

Rodrigo dela Peña Jr. Amorsolo's Light and Other Poems

Amorsolo's Light

Don Fernando, it is no secret how light
fills your canvas, how in the tropics, light
is often unseen but felt, the summer light

searing as laser, and it is under this light
that you painted alla prima, your hand light
on the brush, facing the easel at first light

so you can see the sky gradually lighten
until every surface is awash in light,
the world sun-stained, an abundance of light

falling on farmers planting rice, light
on their feet and singing, a fugue of light
rippling, becoming the iridescent flight

of birds over a field, filigree of light
threading the canopy, the mango trees lit
with fruits ripe for the picking, the fact of light

common and real as gravity, as light-
years away stars combust, radiating light,
inflected, refracted, lush on the light

brown skin of women washing clothes, their slight
bodies luminous, how variable light
becomes distilled into wonder, delight,

the day opening into a world of light.

Escher's Dream

Stairs ascending and descending in a loop.
Holding a spherical mirror, a man stares,

reflecting on himself, his face dead
center, what we know only a reflection

of what he sees. Perspective's a tricky
game: the door a ceiling, portal of

another world where one might change, be changed
into a bird, a fish, a cresting wave. An Other.

Water flows down, up, up and down in a never-
ending cycle, powering the mind's water

wheel, perpetual machine that must exist
because perceived. How blindly logic wheels,

turning from one line to the next, a question
engraved on wood, shadow of an image turned,

becoming its answer. The gaze follows
the rungs of a ladder, the day becoming

night becoming day, all in the same page, the same
breath. Memory repeats itself—knights

lined up on horseback, lizards in a fractal
kaleidoscope, the world radiating from one line,

one side with one edge, rotating in an infinite
dance, singing and spiralling as one.

Triptych

1. *Self-Portrait with Broken Things*

So this is the world: alarm
that fails to sound, signal
fault in train after train,
nimbus cloud of a Monday
morning raining down on all
the other days. Same same
but different, meaning yes,
no, you will not decipher
language, which means you will
not understand the world. How
quickly it escalates, a car
becoming wreckage, bone
splintering into smaller
pieces of bone. I've tried
to voice a question for years
but my tongue slips into other
things. Why do I insist
on picking up bright shards
of glass, making a mosaic,
and calling it a life?

2. Self-Portrait as Flip

Meaning friendly little island
people, if you want to be
inoffensive. If that's what we are:
harmless—how may I help you
today, ma'am sir, would you like
a drink with that? Meaning questions
flicked by the tongue are a reflex,
like a cough or an ankle
jerk. But the joke is on you,

soldier, as you flop around
for help. Meaning how quickly
a word turns over on its head,
meaning somersault, over-
the-top crazy, a trick
on a skateboard, or the way
a coin is tossed in the air,
spinning on its axis, both rust-
smudged faces fusing into one.

3. Sentient Self-Portrait

Life being synthetic,
the garden blooms

in a cloud dome.
Reality as a show,
streamed 24/7.
Data roaming.

The world virtual
and viral, quantum

and quantified. IQ
test. DNA test.

Turing test. Panic
a room no one

can get out of.
God is an app

is a DJ is a DEL
key. Dreams

of electric sheep.
Each gesture a life

hack. Error message.
Waking up in someone's

body, another
species' face.