

THE ONLINE PUBLICATION  
OF THE LITERARY DIVISION

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TRANSLATION AND THE ARTS II



"That translator you hired for the Florentine art catalogue project says she can't do another stroke of work till she gets more Chianti."

## Letter from the Editor

Part II of our two-issue focus on **TRANSLATION AND THE ARTS** features a fascinating piece by David McKay, “Some Thoughts on Translating Labels for Museum Exhibitions,” grounded in his philosophy of translation; “From Plaisance to Opéra,” an excerpt from art historian Beth Gersh-Nesic’s translation with Jacqueline Gojard of André Salmon’s memoir on Cubism, Picasso and the School of Paris; an exchange among translators and an art historian on how to translate the term “in-betweenness”; and a “Dirty Poem” by Ames Dee on the messy process of artistic creation. Tony Beckwith’s regular “By the Way” column and cartoons offer fresh perspectives on the art of translating museum catalogues.

Upcoming issues of *Source* will look at translations of poetry and folklore. Submissions are invited.

Thanks go as always to Jamie Padula for proofreading and to LD Administrator Emilia Balke for her support.

Sincerely,

*Michele Aynesworth*

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***ata* Source**  
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Please include a photo  
and brief bio of 2 or 3 sentences.

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Michele Aynesworth specializes in translating Argentine and French authors. Her recent translations include *Deir-Zor: Tracing the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, a photographic journal by Franco-Armenian writer Bardig Kouyoumdjian (see the Fall 2009 issue of *Source*); numerous excerpts from works by Jewish writers for Yale UP’s *Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization* series; and *Season of Infamy: Charles Rist’s Wartime Diary (1939-1945)*, funded by grants from the NEA and the Kittredge Foundation.

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**Cover: BTW Cartoon by Tony Beckwith**

To receive a printed copy of Source, use your ATA membership number and email address to modify your Division Membership. Go to <http://tinyurl.com/2bhy5lf>. Or email Jamie Padula, ATA Chapter and Division Relations Manager, or call (703) 683-6100, extension 3017.

# FROM THE LD ADMINISTRATOR

I am pleased to announce that despite the fact that only about 5% of the Literary Division members took our survey, it produced a considerable amount of very useful information. The survey indicates that we have a pool of dedicated literary translators: 76% of the surveyed have been LD members for more than 2 years, 10% for more than 10 years; 36% are also ALTA members, 12% are also members of local literary translator's groups, and 41% are full-time self-employed translators. Of the 110 surveyed, 61 have published translations, 27 of them have more than 6 translations published, 7 of the surveyed have self-published translations. The way I see it, we have a wonderful pool of mentors. Please contact me if you are interested in becoming a mentor or a contributor to a potential Literary Division blog.

The surveyed work in 31 languages: Arabic, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German,

Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Macedonian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Brazilian Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Spanish, Swedish, Ukrainian, Urdu, and Uzbek.

We have resources in academia as well: 25 of the 110 members who took the survey work as part-time translators and teach translation or a related discipline. It would be wonderful if these members would consider presenting for our next year's conference. I hope that, in case you are interested in presenting at the conference, this summary of the results of our survey will help you select a topic that best matches your expertise and our membership's preferences. You will also be able to download the results of the survey from our website.

The survey indicated that Listserv has a potential to grow: only 34 of the surveyed have joined the LD Listserv and 41 are planning on joining. I encourage you to join if you haven't, since this is a great place to share ideas and find answers to



**Emilia Balke is a freelance translator, interpreter, and voiceover talent. She translates from Russian, German, and Macedonian into English and Bulgarian, and from Bulgarian into English.**

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your questions. I would like to take the opportunity to thank those of you who took the time to answer questions on Listserv.

Based on the responses to my questions regarding the content of Source, Listserv and our website, the areas of interest range from practical issues — such as how to become a literary translator, how to get published, how to find a publisher, how to find online resources for translators, how to select a book for translation, what to look for in a contract, what are the typical payment methods, how to find literary translation jobs and how to obtain copyrights, tips for beginners, and literary translation quality and standards — to suggestions about setting up a job market and a literary translator’s directory, publishing articles and translations from Portuguese, Arabic, Eastern European languages, and from English to other languages, as well as more theoretical topics such as translation analysis, the types of decisions that a literary translator has to make to adapt a translation for a particular target audience, translation of puns, choice of words, advice about cultural issues such as translating dialects, how literary translators have tackled tricky translation problems in their published works, discussions of excerpts from literary translations, and standard language conventions for translators and sociolinguists.

Eleven of the surveyed find the website content very useful, 38 rated it as useful, 34 think that it is somewhat useful and 8 have marked “not useful.” If you are interested in helping redesign our website and writing articles for it, please contact me. Several of the surveyed said that they are interested in helping with the website but I have not received their contact information.

Thank you to all of you who took the time from your busy schedules to complete the survey. Regardless of the fact that the surveyed represent only a small percentage of the ATA members who have chosen to be members of the Literary Division, I consider this group representative and, as division administrator, I will do my best to work with the rest of our volunteers to respond to the needs expressed by this group and provide services to the membership accordingly.

In October the ATA Board approved a new governing policy for Division Leadership. In addition to the Administrator and Assistant Administrator, Divisions will now be led by a Leadership Council consisting of three to ten people according to the size and needs of the Division.

Council members would commit to performing tasks to benefit the Division, which could be a recurring annual task or a number of ongoing smaller tasks, such as arranging a social event during the ATA Annual Conference, procuring articles for the Division’s blog, updating the Division’s web page, or managing the mailing list or LinkedIn group. The Leadership Council will serve as a talent pool for future Division Administrators.

Ideally, the Division Leadership Council should consist of long-time experienced literary translators and younger and enthusiastic members who are savvy social media users. If you need additional information or wish to volunteer, please e-mail me with a brief description of your skills and background and the area in which you can help, i.e. Source, website, blog, Literary Café, etc.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Emilia Balke [ebalke@language-web.net](mailto:ebalke@language-web.net)

# TRANSLATING LABELS FOR MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS



BY DAVID MCKAY

*David McKay translates for Dutch museums, scholars, literary authors, and publishing houses. Recent projects include the **Encyclopedia of Fictional Artists**, a Gauguin exhibition at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, and **The Tulip Virus** by Daniëlle Hermans, a thriller about the seventeenth-century Dutch tulip trade published in the United States by Minotaur Books (a division of Macmillan).*

Translators who work for museums may find themselves confronted with all sorts of documents, from a terminology-laden conservator's report on the restoration of a nineteenth-century masterpiece to a brochure advertising an upcoming children's workshop. They will undoubtedly encounter many text types that are not specific to the museum world, such as press releases, annual reports, scholarly articles, websites, blogs, newsletters, subtitles, and popular books. Yet museum translators also deal with other, more specialized varieties of text, such as provenance records (which describe the ownership history of an object). Any experienced translator grappling with such records for the first time will understand the need to learn the relevant conventions. For example:

*Prov.: 'Paton, the Shippainter'; Tollemache Estates Sale, 15 May 1953, no. 60 as Richard Wilson; Messrs Edward Speelman Ltd.; purchased 1955<sup>1</sup>*

Less obvious perils await the translator when the text seems straightforward at first glance and the greatest challenges are posed by the context and audience. In this article, I focus on such challenges in the translation of one major text type: exhibition labels. Even this topic is still very broad, and I limit myself to a few introductory remarks, drawing primarily on my personal experience as a translator for Dutch museums. Most of the examples relate to the visual arts. Yet many of the same principles apply to translators of other types of museum exhibitions.

"Label" is used broadly in this context, as a generic term for the many panels, plaques, cards, and other printed surfaces – on walls, in display cases, and elsewhere in museum galleries – that provide information relating to the exhibition. This information may range from a simple statement of the title and artist of a work to a general introduction several paragraphs long. Most museum labels are interpretive, in the sense that they try to make the displays more meaningful and relevant to the visitors. Freeman Tilden, author of the classic *Interpreting our Heritage*, formulated six well-known principles of interpretation, the first of which is highly relevant to translation:

Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.<sup>2</sup>

Author's Note: I am grateful to Beverley Jackson for her helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this article.

This suggests a basic guideline for all exhibition translation: consider the role of the translations in the visitor experience.

### **Repackaging information**

With this in mind, it is useful for translators to consider how good labels are written. Museum visitors rarely read each label diligently from start to finish. Instead, they often stroll around the galleries in search of objects, images, and information that appeal to them. Some of them might be willing to wrestle with complex sentences in their professional reading, or when curled up on their own couch with a book. But at museum exhibitions, most of them are looking for information that is presented in a straightforward, easily digestible way and that helps them to engage with the objects around them.<sup>3</sup> Let us look at one example of how we might revise our label translations so that they communicate more effectively. Consider two versions of the same sentence:

- (1) In this painting, the often erotic image of a woman bathing instead conveys a melancholy mood.
- (2) The image of a woman bathing often has an erotic meaning, but in this painting, it conveys a melancholy mood.

In both versions, we learn that this type of image is often erotic. But in version 1, this information is embedded in a long, complex noun phrase: “the often erotic image of a woman bathing.” In version 2, it is presented explicitly in the form of a complete clause: “The image of a woman bathing often has an erotic meaning.” This invites readers to stop and process the first piece of information before moving on to the next one.

Furthermore, version 2 moves from old information to new information. In fact, it begins with the reader’s immediate experience: the appearance of the painting. This is a common strategy in museum labels, which often begin by noting a visible fact about the object in question, perhaps one of its more striking or puzzling features. In contrast, the former version scrambles old and new information together. Finally, version 2 uses parallelism to make the contrast clear; the first clause ends in “an erotic meaning,” which is opposed to the end of the second clause, “melancholy mood.”

Notice also that packaging information effectively does not necessarily mean using short, staccato sentences. Version 2 is a single sentence, and in fact, it is longer than version 1. The key difference is that it presents one chunk of information at a time, and in a logical order. This raises the issue of faithfulness to the original text. Do translators have the freedom to reorder information in this way? I would say that they have the responsibility to do so. As we all know, the order of words and phrases often has to be changed radically in translation, for both grammatical and stylistic reasons. Finding an order of presentation that communicates the author’s message effectively in English is a crucial part of the translator’s job, and copying the word order in the source language is unlikely to be a helpful strategy. In this context, the best way to be faithful to the original message is by presenting it somewhat differently in translation.

Obviously, translators have much less freedom than label writers, and it is important to be alert to possible departures from the intended meaning. I often have the luxury of working with Dutch-speaking museum educators who can read the English translations critically and discuss potential problems. When this type of safety net is absent, we have to be doubly careful. For instance, consider the following two versions of a sentence:

- (1) This is an early Italianate landscape by Jan van Huysum.
- (2) This is one of Jan van Huysum’s early Italianate landscapes.

The two versions may seem identical in meaning at first glance, and in the context of an entire exhibition about Van Huysum, version 2 probably reads more naturally. But version 2 also introduces a subtle presupposition, which is that Jan van Huysum painted more than one early Italianate landscape. If the translator does not know for certain that this is true, then it has to be checked. The lesson of this example is always to be on guard for ways in which stylistic changes may affect meaning.

### **A global audience**

What sorts of visitors will be reading the English labels? Outside the English-speaking world, and even at major museums in English-speaking countries, many will not be native speakers of English. Furthermore, most of them will not be experts in the field, but tourists or other casual visitors. They are likely to form a heterogeneous group: retired Italian schoolteachers, French businesspeople, Australian teenagers with Eurail passes, and Russian families on vacation. This makes it important to respect the likely limits of their English skills and their knowledge, without adopting a patronizing tone.

For example, a technical description of papermaking might describe a beater that “macerates and hydrates the cotton fibers into a slurry.” This description includes both the specialized term “slurry” and the difficult English words “macerate” and “hydrate.” The majority of visitors will be better served by a different version of this description. We might write, for instance, that the beater “soaks the fibers and turns them into a pulp, called a slurry.” This version simplifies or omits the difficult words and introduces the technical term by means of a near-synonym.

Different museums have different styles, and it can be worthwhile to discuss these issues with the client. Some exhibitions and some labels are pitched at specialists, rather than at the general public. Yet in general, there are plenty of reasons to keep the translation simple. This may be true even when the vocabulary in the source language is more complex. It is important to remember that the audience for the source-language labels (in Dutch or Japanese, say) often consists largely of native speakers, in contrast with the diverse international audience for the English versions. It follows that communication strategies which are appropriate in source texts may not be appropriate in translations.

For example, a Dutch label might use the phrase *tussen droom en daad* (literally “between dream and act”), a reference to a well-known line of poetry by the great Flemish writer Willem Elsschot. The suggested meaning is very similar to the meaning of the English proverb, “There’s many a slip ’twixt cup and lip,” and it might be tempting to use this proverb in the translation. In a scholarly book or article, this would probably be an excellent solution. But the archaic word “’twixt” could well confuse museum visitors who are not native English-speakers (even if some of them can look it up on their iPhones). It might be better simply to paraphrase the intended meaning, or at least to modernize the wording of the proverb: “There’s many a slip between the cup and the lip.”

### **Writing blind**

Museums often send translators detailed descriptions of objects but no images of the objects being described. This places the translator in a position of ignorance, relative not only to the authors of the labels but also to their future readers, who will have the object in front of them. Translating on the basis of guesswork is a dangerous game. The best solution is to request images of the objects described, unless they are so well known that you can easily Google them yourself. A few brief examples in English should give some impression of the complexities involved.



- The ring has matte petals surrounding a lapis lazuli stone in a scalloped setting. The stone has been cut en cabochon, without facets. The earrings are decorated with tiny balls, or grains, of gold.
- [describing an abstract painting] The tiny black shapes in the upper left corner appear very far away from the large plane. The colors chosen by the artist determine the weight of the elements.
- [describing a triptych] The right panel seems to depict a theater lounge, with a warrior or soldier at far right – the counterpart of the lovers at left.

Usually the client will be able to send images of some or all of the objects in advance. In other cases, you may need to request specific images after finishing the first draft. Digital photography and e-mail have greatly simplified this process. If in spite of this, some images are not forthcoming, then the second-best solution is to keep careful track of any uncertainties or guesswork, and to present your questions to the client before putting the finishing touches on the translation.

### Tense decisions

In the context of an exhibition, it can often be difficult to choose between the past and present tense. In some cases, both options are available.

Rembrandt uses light and shadow to suggest the spiritual dimension of his subject.

Rembrandt used light and shadow to suggest the spiritual dimension of his subject.

Even if we are discussing a dead painter, the use of the present tense can emphasize the enduring presence of his work. But we do sometimes use the past tense to emphasize the original, historical act of creation, or to situate this statement in the biographical context of Rembrandt's life.

In other cases, the conventions of English may require a different tense than the one used in the source language. For instance, the narrative (or historic) present often sounds unnatural in English.

(1) Around 1500, Michelangelo **returns** to Florence, where he **begins** work on the Statue of David. He **completes** it in 1504 and **returns** to Rome soon after.

(2) Around 1500, Michelangelo **returned** to Florence, where he **began** work on the Statue of David. He **completed** it in 1504 and **returned** to Rome soon after.

(3) Around 1500, Michelangelo **returned** to Florence, where he **began** work on the Statue of David. He **completes** it in 1504 and **returns** to Rome soon after.

Version 1 sounds unconventional in English, but analogous uses of the present tense are quite normal in some other languages. Version 2, which uses the past tense, would generally be preferable. The source text may even hop back and forth between the two, but in English this is rather disorienting, as we see in version 3.

Timelines are one exceptional case in which the narrative present tends to be used in English.

1499-1501 Michelangelo **returns** to Florence

1505 Michelangelo **is** invited back to Rome by Pope Julius II

There is another important case in which the narrative present is required in English, while other languages may prefer the past tense. This is when describing events in fictional stories, myths, and legends.

In the version of the Narcissus story recounted by Pausanias, he **does** not fall in love with his reflection, but with his twin sister.

Retellings of stories from the Bible and some other religious texts may use the present or the past tense, depending on whether the content of the story is being treated as a historical event or a mythical tale. The author's perspective is crucial in such cases. Similarly, the present tense, rather than the past, is used to discuss the narrative content of a pictorial representation such as a painting, sculpture, or photograph.

The snake **is** strangling the male figure, who **is** petrified with fear.

### **What's in a name?**

Works of art in museum collections tend to have generally accepted titles. Source-language titles therefore cannot simply be translated word for word. If the work has been referred to in English before, then the accepted English title should generally be used. In fact, some traditional titles have survived even though they no longer reflect modern English usage. For example, the word "cattle" is sometimes used in the titles of seventeenth-century paintings to refer to livestock other than cows, such as goats or sheep.

On the other hand, the titles of works of visual art are more fluid than the titles of books or films. Sometimes new research reveals that a traditional title was inaccurate. The well-known painting by Paulus Potter traditionally known as *The Young Bull*, which is in the collection of the Mauritshuis in The Hague, is now thought to be based on drawings of several different animals, including at least one adult bull. The Mauritshuis has therefore changed the title to *The Bull*, though the traditional title is still frequently encountered.

When translating exhibition labels, it is important to understand the curator's general approach. Do these works have generally accepted English titles? Are the traditional source-language titles being used, or have some or all of them been changed? Even if traditional titles are clearly being used some of the time, the translator should consult with the client about any source-language titles that deviate markedly from the traditional English versions. The source-language title and the English one do not always correspond neatly.

*The Chicago Manual of Style* provides succinct guidance on the typographical treatment of the titles of works of art:

Titles of paintings, drawings, statues, and other works of art are italicized, whether the titles are original, added by someone other than the artist, or translated. The names of works of antiquity (whose creators are often unknown) are usually set in roman. Titles of photographs are set in roman and enclosed in quotation marks.

Finally, it should be noted that the names of some artists differ from one language to another. This is true mainly of pre-modern artists, but even the twentieth-century painter who started his career as Piet Mondriaan, later moving to New York City and changing his name, is still referred to as Mondriaan in Dutch and Mondrian in English.

## Endnotes

1 From *View of Portsmouth from Portsdown Hill*, in Ann Sumner & Greg Smith (eds.), *Thomas Jones (1742-1803): An Artist Rediscovered*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, cat. no. 32, p. 143. Possibly the most comprehensive and useful introduction to provenance issues is Nancy H. Yeide et al., *The AAM Guide to Provenance Research*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2001.

2 As cited in *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, listed in the Resources section of this article, p. 10. The complete list can also be found in the Wikipedia article “Heritage Interpretation,” last checked on August 6, 2010.

3 In fact, many exhibit labels do not describe individual objects, but provide background information or introduce an entire gallery or display case. In this article, I focus largely on labels that describe objects, because they raise some of the most interesting translation issues.

## Resources

There is much more to be said about translating museum exhibitions, but I hope that this somewhat idiosyncratic collection of introductory comments will inspire interested translators to learn more. Here are a few resources that should prove helpful, especially when working for art museums.

### *Oxford Art Online* ([www.oxfordartonline.com](http://www.oxfordartonline.com))

This is a subscription-only online service that can be accessed through many academic libraries. It includes Grove Art Online, the web edition of the authoritative art reference work, with “23,000 subject entries, 21,000 biographies, 500,000 bibliographic citations, 40,000 image links and 5,500 images,” according to the website. Besides being a treasure trove of information about artists, techniques, schools, themes, and individual works, Grove can also be a useful reference for generally accepted titles and the spelling of proper names.

### *The Getty Vocabularies* ([www.getty.edu/research/conducting\\_research/vocabularies/](http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/))

These online glossaries contain specialized art and architectural terminology, artist names, and geographic names of places especially relevant to art and architecture. The Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) includes some foreign-language equivalents, and there are also separate sites with versions of the AAT in foreign languages, such as Dutch ([www.aat-ned.nl](http://www.aat-ned.nl)) and Spanish ([www.aatespanol.cl](http://www.aatespanol.cl)).

Blunden, Jennifer, “Dumbing down for museum audiences: necessity or myth?” *The Fine Print*, no. 3 (Feb. 2006), pp. 27-33. [www.emendediting.com/html/ezine/issue3/PDFs/TFP3Print.pdf](http://www.emendediting.com/html/ezine/issue3/PDFs/TFP3Print.pdf).

## Books

The J. Paul Getty Museum, in collaboration with various institutions, has produced the Looking at . . . series of art glossaries, or “guides to technical terms.” Each one deals with a different art form (e.g. *Looking at European Sculpture* or *Looking at Photographs*), and the entries not only define terms but place them in context and explain how they are used in practice. Since each guide is only about 100 pages long, it is feasible to skim through the relevant one when embarking on a major translation project.

Meyer, Ralph, *The Artist’s Handbook of Materials and Techniques*. Fifth edition, revised and expanded. Faber & Faber (London, 1991). A comprehensive tome, especially useful for texts on art conservation, restoration, and other technical matters.

The Routledge series *Heritage: Care—Preservation—Management* includes both useful introductory works, such as *Museum Basics* and *Handbook for Museums*, and books on more specialized topics, such as *Hands-On Exhibitions and Museum Ethics*.

Serrell, Beverley, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*. Alta Mira Press (Walnut Creek CA, 1996). A clear and complete introduction to the issues that label writers face.

BTW



“The translator said she didn’t get where she is today  
by listening to project managers”

# DIRTY POEM

By Ames Dee

“Dirty Poem” is a joking reference to the process of writing. I draft all my poems by hand, and they usually get pretty messy before I’m ready to type them and see what they look like on the printed page. I’m comparing the poet’s experience to that of the sculptor, who doesn’t really care about the mess, and the watercolorist, who celebrates it. “Accident” is a technical term in watercolor painting - it refers to the uncontrollable effects that water exerts on pigment as it dries; the result may not have been intended by the artist, but is sometimes quite wonderful.

The title also is a tease that hints at the playfulness of the poem. It begins from a somewhat silly premise and elaborates it - with references to Milton and Shakespeare! - so that in the end it’s just about having fun with words. In Portland we have shops that sell nothing but cupcakes. They come in wild colors and flavors and are elaborately decorated - but in the end, they’re just cupcakes. This poem is akin to that.

The sculptor works with pride and trust  
and scarcely thinks of chips and dust  
that litter floor and cover clothes,  
whitening hair and clogging nose.

The watercolorist displays  
high confidence in wash and glaze,  
as if a drip or spatter lent  
the happiest of accident.

But I feel shame and deep distress,  
scribbling poems in a mess  
of crossing out and tossing in  
like treasures in a rubbish bin.

I scribble on, my spirits low,  
as arrows, lines, and blotches grow.  
Still, managing to read the verse,  
I tell myself it could be worse.

When I – from life untimely ripp’d –  
have fallen on my manuscript,  
my mess may irk St. Peter so,  
he’ll hurl me headlong down below.



Ames Dee has written poems since childhood. Her influences include John Donne, Robert Frost, and Ogden Nash. She writes and paints in the Pacific Northwest, where she is presently working on a novel.

# BY THE WAY

by **Tony Beckwith**

## TRANSLATION IN SPACE AND TIME



*Tony Beckwith was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, spent his formative years in Montevideo, Uruguay, then set off to see the world. He came to Texas in 1980 and now lives in Austin, where he works as a writer, translator, poet, and cartoonist. E-mail: [tony@tonybeckwith.com](mailto:tony@tonybeckwith.com)*

The speeches were over and the exhibition was officially open. I weaved my way to the front of the gallery and approached the Maestro. We had just met an hour or so earlier and he greeted me with a smile. I laid my copy of the catalogue on the podium, open at the first page and, with a flourish, he dedicated it to me: *A Tony, mi traductor, gracias, Carlos Cruz-Diez.* We shook hands and I tried to explain how much I'd enjoyed being in his world, in his mind, for about eight months as I translated the book. He smiled and nodded and seemed to be saying, "Yes, it's fun in here."

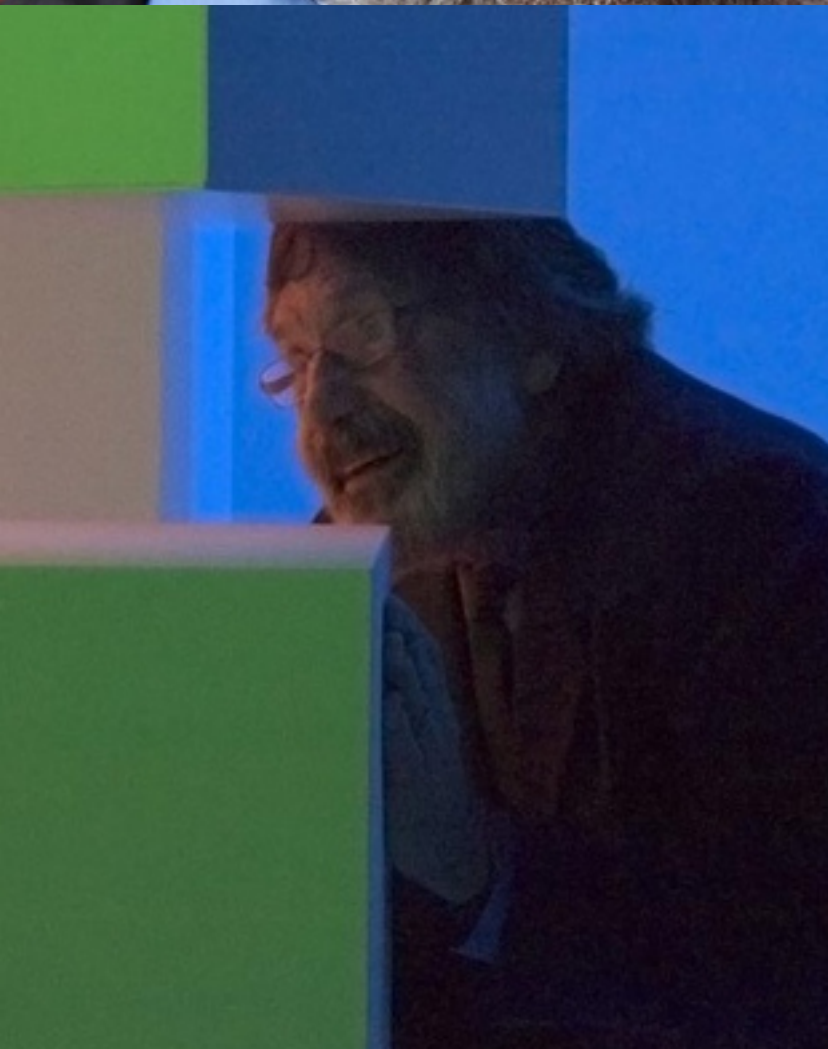
It all began, as most projects do these days, with an email; in this case, from colleagues at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH). I had worked on translations of their catalogues over the years, as one of a small group of freelance translators assigned to the task. This time they wanted just one voice, and I was the lucky one chosen to provide an English translation of the catalogue for a retrospective of works by Carlos Cruz-Diez. It was to be a 500-page book of historical and theoretical essays, interviews, architectural proposals, technical explanations, and a collection of superb photographs of his pieces.

Carlos Cruz-Diez is a Venezuelan painter and visionary artist. He was born in 1923 and has lived in Paris for many years. The retrospective of his works at the MFAH presented his research and showed how he expressed his discoveries in a variety of forms, most of which require the interaction of the viewer and in some cases are constructed as street installations designed for foot traffic. He has been a prolific artist his whole life.

One of the first sections to be translated was an essay by Héctor Olea, the Mexican art critic and co-editor of the catalogue, entitled “The Dialectics of Chrono-Chromatic Space.” Some expect essays of this kind to be turgid and recondite—the proverbial impenetrable thicket—and think that the main challenge for the translator is to stay awake. But in this case there were attractions that helped me to keep moving: interesting subject matter, new ideas to consider and explore, and a theatrical tone and style that helped to illuminate the author’s descriptions. One particular sentence that conveys something of the dramatic style I’m referring to goes as follows: “From its utopian view, the seminal function of the avant-garde was to shut down traditional concepts of art.”

An essay of this kind is written in a serious mood that is accentuated by the formal language, and when the writer is not talking about “the seminal function of the avant-garde” he is discussing different moods and periods in art history, expressing himself in the theoretical language of art (which is never in a hurry) as he gradually zooms in on the work at hand. Scholarly and insightful, the material is unavoidably dense, so the translator must keep an eye on the smoothness of the flow while searching for exactly the right word. “Is it possible that this proposal contains the beginnings of a dialogue between the ‘provocative aspects’ of constructed formalism and a subjectivism of perception?” At the end of the essay there is a photograph of two men astride a black motorcycle. The caption reads, “The author of this essay, Héctor Olea, and Carlos Cruz-Diez parking the motorcycle at the door of the artist’s workshop at 23, rue Pierre Sénard, Paris, France, April 2005.” They have evidently just enjoyed a very good ride, and are smiling and laughing into the camera.

The next section was “Four Situations Involving Color: A Conversation,” in which the exhibition’s curator, Mari Carmen Ramírez, interviews the artist about his life and work. The mood here is very different from the previous essay, and the translator must make appropriate adjustments to his own perspective—going from analytical to interactive, conceptual to sparkling, academic to conversational. One of the many challenges and rewards of a project of this nature is that each section of the catalogue allows the translator to be a different kind of writer. The previous essay required the skills of an art history scribe, but now the translator becomes a memoirist. The interview begins at the beginning, and the Maestro is soon recalling events in his childhood that influenced him in one way or another: “I have several childhood memories in which color plays



**CARLOS CRUZ-DIEZ**  
**COLOR IN SPACE AND TIME**  
FEBRUARY 6 - JULY 4

CRUZ-DIEZ FOUNDATION  
COLLECTOR OF ARTS

**MFA**  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



a leading role.” His father owned a bottling plant near Caracas and he remembers that one day at the plant “the sunlight from the windows streamed through the bottles of red liquid, casting colored shadows on the floor and infusing the space with color.”

Cruz-Diez tells Mari Carmen Ramírez about his schooling, and how he became disappointed in his early paintings of landscapes and more traditional subjects. As he describes his subsequent evolution he explains how he was “trying to decide where I was going with regard to color and the artist’s social responsibilities.” Along the way, he mentions some extraordinarily interesting things—the translator’s lagniappe, as it were. “One day, when I was reading a book about [Diego] Velázquez and his times, I looked closely at his works and compared them with those of his contemporaries. It was clear that it wasn’t just about painting well; it was also about *inventing* painting. *Las meninas* [The Maids of Honor] was an invention, another point of departure. Until then, everyone painted from the outside looking toward the canvas, but this one was painted from the canvas looking out.” When I Googled *Las meninas* I saw what he was talking about, and felt that I had just understood something important about the implications of a major landmark in the history of art. It occurred to me that Cruz-Diez’s point was, in a way, relevant to what I was trying to do as a translator—looking at his words from the inside out, trying to see what he was seeing through his eyes, and then describing it in English.

The catalogue’s narrative arc now swooped in closer to the man himself in “The Early Work,” an essay by the artist. Here he is speaking in the first person (“Ever since I began my adventure as a painter...”) about his beliefs and principles, and his evolution as an artist with a social responsibility—now the translator is a diarist/autobiographer. “I spent years painting the extreme poverty of the marginal barrios of Caracas, sublimating my angst and my expressive potential in the face of a reality that, as a painter, I was powerless to change.” Translating passages like this one created images and feelings that began to ease me into the artist’s mind as I shared his experiences, sensing his emotional reactions and following his lines of thought.

The next section returned to the interview between artist and curator, and in “Situation 2: Color into Space” Cruz-Diez explains that, “I wanted to find a way to use color so that it was not a painted testimony but a reality that expressed its own condition—that is, the reality of light.” He experimented with light until he was able to project color into space to create art with no support of any kind. His research into kinetic art led him to build structures that showed how color can change according to the position of the viewer. He discusses the process involved in the creation of his works, “...the edges of the perpendicular planes are painted white on one side and red, green, and even black, on the other. This treatment makes the first one appear pinker, the second one

greener, and so on. My intention was to produce nuances that would reveal the subtle ranges of reflective color.” Again, these are dense texts, crammed with a great deal of information, so the translation must help the reader navigate the inflow by arranging the elements in reasonable, understandable sequences.

The lengthy interview takes a graceful stroll through the Maestro’s history. As it moves on from his early life and experimentation, he talks about technical matters, which were always an important part of his work. “During this period, polyester rollers were replaced by a technique involving the use of an air brush and lacquer, which achieved more consistent and even textures.” Some of the descriptions are a little reminiscent of industrial text translations, and the terminology is occasionally what one might expect to hear in a metallurgical workshop. He also talks in great detail about his process. “An intermediate space is created between the layers where light changes and in turn enriches colors and forms, encouraging the transition from a two-dimensional plane to the expression of a latent volume.”

Everything must have a name, and Cruz-Diez explains how some of his works got theirs. “The first name I gave them—I don’t know if it is written down somewhere—was ‘false prisms’ because, as an opaque support, they produced chromatic effects that were similar to prisms.” Where the writer goes, the translator must follow, with eyes and ears wide open. His voice was becoming familiar to me by now. I could hear his cadences as I read his words, and tried to keep something of those rhythms and tones in the English version. He is a thoughtful man, a contemplative man, one who explains things as he sees them in his mind’s eye. “And so begins the myth-making process that all elemental experiences stimulate. Everyone tries to find meaning for what he or she cannot explain, and this quest leads to many levels of thinking, including ‘the aesthetic’.”

He first went to Paris in 1955 and loved it. “Things are neither too big nor too small. The streets are neither too wide nor too narrow. I can see people, I can see in detail what is behind or in front of me.” When translating his references to Paris, I wondered if it helped that I had been there. Though hardly a critical factor, I decided that it certainly couldn’t hurt, since it is always helpful to be able to picture the subject of the translation, to have a background to scour for shades of meaning that can be passed from one language to the other.

Toward the end of the book is the Chronology, which traces the Maestro’s career through a list of very brief facts and descriptions of events that were directly or indirectly involved in his life. Here, more so than in the rest of the book, great attention to detail was required to manage the multiple details and minutia. It was a relief to

know that every word I translated would be scrutinized by the MFAH's Publications Director, Diane Lovejoy. We communicated via "track changes" and got used to talking to each other in the margins of the texts, adding afterthoughts and new suggestions as ideas percolated and stewed over time. In one exchange, the first draft said, "[Certain works] exemplify the process, which allows color to be unencumbered by fixed forms." My marginal note suggests, "How about '...which releases color from the tyranny of fixed forms'?" The accumulated familiarity with the subject matter, absorbed while translating the rest of the book, helped enormously in making sense of each item in very few words and, where possible and appropriate, in using the same mood as the section to which the incident referred.

Cruz-Diez is a thoroughly creative artist. When he couldn't find the tools he needed to produce his works of art, he invented his own and built them, so there is a section in the catalogue called "Machines and Tools." Invented tools inevitably lead to new words and new processes to describe, and the translator must be attuned to the Maestro's sense of technical precision as he discusses his toolbox. "The tape cutter had a scalpel knife mounted on a cartridge on bearings that moved on a tube that functions as a rail. This mechanism, designed to move horizontally, was mounted on a stationary wooden base that held the digital printing plate where the cuts were to be made." The translator must be able to see this device in his mind's eye so that he can describe it in English, and must possess the skills of a technical writer in order to do so. This section was actually good training for the "Glossary of Terms" right at the end of the book, where everything is explained. "Section Folder: During the early years, the 'U'-shaped aluminum sections were made with a metal folder, one fold at a time." The reader may not fully grasp the specifics, but the description of the process must flow smoothly and make sense in the translation.

After eight months I felt quite at home in the extraordinary mind of Carlos Cruz-Diez, having been "on the road" with him, or so it seemed. I now felt perfectly comfortable writing statements such as: "I am a 'visualizer' of situations, a plastic researcher, and I believe that all human activity is simple and flows from elementary things; it only seems mysterious when one ignores its mechanisms or its principles." But then, one day I sent in the final revision to the last translation and suddenly the project was over and out of my hands. Weeks went by and the whole experience slowly moved to the back of my mind. New projects bury earlier ones just as surely as new love edges the old. Winter came, then Christmas.

And then, in early February, Lillian and I were "cordially invited to a reception and dinner celebrating the opening of *Carlos Cruz-Diez: Color in Space and Time*," a retrospective of the artist's work. We drove to Houston in an exuberant mood and, for me, the rest was history.

“FROM PLAISANCE TO OPÉRA”  
THE AIR ON THE BUTTE: A MEMOIR (1945)  
BY ANDRÉ SALMON

TRANSLATED BY BETH GERSH-NEŠIĆ AND JACQUELINE GOJARD  
FROM L’AIR DE LA BUTTE: MÉMOIRES (1945)  
[PARIS: ARCADIA ÉDITIONS, 2004, PAGES 116-126]



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Jacqueline Gojard has specialized in the study of André Salmon, as well as of the writers and artists from his *Esprit Nouveau* circle. She is currently working on Salmon’s biography and has edited several new editions of his works. She is the executor of Salmon’s literary estate, and in 2009 published the *Max Jacob/André Salmon Correspondance, 1905-1944* (Gallimard).

André Salmon (1881-1969) was a French poet, art critic, journalist, novelist, playwright and principal member of *la bande à Picasso* (the writers and artists who gathered at Picasso’s studio-residence in the ramshackle “Bateau Lavoir” at 13 rue Ravignan in Montmartre). Salmon is best known for supporting Cubism when few people understood it. He also gave Picasso’s masterpiece *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)* its title – much to the artist’s consternation. (Picasso never liked the name and only referred to the painting as “my bordello.”) Salmon’s choice of title reflects his love of wordplay and innuendo. Picasso’s mistress Fernande Olivier (1905-11) remembered Salmon’s gift for storytelling in her memoir *Picasso et ses amis* (1933). Salmon’s memoir *L’Air de la Butte* (1945) overlaps with Olivier’s and continues through to World War I. In the following chapter, “From Plaisance to Opéra,” we find Salmon’s version of the infamous Rousseau Banquet and learn about the gang’s role-playing game “Faire Degas,” as well as the chaos following the 1917 premier of Picasso, Satie and Cocteau’s ballet *Parade*, all captured in Salmon’s characteristically candid style.

When I would happily go to those evenings at the painter Henri Rousseau's dingy studio – the Rousseau known as “le Douanier” [the Customer's Officer] - on the rue Perrel, deep inside the Plaisance district, the thought never occurred to me that one day I would be the treasurer of the Friends of Henri Rousseau Committee and responsible for bringing the remains of this good fellow from Bagneux to Laval.<sup>1</sup> The art critic Maximilien Gauthier was the secretary of the Committee which was magisterially presided over by Léon-Paul Fargue, a painter and accomplished poet, before becoming the highly-regarded writer of memoirs for those who choose to explore an existence through “its layered strata, its Pliocene, its Jurassic.”<sup>2</sup>

I could discuss the Douanier's life in minute detail, but death and idiotic objections have already made him famous, which his admission into the Louvre could secure. We cherished everything about him: his ingenious and knowing art, his kindness and his obsessions, his obvious absurdities – which in no way liberated any kind of genius. Yes, everything, including the insanity of the soirees and receptions, which possessed this old penniless man - possessed us as well.

The dyed-in-the-wool Montmartre denizens detested us for having been the first on the Butte to break with their style of wearing a pointed hat and lavalier tie, accompanied by a heavy walking stick and skull pipe. They criticized us for introducing bourgeois manners from Montparnasse which, quite honestly, they knew nothing about. Except for in our studios or tiny poet quarters, where virginal sisters would not even be offended, we dressed as best we could: “Dressed appropriately,” Apollinaire said, as he wandered through the streets of what was still a Victorian London.<sup>3</sup>

When we went to poor Rousseau's home, we dressed as carefully as when we were invited to visit the high-society couturier and arts patron Paul Poiret. We dressed even better than when we went to see the Steins, the brother and sister millionaires who came from San Francisco, posed as transatlantic bohemians and lived near the Luxembourg Gardens. On those evenings on the rue de Fleurus, in a study adorned by [Picasso's] excellent Saltimbanque Period canvases and in a boudoir studded like stars with little Renoirs, an ordinary suit from the wardrobe would do.

We would travel together on the upper-deck of Batignolles-Clichy-Odéon bus as Georges Braque enlivened

1 Henri [le Douanier] Rousseau was born in Laval on May 21, 1844 and died on September 2, 1910 in Necker Hospital in Paris. He was buried in a pauper's mass grave in the Cimetière de Bagneux on September 4, then disinterred and reburied in an individual plot in March 1912. A gravestone was erected and engraved with a verse by Guillaume Apollinaire, carved by Constantin Brancusi in 1913. The Comité des amis d'Henri Rousseau arranged for the transfer of Douanier Rousseau's remains to Laval in 1942 (Salmon remembered it happened after the Occupation) where they were reburied in the Jardin de la Perrine near the municipal museum. Rousseau's landlady Madame Armand Queval, President Albert Sarraut and Adolphe Beck, the mayor of Laval, were attendance. The website for the cemetery in Bagneux erroneously claims that Rousseau is buried there. [BGN]

2 Léon-Paul Fargue, “La paix était fausse,” in *Chroniques du “Figaro”: Suites françaises*, edited by Léon Cotnareanu (New York: Brentano's, 1945), vol. I:244. “Nous allons franchir un nouveau drame, puisque l'existence a ses étages, son pliocène, son jurassique, son quaternaire, ses orchestres.” The article was written on September 6, 1939, and attempts to buck up the spirits of his fellow French citizens after the German invasion of Poland on September 1 and declaration of war on September 3. (We thank ALTA colleagues Jeffrey S. Ankrom, Esq. and Professor David Frye at the University of Michigan who responded to our e-mail query and located the Fargue quotation.)

3 A reference to Guillaume Apollinaire's poem *Alcools* in the section “L'Émigrant de Landor Road,” “De mannequins vêtus comme il faut qu'on se vête.” [JG]

the journey with tunes played on his accordion, an under-appreciated instrument back then. Together, as a gang, we would go to Rousseau's studio lit by Venetian lanterns. Aside from his beautiful paintings, it was decorated with French flags and yellow standards emblazoned with the czars' eagles, sacred muslins with fabulous Adrianople red, which came our way due to that Toulon morning and Kronstadt evening dedicated to a Franco-Russian alliance [in 1891]. They were kept like beautiful linens preserved in the armoires of our finest old households. Rousseau believed that the Franco-Russian alliance was a sign universal peace was at hand. That was a subject this dear man painted.

At twenty, he was a clarinetist in the regiment, which lasted seven years. In old age, Rousseau preferred to play the violin – a heartrending squeaky fiddle. He would sing:

“Knock, knock, let me in . . . .”

“Ow! I have such a toothache . . . .”

“Léonore, my brave love . . . .”

“I really don't like the major newspapers / Which only talk about politics . . . .”



Rousseau, *Self-Portrait with Palette*, 1890, oil on canvas  
National Gallery, Prague

He would give the floor to other amateurs and his diction students, for he also had a gift for recitation. However, his interpretations of the poets' and the best-known monologuists could not hold a candle to his painting.

Who wasn't at Rousseau's? The Unanimists, led by Jules Romains and René Arcos, merged with the School of the Rue Ravignan on the rue Perrel. Georges Duhamel also came, without his flute whose modulations could have accompanied the Douanier's song about nighttime in Plaisance:

I really don't like the major newspapers  
Which only talk about politics,  
What do I care that Eskimos  
Might have ravaged Africa?  
What I need is *Le Petit Journal*  
*La Gazette La Croix* from my mother's time.  
The more people drown in the canal  
The more it is my business.

Because the Douanier was poor, he would sometimes not have adequate provisions for his guests just before a reception. Word would travel from the boutiques in Plaisance to the studios in Montmartre, from the cafés in Montparnasse to the poetry hangouts at the intersection of Buci: "This evening, April 1, 1909 (an example of a real date from among so many) Monsieur Henri Rousseau will dine at home."

Surely, the Douanier should have suffered miserably in such circumstances. Fear not. A Good Fairy would come through in the nick of time. He would always arrive at the right moment – identical in style but not always the same one. This Good Fairy, a benevolent genii, was a leader among shrewd characters, a real operator, who would bring a basket of white wine from the grocer, with – take a look! – sometimes a pound of little sponge cakes, those excellent ladyfingers called *à la cuillère*, which makes no sense since the witty mouths of Parisian women grocers changed the name, a while ago, to *à l'écuyère*, which has an entirely different spin.<sup>4</sup>

A basket of white wine and little sponge cakes. Go ahead then. Pick it up. It's heavy. So what would one get in return? Relieved of the common and tragic anxiety of having something to offer his guests, the old man, overwhelmed, would give to his benefactor one of those unsellable canvases, which today might fetch a million francs in cash, according to the public auction prices.

Trading like this went on until the painter Serge Férat, who was rich at that time, came along. He bought some of Rousseau's canvases without fleecing him. Excellent! Later on he would give new life to the last series of *Les Soirées de Paris*, a revue founded by Apollinaire's friends for Apollinaire. The rare January 15, 1913 issue is devoted to the Douanier's renown.

"You are invited to attend the procession, service and burial of Monsieur Henri Julien Rousseau, painter, officer in the Academy, who passed away on September 2, 1910, at Necker Hospital at the age of 66."

1910 . . . 1945 . . . 66 years old . . . 101 years ago . . . Thirty-five years since your flute's song ceased to wake up the birds in their cages from the concierge's quarters to the garrets on the rue Perrel. The "happy tunes of the instrument," as you inscribed on your painting *Yadwigha's Dream*.<sup>5</sup>

So many memories which come to mind and put a lump in my throat discourage me from making any pilgrimage from the rue Perrel to the rue Ravignan. It's better not to go there anymore.

The best way to find you would be at the Louvre where, in due time, you took your place among the masters: you, who in days gone by were a popular figure in your poor neighborhood.

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4 Salmon points out a pun: *à la cuillère* sounds like *à l'écuyère*. The first means "spoon cookies" and in the second, it means "female equestrian cookies."

5 Known today as *The Dream*, 1910, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The Louvre! We found you there so often, without canvas or easel, an attentive visitor. You did not copy the *Marriage of Cana* nor any work by Paolo Uccello, whom you discovered there on your own. The Louvre was your temple of art, whose conquest never obsessed you but where, nonetheless, you wouldn't have been surprised to find your work, since you were so sure in your angelic candor that your concepts in art were the best, of the highest caliber.

On a sunny summer afternoon (as the novelists would say in those chapters published under the "News in Brief" columns that you found so amusing in your newspapers, dear inspired curious spectator) I found you going down to the Apollo Gallery, looking for the exit. You had just spent a long time meditating on the museum's collection. I asked you what particularly struck you this time, what masters did you study for your own benefit. You answered: "One can't remember all their names."

What could a corner of Heaven look like for someone like you who deserves to be in Heaven, because of your ambitious artworks and your acceptance of a pitiful lot in life, because of your sacred ambition and your secular humility, because of your radiating poverty, your distinguished poor man's dignity, and your resignation; and also because of your concepts for your art, that were so lofty? You would have immediately abandoned your ideas while you gave yourself over to the joy of painting in and of itself, if you did not truly see yourself in the family of the greatest artists without waiting for our eulogies.

Because of all this, your corner of Heaven could resemble the rue Perrel studio, as it flickers in our memories: its festive evening apparel, when you wasted your money to entertain artists, poets, and shopkeepers from Plaisance. Your small and faithful clientele appreciated your local specialty: portraits of the family and the students from your painting, music and diction classes, children of these shopkeepers or of your former colleagues from the toll collector's office in Paris, the job which provided you with the inappropriate and felicitous name Douanier.

Or instead, it might be a reflection of young Picasso's studio on the rue Ravignan, the studio in an old wooden house that could become a marble palace if we covered the façade with all the commemorative and truly informative plaques:

*Here fell the darkness of the Blue Period nights . . . Here bloomed the Rose Period days . . . Here the Demoiselles d'Avignon abandoned their curves to embody another theory according to the Golden Section and the secret of the Fourth-Dimension . . . Here a brotherhood of poets brought together through professional criticism gathered in the School of the rue Ravignan. . . . Here before the turn of the century, the décor for the Fairy Council of Jules Laforgue was painted. . . . Here in these dark corridors lived the true lovers of fire. . . .*

And many, many others, like:

*Here, one evening in the year MCMVIII the splendor of the first and last banquet was organized by the admirers of the painter Henri Rousseau, known as le Douanier.*

When we didn't go to Rousseau's studio, or the Steins or the Lapin Agile, or the Closerie des Lilas, or anywhere else, and we felt a bit lonely in our own digs, we would willingly spend the evening at Picasso's studio. There we would hang out and really get into this society farce we called "Playing Degas." A juvenile game? Not really. Let me try to explain.



There was once a humorous brochure which said: “DEGAS, septuagenarian, celebrated painter, great talent, socialite, curmudgeon.”

Now, pay attention: Degas - whom we greatly admired - was the right choice for the game. If we didn't appreciate La Gandara, another fashionable painter, as much for the purposes of the game, it was because we felt he just served the high-society set. Here are the basics. “Playing Degas” was an excuse to stage a refined ceremonial event, expressly for beautiful young ladies, and an opportunity to expound with the natural grace and dignity befitting a duchess' audience.

The person who played Degas was supposed to make barbed comments. Our merciless critiques would grow so intense (however, we weren't really mean) that we could seriously dampen the spirits of *los mismos*,<sup>6</sup> as our host used to call them – the kind of artist who was hardly an outsider to our circle, our tribe, our brotherhood, our catacomb. But mind you, the Degas character did not play alone.

In order to respond in kind, we made use of perfect Ludovic Halévys, some edgy-as-you-please Jacques-Émile Blanches, some Forains with equally nasty dispositions, and some Boldinis tossed in to make us die from laughter.

By the end of the evening, a true gentleman in evening dress would arrive. Mixing up the epochs, he would “play” – without missing a beat - Victor Hugo, Courbet, Delacroix, or even Georges Sand! This Proteus, the most authentic socialite in our witty family (you might say) was Max Jacob, whom on any given afternoon Montmartre would see either in his chauffeur get-up or his Breton suit.

In one of the greatest Christian books in our language, *The Defense of Tartuffe* (which marvelously draws attention to a gift for humor guarded to the point of saintliness), Max Jacob tells a great story. He confesses that when Father F. . . (Father Ferrand) of the Fathers of Zion prepared him for baptism (a bit too long for his taste), the thought occurred to him to offer to do his horoscope, just to see his reaction. I resisted the urge to remind Max of his former appetite for cross-dressing when my Saint-Benoît-sur Loire friend no longer exercised his originality in clothing, except for allowing the white of the basilica's stonework to cover his knees after long periods of kneeling.

We would still think up more ideas for dialogues, from those in “Playing Degas” to stories about “Returning from the Opéra.” We would comment on those good old premieres of fifty years ago, in Jockey Club style, without suspecting that the Opéra was on the look out for the rue Ravignan crowd. Serge Diaghilev's Cossacks were already no more than a few steps away from Paris with their ballet stuff, the costumes and stage sets, consisting of as much Slavic transpositions as we had in our contemporary French Art. Matisse played his part there through “colored volume.” This same Matisse was the one whom Apollinaire, mistrusting those who scoff, dared to compare to an orange, the delight of the jealous Hesperides, because of his succulence and his ability to radiate his fruitfulness.<sup>7</sup>

Let's not get ahead of ourselves!, oh serial writer, cousin to the Persian poet. Before the Opéra was open to Derain, Braque, Marie Laurencin, and many others, and had opened its doors to the charming and much-forgotten Fauconnet whom Death stole from glory at thirty years old - like Seurat. Before this Opéra, let me

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6 Here Salmon uses the Spanish words to provide the flavor of Picasso's mongrel expressions, French mixed with Spanish. *Los mismos* means the same ones (*los mismos con las mismas* – same old, same old, i.e., the regulars).

7 Guillaume Apollinaire, Preface to the Matisse-Picasso exhibition, Paul Guillaume Gallery, January 23-February 15, 1918.

tell you, there was a truly memorable celebration, a feast, at 13 rue Ravignan: Rousseau's banquet, a great date in the history of contemporary Art.

Rousseau's enemies - the enemies of his candid and powerful art – bent on persecuting this poor great man, endlessly accuse us of mocking him!

I swear to tell the truth and nothing but the truth here. We dedicated to our friend Rousseau the kind of celebration that would touch his simple heart in the best way and would be in the spirit of the Douanier's compositions. Is that clear?

Based on a Chinese tune from the café-concerte, *The China of Ba-Ta-Clan*, the poet Maurice Chevrier<sup>8</sup> bleated:

It's the painting  
Of this Rousseau  
That tames nature  
With his magic brush . . . .

In a serious manner, Apollinaire declaimed:

You remember, Rousseau, the Aztec landscape,  
The forests where the mango and pineapple grew,  
The monkeys spreading the blood of watermelons  
And the blond emperor who was shot over there.

The pictures that you paint, you saw in Mexico:  
A red sun embellished the top of the banana trees  
And the valiant soldier you were swapped a tunic  
For the blue dolman jacket of the brave customs officer . . .

With this poem Apollinaire stepped right into the middle of the Rousseau legend and believed it. Rousseau was not a customs officer but an employee of the city toll office. He wore a green uniform not the dolman blue. We are not sure whether Rousseau was in the Mexican campaign. The old man of Plaisance would tell stories. I recall one that he liked to tell about a ghost who visited him when he stood guard at night at the city gate in Montrouge – a ghost “who knew Catulle Mendès!” Having said this in one essay, Apollinaire felt that he had to add: “Rousseau was pulling our leg.”<sup>9</sup> What a stroke of luck that Mr. Charles Chassé, a little-known professor of history set out to demolish the “the false glories!” Alfred Jarry was reduced to nothing in Mr. Charles Chassé's eyes, and the same had to be done to deflate Rousseau. A simple thing when Guillaume Apollinaire finally admitted that it was only a farce, which the Douanier himself confessed. “Rousseau was pulling our leg.” Or, the art of deceptive citations.

By midnight, Rousseau was sleeping. We looked for a cab, making sure to choose the one with a light that would take him back to Plaisance. We put the old man into the carriage, putting his little violin in his lap. . . . Rousseau left . . . after that . . . Ah! after that . . . of course we did plenty of wild things. Why not?

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8 Chevrier means goatherder. Maurice Chevrier's real name was Maurice Cremnitz, a member of Picasso's Gang.

9 Guillaume Apollinaire, “Henri Rousseau,” *Les Soirées de Paris*, 15 January 1914.

In the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Gertrude Stein did not tell the story very well to her American audience. It's better to rely on the mistress of the house at that time, Fernande Olivier whose book *Picasso and his Friends* [1933] is twice as valuable as a document, since the original is now hard to come by. (It's regrettable that the editor dismissed the manuscript's title *Nine Years with Picasso*.)

The day came when Jean Cocteau's first poster was glued on the walls of Paris. The Ballets Russes would move from the Châtelet to the Opéra, with a few return engagements at the Châtelet, the stage for *Around the World in 80 Days* and *The Devil's Pills*.<sup>10</sup> The Cubism in *Parade* made some points and risked some leaps.

*Parade!* . . . 1917 . . . . Afternoon performance . . . Applause and jeers, whistles . . . .riots during the intermission . . . One hundred Russian soldiers were invited to sit in the second balcony in exchange for their bravery at the front in Champagne. They were ready to intervene . . . One imbecile swooped down on Apollinaire and me in order to yell: "Is this French art? . . Is it?"

We pushed him out of the way without responding. We had just heard about René Dalize's death: Captain René Dupuy des Islette, fell while leading his battalion into battle on the farm in Cogne-le-Vent . . .

May 7, 1917. The fifth line of the dedication in [Apollinaire's] *Calligrammes*.<sup>11</sup>

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10 *Le Tour du Monde en 80 Jours*, a play by Jules Verne and Adolphe d'Ennery (1874); *Les Pilules du Diable* was a fairytale in three acts and 20 tableaux by Ferdinand Laloue and Anicet Bourgeois (1839).

11 "In memory of /my oldest friend/René Dalize/who died on the Field of Honor/May 7, 1917  
À la mémoire/du plus ancien de mes camarades/RENÉ DALIZE/mort au Champ d'Honneur/le 7 mai 1917.

# IN-BETWEENNESS: A CONVERSATION

with Marta Garsd, Liliana Valenzuela,  
Tony Beckwith, and Marcel Lopez

## **Marta Garsd**

*Marta holds an MA degree in art history and has worked in her field of expertise, Latin American art, writing and producing bilingual texts for publications and exhibitions both in the U.S. and Latin America. She has worked on projects related to the arts and cultures of Latin America for WGBH/Public Broadcasting Service, Boston; Scribner's Sons, New York; and the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress, among other institutions.*

## **Liliana Valenzuela**

*Born and raised in Mexico City, Liliana is an adopted tejana. The 2006 recipient of the Alicia Gordon Award for Word Artistry in Translation, she's the Spanish language translator of works by Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, Denise Chávez, Nina Marie Martínez, Alex Espinoza, Cristina García, and many other writers. She served as ATA director during 2005-2008.*

## **Tony Beckwith**

*Tony has been contributing cartoons and "By the Way" feature articles to Source since its rebirth online in the summer of 2008.*

## **Marcel Lopez**

*An electronic engineer with a masters' degree in Telecommunications, Marcel studied medicine for three years, lived in 17 countries, speaks English and Spanish fluently, and French, Italian, and Portuguese conversationally.*

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Marta: The topic Art and Translation is fascinating. Although I don't translate from English to Spanish, it has been very difficult for me to find the appropriate words for concepts frequently used in descriptions of post colonial art – such as “in-betweenness.” Suggestions? There is also the issue of cultural associations between word and image.

Tony: How about “ambivalence” (ambivalencia) or “hybridness” (the Spanish form would be based on “híbrido”)?

Here's a text copied from: [http://postcolonial.net/@/DigitalLibrary/\\_entries/42/file-pdf.pdf](http://postcolonial.net/@/DigitalLibrary/_entries/42/file-pdf.pdf)  
that suggests a possible way to approach it:

Also, although First and Third World positions may not be interchangeable, they are nevertheless quite fluid, which implies a need to qualify if not to repudiate binary oppositions in the articulation of their relationship. Hence local interactions take priority over global structures in the shaping of these relationships,

which implies that they are better comprehended historically in their heterogeneity than structurally in their fixity. These conclusions follow from the hybridness or “in-betweenness” of the postcolonial subject that is not to be contained within fixed categories or binary oppositions. Since postcolonial criticism has focused on the postcolonial subject to the exclusion of an account of the world outside of the subject, the global condition implied by postcoloniality appears at best as a projection onto the world of postcolonial subjectivity and epistemology – a discursive constitution of the world, in other words, in accordance with the constitution of the postcolonial subject, much as it had been constituted earlier by the epistemologies that are the object of postcolonial criticism.

I’d love to hear more on the subject.

Marta: I would not call it an “art term,” although it has been extensively used in postcolonial art criticism after Homi Bhabha who, I believe, coined the term claiming that a salient characteristic of colonial culture is the condition of hybridness or in-betweenness (between fixed categories). I don’t think the right translation would be “ambivalencia” since this would imply one or the other, alternatively.

Read how the term is used in *En El umbral del siglo XXI: Un lustro de literatura hispánica*, published by the University of Cordoba, Spain:

“Así la estética de la transmodernidad y su relación con los movimientos migratorios y la integración o “ghetización” de sus protagonistas; el sentimiento de pérdida del entorno que produce la emigración y la recuperación de la memoria que trae consigo para conocimiento de sus herederos; el papel de la performance y el video arte, o la utilización del happening , por parte de escritoras como la chilena Diamela Eltit; las ideas y teorías literarias en la obra de Isabel Allende; los lazos transatlánticos y la búsqueda de la identidad en tres continentes a

través de obras de la mexicana Brianda Domecq, la española Lucia Etxebarria o la chilena Marjorie Agosin o el uso del “code switching” como estrategia transgresora en la literatura chicana “en una nueva neurosis creativa que les ha ayudado, como instrumento artístico a encontrar su identidad en un espacio medio, el in-betweenness “.

And when we refer to the condition of in-betweenness could we say “la condición de entremedio” or “la condición intermedia? I don’t like it. Or “La condición de estado intersticial”?

Michele: Just for fun I plugged in the relevant sentence from Tony’s text [“These conclusions follow from the hybridness or ‘in-betweenness’ of the postcolonial subject”] to Google Translate. I love “hybridness” – good ol’ Spanish word—in Google’s translation:

“Estas conclusiones se derivan de la hybridness o ‘en la intermediación’ del sujeto poscolonial.”

Tony: Marta, considering the number of English words in the text you cite, I wonder if there’s a need to translate the word at all? The other thought that comes to mind is, “Tierra de nadie” (No-man’s land).

Liliana: The Mexican-American author and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa used “Nepantla,” to designate that space in-between and “Nepantleras” those who move between two or more spheres. Another one could be “mestizaje,” racial as well as cultural or social. Depends on the context, I guess.

Marcel: Marta, I don’t know the context and it really depends on the rest. But here are some possibilities for you. “In-betweenness” es entretejido, entremezclado, con el mismo lugar geométrico, compartido, compartiendo el mismo espacio, contenido, entre tiempos y espacios iguales, con presencia en los mismos límites.

# CREDITS

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Ames Dee, Self-Portrait

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Images are from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Web site:

<http://www.mfah.org/exhibition/carlos-cruz-diez-color-space/>

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Photo of Beth Gersh-Nesic

<http://arthistory.about.com/bio/Beth-Gersh-Nesic-70964.htm>

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Henri Rousseau, Self-Portrait with Palette, 1890, oil on canvas, National Gallery, Prague.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rousseau09.jpg> (public domain)