

Dinnerview: Elizabeth Metzger Sampson

written by Danielle Susi | July 1, 2020



Elizabeth Metzger Sampson is a poet, essayist, and frequent collaborator with visual artists. Publications include interviews, essays, and poems, in *Adroit Journal*, *Temporary Art Review*, *Hypertext Magazine*, and at poetryfoundation.org. Their collaborative visual and written work has been shown at venues in and around Chicago, and in Neuss, Germany, and Cairo, Egypt. Sampson has previously worked as an editor and curator and is currently the executive director of the Chicago Poetry Center. She has been twice named one of Newcity's "Lit 50: Who Really Books in Chicago."

Here, she talks about dessert cereal, grazing on charcuterie plates, and eating the same breakfast for the last ten years.

On her all-time favorite meal:

I have so many favorite meals! My first thought was: any meal that my partner and I have at our favorite local restaurant, Lula Café. We go there for all celebrations, the food changes with what's available, and it's delicious every time. I particularly enjoy that the food changes but the staff doesn't—the same fabulous folks have been there a long time, and part of the experience is how wonderful the people and the space are, too. They've been a fixture in our neighborhood since before we were, and I'm grateful for their presence. When we're at Lula we're on a date, proper: we're totally engaged with each other, telling stories and jokes, talking the night away and discussing all the delicious food on our plates. It's a space where we take our time and order too much and make a night of it, and for that I love it.

On what the light looks like during her favorite meal of the day:

Gentle, because we have south-facing windows, and western-facing ones in our kitchen, and I'm thinking about breakfast. I have been eating the same breakfast for over ten years—a blueberry, banana, and yogurt smoothie. It's

odd because I get sick of repetition easily (in tastes and otherwise), so I'm unclear on why I've clung to this breakfast routine so closely. But it works, I love it, and I'm disappointed on the rare occasion I don't have it. When I go a day or a few without it, and then I have the morning where I can return to it... that's a lovely morning.

On snacking while writing:

When I get to make a day of it, yes. I'll make my own charcuterie board and slowly munch on it for hours. There's something about it that feels luxurious and gets me to settle down and think when I need a pause. When I'm staring at my screen and thinking about what's next, I can feel impatient. If I'm chewing, thinking, and staring at my screen, I feel calmer: the chewing is some kind of permission to sit calmly with my thoughts for a minute.

On her go-to late-night snack:

Dark chocolate peanut butter cups, or, what gets referred to in our house as "dessert cereal." It's a sweet cereal that couldn't pass for any sort of actual meal, but is an amazing dessert. Also cheese. Anytime, anywhere: cheese.

On her food quirks:

In addition to the highly repetitive breakfast, I require that my house has a stock of Chicago-made El Milagro tortilla chips available at all times. As far as I am concerned there is no other pre-made chip that compares—you have to be eating freshly made tortilla chips to start competing with El Milagro.

I love cheese so much that at family parties, my nieces have taken to sitting near me and passing off all the cheese on their plate to my plate while going, "you love cheese!" It's true, I love cheese.

On her final meal request:

The grandest charcuterie plate of my dreams! All the cured meats, all the most potent cheeses, all the pickles and spreads! Tiny bland crackers and bits of toast to transport all that flavor with a little crunch. So many good textures. So many tiny pickles. So many different pickled vegetables. Fig spread. I would graze on a charcuterie plate for hours with a nice glass of red wine that tastes like dirt and tobacco.

If we're going full fantasy here, then I'm eating this in a forest near water at the golden hour, the bird and bug sounds are loud, and tiny forest creatures have come together to set this table on a giant tree stump. Now I'm trying to decide which forest creature makes for the best sommelier... a hare? A moth? If the birds and the chipmunks set the table, and the squirrel is the waiter... let's go with the moth as sommelier. Yep.