for what feels like a minute
& limitless, your BMX mimics
a unicycle, the street a wide rope,
& the next thing you know

you’re pedaling midair, balancing
an act to keep your front wheel
afloat, from pavement, praying
a foot doesn’t slip, your palms

grip the handlebars like a split
rein, praying a disciple witnesses
your frame’s ebbing levade
fail to fade, witnesses your legs

churning, propelling your face,
determined, down a city block,
past a basketball goal you played
H-O-R-S-E, past the church

you never attended, this wheelie
equivalent to the dual miracle:
spiritual strength & endurance,
your quads & hams burning

like a hog cranked over a pit
of flames, & though your chain
is taut, you doubt, & the instant
you quit believing, you sink.
For some reason, this was our yearly trip across Lake Ponchartrain. Our class’s whiff of livestock, alligator on a stick, sugar cane, fried frog legs & fresh-squeezed lemonade.

& for some reason, I thought it a good idea to volunteer for the hypnosis fodder. To take the main stage with five others in front of hundreds & hundreds of eyes.

I didn’t know, as some white guy in a cape & tie showcased his power. He told us to sit & we sat. He strolled by whispering instructions & we all went along with it:

*Ok. Whenever I say “bab rab gab doh” wave my wand, make like you’re sleeping.*

*Ok? whenever I say “doh gab rab bab,” make like you’re waking up from a long nap.*

Even now I wonder if audience members perched on foldout chairs or plunked under gangly trees could see me faking. Wonder what would’ve happened had I stirred before he told us to, instead of going along with the whole ruse. What I would’ve done had I known there were folks in the audience who owned robes & hoods. Folks I’d stood beside or passed chucking darts at balloons & shooting moving targets. By sunset the hoax was over, & it was time to get back on the bus. My classmates swooned
& cheered & even the girl who never liked me held my arm, happy I wasn’t sawed in two or transformed into a talking sow. Even better, that I wasn’t made to disappear.

Christopher Woods, *Shack by the Trees*, photograph