

GAUGUIN'S FANTASY

Tiare and Mareva had been living in Paris for two years. They had left their native island in the hope of reaching the metropolis, where they no doubt intended to prosper and free themselves from the ties of their ancestral culture. From their small apartment, every night before going to bed, they could appreciate the majesty of the Eiffel Tower, a vision that was a symbol of freedom for them.

Their friend Koke, the painter, had immortalised them years before in several of his works, but it was the one of "Arearea" that they valued the most, they had been portrayed with their beloved dog Teiki in it. They belonged to a well-to-do family, their mother had died when they were fifteen years old and their eldest sister spent long periods in the psychiatric hospital. Their father had given his five children a very strict religious upbringing. Once a week they attended the temple according to tradition: white dresses and hats for the ladies and dark trousers and light shirts for the boys. Their father's severity, their sister's illness and the long days at the bedside of their dying mother left a great mark on their emotional life.

A year after they began to work at the textile factory, the manager gave them tickets for the Autumn Salon. Someone had told them that they would find works by Gauguin, Cezanne, Renoir, Rodin and others there. On Sunday, on their free afternoon, they decided at the last minute to visit the exhibition.

They saw several pictures: "What they Call Vagrancy", "The Card Player", "Blonde Woman in a Brothel", "The Strangled Woman", "The Dance at the Mill de la Galette".. and "Eve", a sculpture by Rodin. They didn't spend much time on each painting, to be honest. When it was close to closing time, surprise! There they were: "Women from Tahiti". The teenage girl with the long hair was more daring and wore a red and white sarong with a huge flower curled between her sun-facing legs. The other, more shy, wore a long, closed dress that covered her whole body, she stood with her back to the sea and looked out of the corner of her eye anticipating that, at some point, something was going to happen. And indeed it did: the general lights went out, only the emergency lights were left, and absolute silence took over the room. The two women could not believe what they were experiencing, they banged on the doors and screamed in anguish and despair, it was a useless effort.

Throughout the night they watched as the soldiers threatened with their bayonets a grieving mother carrying a sick baby in her arms while dragging a starving, crying child by the hand, and called a second woman begging in the street for food a “filthy beggar”; they were escorted, amidst insults and shouts, to the force labour camp for lawless migrants. A woman screamed and ran, a boy hid under the table and covered his face because his father, a card player, had come home drunk like every night, and had just strangled his mum. An underage blonde girl was sleeping with a wealthy believer in the city’s luxury brothel. The shy teenage girl on the beach was now wearing a black and yellow striped sarong, she was still peeking out, but she showed a smile which quickly turned into a loud, cheerful laugh. At the Galette mill, people were dancing and talking happily and casually, none of those present were aware that two coloured girls had been refused entry, according to the guard, because they were not dressed appropriately for the occasion.

Eve, who stood naked in the middle of the room, frightened at the sight of them, covering her breasts, shouted at them: “What are you doing here? Don’t you know that this exhibition is a hymn to pleasure and order whose purpose is to highlight the values that dominate the world today? I think you are in the wrong place.

Tiare and Mareva instantly realised that the big city was not the right place for them to thrive. They had grown up immersed in collective effort and solidarity. So, a month later, they set sail for their homeland. There, after the jubilant joy of their return home, they went to work in the family pearl farming business. The two sisters are said to be buried in a small town graveyard, next to their painter friend. This was their last wish and their grandchildren made it come true.

“Stories without Mufflers” (2006 -)