

PETER MEINKE

Zinc Fingers

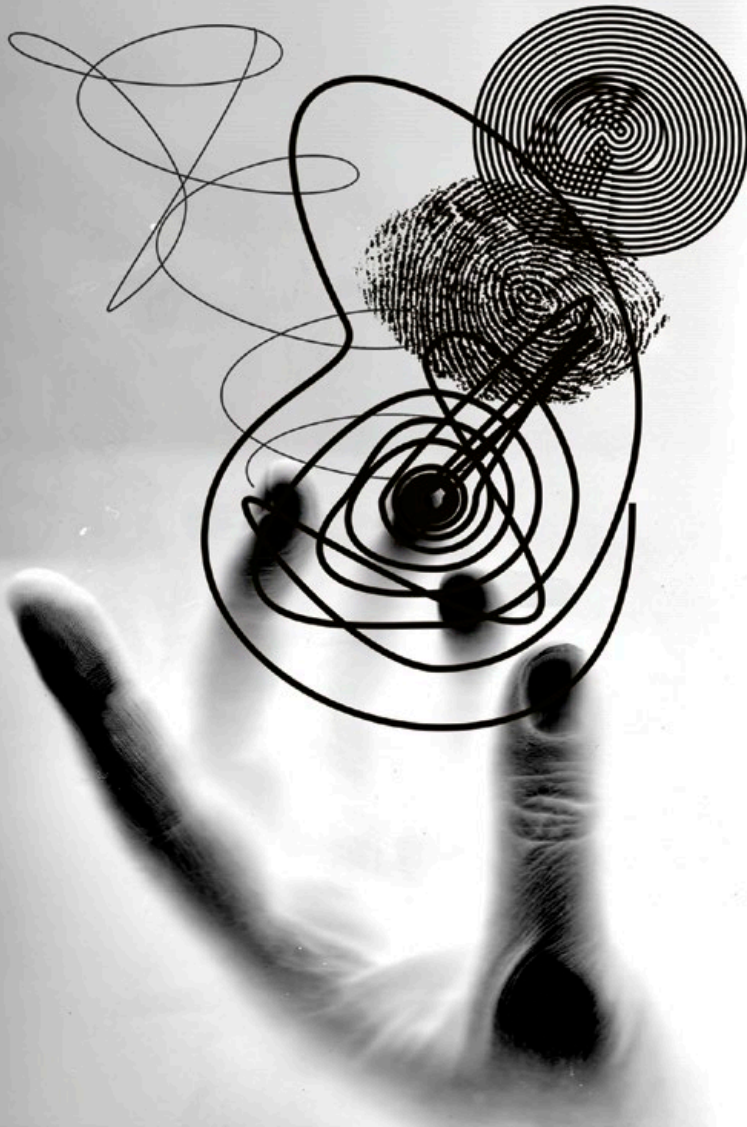


Illustration by Shonagh Rae

Though scientists inform us that criminals have insufficient zinc I've always believed it's insufficient gold and silver that gets them going The man who slipped his hand into my front pocket on the jammed Paris Metro wasn't trying to make friends His overcoat smelled greasy and it was unpleasant holding hands above my wallet pressed in on all sides like stacked baguettes There was no way to move or take a swing Still some action on my part seemed to be called for: we stood nose to nose I tried to look in his eyes but he stared at my chin shy on our first date so after a while as we rattled along toward the Champs-Élysées

I lost concentration and began to think

of our scholarly daughter working at Yale on a project called Zinc Fingers scanning a protein with pseudopods each with a trace of zinc that latch on to our DNA and help determine what we become This brought me back to mon ami the pickpocket: I wondered how he chose his hard line of work and if as a boy he was good at cards for example or sewing for that matter what choice did I have either so when we reached our stop and he looked up from my chin at last I smiled at him and his eyes flashed in fear or surprise and I called *It's OK* as he scuttled away *Tout va bien!* though I held tight to my wallet

Peter Meinke is the current poet laureate of Florida and the author of more than 20 books. His daughter is now a research scientist at Tufts University.

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This poem is featured in the *Poets for Science* exhibit created by the Wick Poetry Center at Kent State University and poet Jane Hirshfield. The exhibit is on view through September 8, 2023, at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, DC.