THE CIRCLE OF A

The event was about to begin. The absence of the President of the Community was conspicuous. “Mr. Mayor, council members, and the public:

It is an honor for me to have the opportunity to inaugurate this permanent exhibition, as it represents a tribute from his hometown to a man who, throughout his life, served as a guiding figure in the struggle for the ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity. A. was not a prolific painter; his body of work consists of only six compositions—though one was not actually created by him, a point we will clarify at the end. His great merit lay in his ability to interpret life—real life—through his paintings. I shall, therefore, present them in chronological order.

First, we have ‘The Old Shoe.’ We see a rustic sandal, consisting of an esparto-grass sole tied to the foot with cords. The insurgent army was advancing mercilessly, imprisoning or taking the lives of those who had advocated for a more equitable distribution of wealth and the reform of the socioeconomic structures that oppressed the population. Many were forced to cross the border in the dead of winter to escape such brutal repression. The contrast was stark: the primitive sandals of the newcomers set against the leather shoes and boots of the locals. Difficult times—exceedingly difficult times—lay ahead; more than four hundred thousand people had arrived in the span of a single month, and the initial wave of solidarity would gradually give way to suspicion and fear. Harsh measures were implemented against anyone who assisted those who had entered the country. They soon came to realize the reality of their situation: they were refugees—people who had arrived in a foreign land due to war and/or their political and religious beliefs. Camps began to spring up in uninhabited areas: there was a scarcity of food, heavy snowfall, a cold that bit mercilessly into one’s very bones, a lack of warm clothing, lice... One had to be strong and endure whatever might come. They were...” stateless persons.

Here we have “Multicolored Sound.” We see a man with a large mustache playing the guitar, a young woman in a ruffled flamenco dress performing a *zapateao* (footwork dance), glasses of wine resting on a table, a kitten sleeping peacefully near a brazier, and —in the bottom-left corner—a black circle. The country that had taken them in found itself

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embroiled in a major war, alongside other armies from across the continent. Men were sent to the front, as were many women. Consequently, the refugees found work in factories, hospitals, kitchens, and fields. Some—like A.—were even permitted to join the national army, as their prior military training proved useful. Once the great war ended, the country remained in need of a large workforce; this, combined with their selfless contributions to sustaining the nation throughout the conflict, enabled the migrants to finally obtain the long-awaited legal status that granted them full citizenship. Thus, the painting reflects a zest for life and the joy of having overcome an initially hostile situation, yet it is also tinged with *morriña*—a deep, aching nostalgia for their homeland. That is what the black circle represents: they could not return to the land of their birth.

Next, we encounter “Woman and Dove.” The canvas is dominated by the elongated figure of a woman wearing a top hat, from which a dove emerges, spreading its wings. A. met M. at the factory where he worked; after a two-year courtship, they married. Both were highly energetic, possessed a keen sense of humor, and shared similar outlooks on life and politics. Here, the top hat serves as a symbol closely linked to the maternal breast—a source of milk, and an inexhaustible wellspring of love and life. A. seeks to bridge the roots of the earth with the flight of the dove (symbolizing freedom) through the woman’s body. ...woman. The black circle continues in the bottom-left corner.

We move on to “Family with a Dog.” We see A. and M. holding hands, accompanied by their son—who holds the leash of a small dog—as they stroll through the park. A. has achieved balance; he is at ease with himself and with others. His son is growing up; he will go on to pursue higher education and, before long, will begin working for a large company. If we look closely, we notice the absence of the circle.

Here: “Solitude and the Sun.” A., now elderly, walks with some difficulty, his head bowed beneath the sun. His wife passed away a few years ago; his dog was poisoned by someone who bore him ill will. He sits alone on a park bench. In the final years of his life, the energy of the sun proved vital to him. He would often murmur verses by the poet Vicente Aleixandre: “He was old, his face wrinkled, his eyes dim rather than sad. / He leaned against the tree trunk, and the sun would approach him first, / gently nibbling at his feet, / and there it would linger for a few moments, as if curled up.” At first glance, one

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notices a certain imprecision in the brushstrokes; this is because his hands trembled—a tremor that grew more pronounced as time went on.

Finally, “The Green Circle.” While in the park, A. was beaten by several hooded individuals who shouted: “Get rid of the immigrants!” “Get rid of the ‘old-geezer protesters’!” “We need to clean up this city!” His final words in the hospital were: “Doctor, please paint a black circle on my chest.” A tear rolled down the physician’s cheek. He painted a green circle over his heart.

“Stories without Mufflers” (2006 -)

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