

Mesándel Virtusio Arguelles - Kristine Ong Muslim

Fourteen Pictures

1

The mouth of the old man
remains open
to speaking as if repeatedly
breathing on the words
so as to relinquish them wholly
to the wind while earnestly
listening nothing is heard

by the old man in the middle

2

In the hollow of their mouths
the hymn for darkness seems in tune
Marked by eyes that roll back
in extreme terror
while huddling in front
in an inexplicable urge to congregate
when traveling to Saint Isidore

Night crawls past sanity's remains

Left behind by a dwindling sanity

3

Crashing any moment now is

the blade

against whoever invites to the dining table
this widow, who volunteered to redeem
the Israelites, according to the Apocrypha
Her expression is meek
yet intent on fulfilling what she took upon herself:
behead the enemy without faltering

There is no need to rinse
even when the hands are bloodstained
4

A combination of terror and madness
is on the face of the god swallowing
his offspring

As if aware of his utter depravity
yet lacking power
even in his divinity

to overcome an immense hunger
like that of a beast
His eyes nearly bulge out of their sockets

in intense craving and incredulity
The hollow of his mouth is vast
Swallowing the insides

5

The witches convene
The two main characters
are on the opposite sides:
the great he-goat to the left

and the maiden is seated
on the right side that had been lopped off
during restoration, according to the note
the over fifty-inch distance across

The edge of what was painted had vanished
You disappeared in the middle of the canvas
6

Discovered upon close examination:
the veil was painted only at the end
It cast a pall over the docile face
of a lady who leaned against a rock
her slightly bent body

The arm rests against the head
The piece of cloth is so light
but cannot be lifted
7

Nothing else can be uncovered
except for what's in the beginning:
orphaned dog in a piece of land
Only the head is visible overhead
Deeply unsettling
is that gaze from the pit
where only the eyes can be seen
Whatever's in front is at the brink
of exclusion and salvation
8

Where were the two going—
to a nearby mountain
where horsemen
were likely to go
or somewhere much farther than the unknown
places the painter visited as he succumbed
to isolation at Quinta del Sordo
with his demons
the creatures wrenched from silence
and perhaps, with the precious Leocadia
9

Compared to the figurines at the threshold to the right
the long queue on the left is more prominent
at the back: those who were hazily sketched
The blurry-faced ones in the procession
They make up most of the artwork
if not the loss of the painter
who chose to distance himself from the public
without ever leaving the public behind
The shadows could not leave him
10

What is concealed by the hand
that was concealed by the hands
that created the fourteen pictures
on the walls that spanned
the entirety of his sanctuary

What the paintbrushes insisted on

What was held by the form

in his hands kept secret

from everyone

11

The only one looking up

among the men reading

from the same book appears not to have time

for knowledge that can alter

any condition

Filling a blank that has been reserved

Ending in the unseen

12

The two strangers wield something for beating

each other and are likely bloodied from the brawl

even though the painting shows only one of them

to have bloody streaks on the face

Both are knee-deep in mud

in a duel where there's no retreating

until the end. Whoever will win

stays locked up where he has escaped

13

They seem to float in air:

The Daughters of Night

Doling out destinies to those on the ground

like the person they're with on the canvas

The hands were tied

yet he was still able to paint

those who tied his hands:

Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos

14

Along with owls and bats

also common in his works

are the witches

Depictions of the deterioration of form

like the senile folks before the dinner table

in the picture. The gaze and the grin etched

on the face of the old man at the center

you take to mean as his readiness to feast



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