eyes.

As if a handle, snapped,  
would not cut veins.

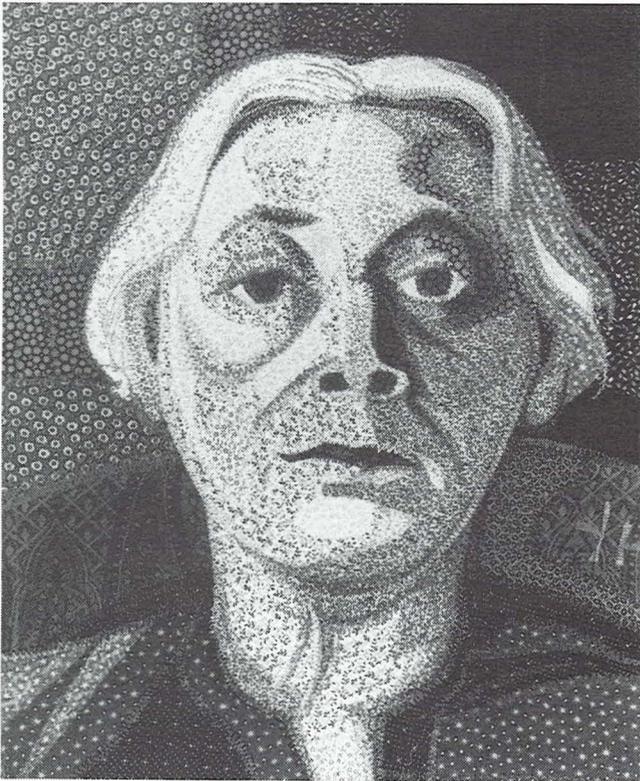


Photo: J. Baird

Deidre Scherer, *Magnitude*, 1990. Fabric and Thread. 10" x 8.5"

### Defensive Measures

Chili still burns my mouth  
like the twisted scythe  
of peppers redder than blood  
or the brick lace of the bruise  
on my cheek. To kill  
if you have no weapons:

maintain surprise,  
find two sharp rocks,  
swing them like cymbals  
in a curve toward the temples—  
your target will squash  
like a frog.

You can also hug-break ribs,  
bite the neck, shark-kiss  
the throat, slice skin,  
smother in mud. But here  
mud is frozen in snow,  
all stones removed

to landscape the entrance.  
As in Aesop's cave  
where creatures came  
to call on the lion,  
more footprints point in  
than out. And I am five

feet tall, a gnarled  
nanny goat of a crone  
trying to fight a war.  
No more guitar for a shield,  
only a song for my sword.  
Wait until I get outside.

*Elisavietta Ritchie is a writer, editor, photographer and translator. In addition to seven collections of poetry, she has written Flying Time: Stories & Half-Stories (Signal Books, 1992).*