

The Artist

A Portrait in 15 Tableaux

by a.d.

He surrounds himself in beauty to drown out his feelings of inadequacy. Like the mad emperor, smothering out the world in a suffusion of petals, so must he smother the unseemly about him. He has become the opposite of God, birthing the perfect from the imperfect.

When asked about love, he claims to have never been in it. This is just another of his prevarications, the ones he has erected so diligently around himself, a shiny distraction like the orchards of the Hesperides. He knows that the first step to becoming an artist is to bare open your heart to the world. This renders it pliant and unguarded. Eventually, something will wander into its softness and refuse to leave.

He has three methods of painting: the first is where he paints entirely with his mind, letting his limbs be strung and led. The second, where he paints only with his body, like an automaton. The third is where he disremembers himself, forgets he has a body at all. Most of his best work was produced during these momentary lapses of being.

His mornings are abrupt and almost always dawnless. His footsteps fall heavy and silent over the carpet of his secluded world. He would like to know how it feels to flit through life blindly, as a bat does, immune to beauty.

Like a decadent, he denies himself nothing. He evades labels, limitations, confinements. He exists in the negative space between meanings. *Declination is the game of the ingrate*, he tells me. *The universe has proposed all this beauty, has laid it all out before us and invited us to feast. Who are we to decline its offerings?*

Consistently, he probes the countless mysteries of the universe. He pours his vast knowledge into the minds of his acolytes, who absorb his every word, as if by osmosis. When away from him, I can feel his words glimmer on my mind like the shimmering trails of a snail.

His mind is a wanderer. He despises questions to which there can only be one answer. He evades the stifling casket of consistency, eschews the fetters of fame. He refuses to betray himself or be bound in servitude to the bland desires of society. He remains enslaved only to beauty, terrible and unremitting.

He ponders his mortality dauntlessly, like a skeptic. *Death is merely a metamorphosis*, he says. Upon his transition, he intends to come back as a flame of inspiration — he shall compel his spirit into the receptive minds of creatives, to carry on his vision through the willing hands of strangers.

He often gets lost within the intricate dance between him and his paintbrush, where the rules are dictated as he goes. Devoid of inhibition, his heart beats in tandem with the earth, whose soul, he says, is withdrawn from the city. This is a man whose mind is ruled by his various passions — as difficult to know as he is to unknow.

So much of what we see is distorted by our preconceptions. He knows that art, like the soul, is precarious; that to paint, to capture any vision at all, is to look not through the eyes, but the mind. He lays his lamentation softly like a gauze: *People are so often deceived by what they think they should see that they fail to look at all.*

He is crescively decimating my various reserves about life. He chastises me for my idleness. He is adamant about dissolving the shroud I have woven to shield myself from the world. Every night he leads me to face the canvas and cuts me open. *A piece of art bereft of the artist is as mute as a virgin canvas*, he says. After all, the most precious thing we can impart on the world is a shard of our ephemeral soul.

His appraisal of artwork is a flaying. He believes that good work is multifaceted and inexhaustible, like the ocean where, every time one looks, something new is begging to be gleaned. Like a blessing, these hidden meanings are only administered when we are ready to receive them.

All his childhood dreams congregated on one thing: the act of creation. He would spend hours in solitude, devoting himself to his visions. The outcome, rather than the process, was what engrossed him — to gaze upon something that until minutes ago was still nonexistent. The most enthralling part was watching the conception take wing beneath his hands.

His studio he enters unshod, like a temple. Years of abuse have made a Pollock out of the hardwood floor, satin drops of dried paint that press roundly against the soles, a reminder of your purpose here — to leave some kind of a mark upon the world, unremovable and unmissable.

When he sleeps, he does not dream. He plans, he envisions. He entertains visitations from the near future; his still unrealized works, fleshed out, speak to him, beckoning themselves into fruition. How wondrous it must feel to have your own creations seduce you, make love to you through their longing to be born.
