

My Neighbor's Dog Told Me...

I draw in Ericeira what compels me. The water fountain near the entrance to the village market with fish that spew water from open mouths, with a roof that may remind you of those twin-beaked idiosyncratic hats from the Napoleonic era, has always arrested my eye since I first passed it by in childhood. One day I began to draw it. At times, in the act of drawing, ideas emerge in interlaced currents when there is a memory to be found. A recurring dream from childhood was there, a nightmare, and the next day I willfully painted out that vision superimposed on the fountain.

It turns out that in Lisbon, when I was growing up, there were “chachas” during the rites of Carnival. These men clothed in black tunics and capes with hats pointed sideways looking like another Napoleonic invasion to us, were generally roaring drunk. Frequently, they could be seen grasping a wooden sword while chasing frightened, screaming children through the streets of Lisbon. (This is not a “chacha” story - a “chacha” story in colloquial jargon means a nonsensical story - but the story of a child who was frightened by chachas.) From infancy, I remember the warnings of my mother to avert whatever my inappropriate behavior might bestow upon me: “watch out or the [chacha] will take you away.”

Childhood images surged into consciousness and I chose to draw a recalled “caboz” (a small fish which is easily confused with the rocks in the small puddles left by the shore when the tide goes out) as the statues of the fish in the fountain are usually referred to by any “Ericeirence,” however, this time, perhaps with a little more aggression, and also consequently more comical when you think of the “chacha” with a face of “caboz” in what you may find when you go the market in Ericeira.

The fact of the matter was that I was saturated from so much verbal pollution around me that I felt bitten by a thousand “cabozes”! Singularly they were merely annoyances, but the quantity was not insignificant nor was the effect, and I made the resolution of starting a list of these “sound bites” so that in the future I could include them in a piece. Those phrases painted out on *My Neighbor's Dog Told Me...*, became the “rain” than the viewer sees from a distance when looking at the painting.

Psychological science, in perfecting the mechanism of inducing previous states, has already counseled its practitioners that to optimize regression the person has to be in a similar state of mind to the one that is sought from the past. As any child would acknowledge, it’s like sucking on a piece of long spaghetti: The person has to suck hard on that piece of pasta to see the other end, usually camouflaged on the bottom of the plate by the appetizing artifice of the chef.

Another day went by and I ran into my neighbor's dog downtown marking his territory a long way from home. As I was intrigued by the dog's assertive qualities, the idea came to me of studying this dog, so perfect in adaptation by his mongrel nature and audacity to Ericeira's environmental conditions that it would have made Charles Darwin proud. I thought that I would not be reaching, speaking of metaphors, if I used his daily follow-

the-nose course through Ericeira to highlight the human behavior heard around me. Next early morning I was ready in wait, peeking out of my window with photo camera in hand to follow my friend Bobi. As custom has taught me, since I remember Ericeira, my neighbors let out their pets in the morning so they can alleviate themselves on the streets and on their neighbors' doors. Most of the time, these ruffian street doggies roam the streets all day long. And there goes Bobi! But this time with me trailing behind him and snapping the shutter on what could have been a distressful morning for Bobi. Though Bobi's uneasiness didn't last long and within half an hour he became accustomed to my presence, at the camera, and at the "reality show" of the day. And it was in this way that two edges of the piece "My Neighbor's Dog Told Me..." became bordered by a synopsis of that day, like all other days in the life of Bobi.

The way in which I was attacked by verbal pollution, made me feel differently about this project. It needed to be breached in various ways involving all the senses. I recorded sounds and dialogues that belong to it now. There were many components that came together for this piece, but because necessity precludes invention, I held emotively to the metaphor of verbal pollution that keeps on contaminating... and I came upon the formality of the piece with a torrential rain of remembered phrases, which in conjunction or as a whole induce the listener into a black comedy. I wrote pages of those phrases, many times in stream of consciousness, finishing with a phrase like: "see if you can pass through the gaps in the rain without getting wet."

Painting with acrylics on paper bonded on a panel, and on top of the photographs of my friend Bobi, I began to invent structures to use the qualities of either transparency or opacity: On one hand to spy on Bobi and on the other to bring to the fore the image of the "caboz" and the fountain. And this was the motivation behind the tiles on the "Napoleonic hat" of the fountain when meeting Bobi resembles what a critic said about the Cubist painting of Picasso and Braque: "An explosion in a tile factory."

The painting developed partly in Portugal and I finished it two years later in a studio that I found under a restaurant in Atlanta. The restaurant is French. Reality indeed, can be more fictitious than fiction.