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

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

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

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

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
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

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

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