

HECTOR DIAZ

Stefano Puleo

The Legacy Narratives | Vol. 4

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The artist facing the absurd:
A conversation with Stefano Puleo

By Héctor Díaz

Introduction

Over the years I have had the privilege of speaking with Stefano Puleo on many occasions. We have talked about his visual language, the Mediterranean heritage that pulses in every stroke, the influence of Cézanne and the Fauves, the construction of series such as Women, Characters or Landscapes, and that constant search for harmony between form and color that defines his work. Those conversations, published in various editorial projects, have allowed the public to approach his painting, his technique and his trajectory.

This time, however, the dialogue is different.

It is not an interview about what is seen on the canvas, but about what dwells behind it. In this conversation we enter the intimate territory of the artist: the search for meaning in a universe that often seems indifferent, the weight of radical freedom, the construction of identity through action, the relationship with failure, silence and finitude. These are questions that do not inquire into the finished work, but into the man who makes it possible; into the consciousness that sustains the brush when external chaos threatens to impose itself.

What follows is, therefore, a different approach. A look into the interior of Stefano Puleo: not the painter we know through his paintings, but the human being who, day after day, chooses to create as a way of affirming himself in the face of the absurd.

–Héctor Díaz
September 26, 2026

Meaning and Absurdity

1. The search for purpose: Faced with a universe that often seems indifferent or chaotic, where or how do you build your meaning to keep moving forward every day?
I find it in the desire to create. I try to feed my curiosity every day by looking for stimuli in observation and in the search for new creative horizons that can feed my desire to improve my work by opposing chaos with an inner order.

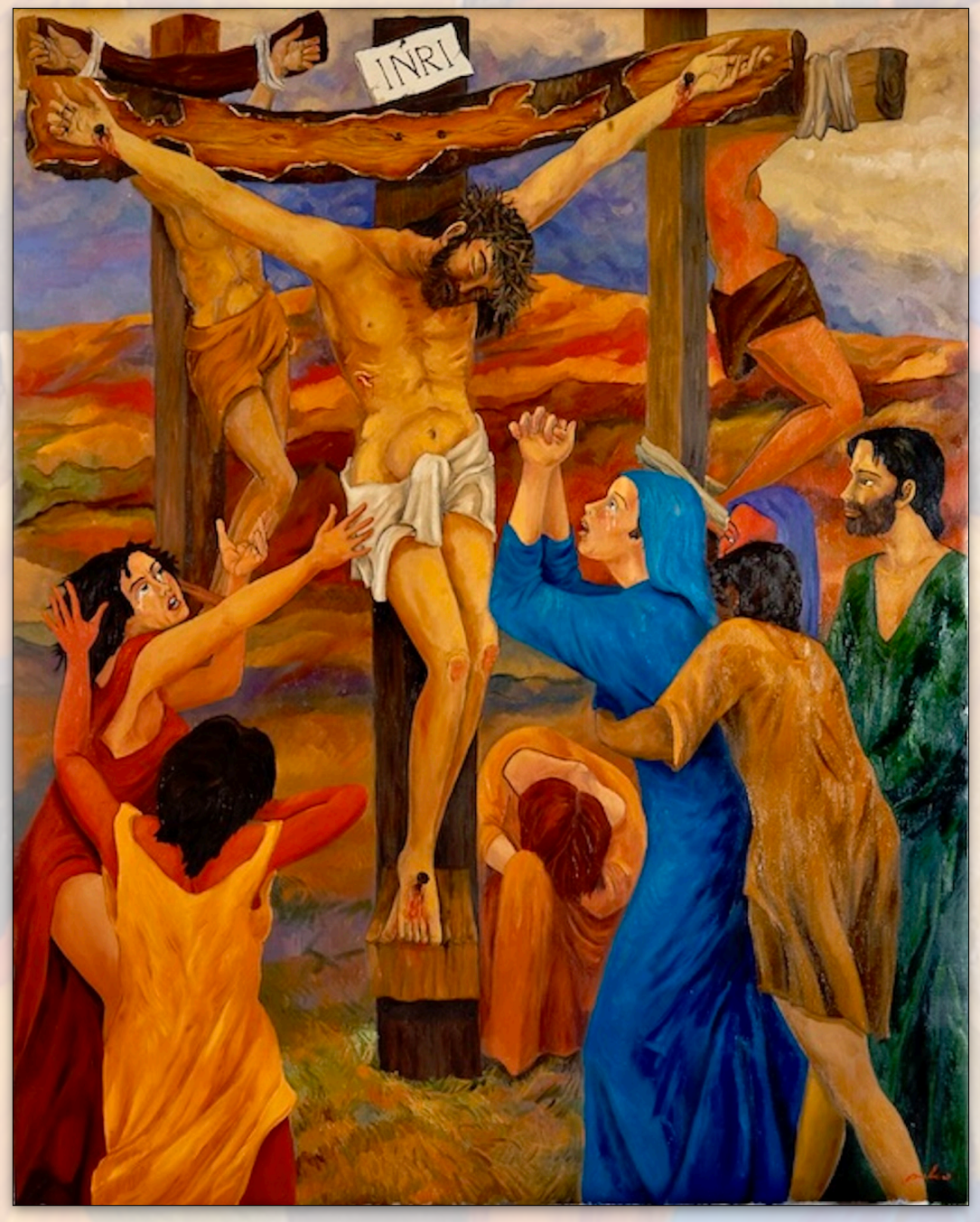
2. The myth of Sisyphus: If life requires constant effort that seems to have no definitive end, what is your "rock" and how do you find fulfillment in the very act of pushing it?
My rock is the passion I have for my work, accompanied by the constancy for the continuous search for perfection in painting, through the study of color. In the action of painting with energy I do not look for a definitive result but the quality where I find the satisfaction that helps me to renew it and make it more solid and strong.

3. Meaning in adversity: In times of greatest crisis or difficulty, what meaning or intimate belief do you choose to embrace to support yourself and not give up?
In the life of an artist there are often moments of crisis and difficulty and they are always lived with great apprehension, but the conviction that everything can lead to an opportunity for inner growth is also growing. This implies the need to retrace my entire journey in my memory, trying to relive moments and actions that I underestimated in the past and that I can resume with greater experience. From these reflections a new lymph is born for creativity that can support me and give me the strength not to give up and continue my journey.

4. The reflective void: When the inertia of routine comes to a complete halt and you are faced with absolute silence, what do you find in that space: anguish, clarity, or peace?
I think that absolute silence is not the worst moment in the life of an artist, on the contrary it is a fertile ground where you can find new stimuli and lucidity to regenerate creativity. For this reason, I find so much clarity in it.

Freedom and Anguish

5. Radical freedom: Knowing that we are the sole architects of our own destiny can be emancipating, but also overwhelming. How do you handle the weight of absolute responsibility for your decisions?
All my work certifies my freedom and absolute responsibility for my destiny. Those who choose this profession know that every path they take must define something that is part of you and this, if supported by passion, has no weight.



Crucifixion, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 200 x 150 cm, “Characters” Series © Stefano Puleo



The painter and the family of Arlecchino, 2018, Oil on Linen, 150 x 120 cm, “Characters” Series © Stefano Puleo

6. The paradox of choice: Every life choice implies the rejection of infinite other possibilities.
I think it's true. Every life choice leads you to exclude others but if you are supported by passion you can accept the rejection of other possibilities.

7. How do you deal with the anguish of the paths that you consciously decide not to take?
I don't feel any anguish, I have a path already traced and I have no regrets for other paths not taken.

8. The leap into the void: in the face of absolute uncertainty, logic is sometimes not enough. What was that great "leap into the unknown" that irreversibly transformed your life?
I certainly can't say that I'm a great jumper. My aspiration has led me to make small leaps even in the face of absolute uncertainty, because in my work there is always doubt and fear of not achieving the goal I have set for myself. But certainly, despite the fact that I miss an important leap into the unknown, these small steps have irreversibly changed my life.

9. Intimate rebellion: beyond your role as a creator, against which aspects of reality, society or your own nature do you rebel daily to affirm your existence?
As an artist, my daily rebellion is against the weight of falling into the banal and the obvious. This is why I often find myself rebelling against myself because this rebellion can become vital nourishment for a stimulus for the creation of a new expressiveness. Just as I rebel against my mind because I oppose the fact that there is a difference between the image I have created in my head and what I can actually achieve.

Identity and Otherness

10. The gaze of the other: How does judgment, observation or the mere presence of others alter or shape the deepest perception you have of yourself?
I often discover understandings and meanings about my work that I had not visualized until an observer highlighted them. This leads me to a careful review of the perception I have of myself by seeking confirmation of my work and above all, to avoid the risk that the search for the understanding of others can compromise my need to remain true to myself.

11. The trap of "bad faith": at what stages of your life have you caught yourself acting to fulfill an external role or expectation, temporarily sacrificing your authenticity?
I remember falling into this dynamic at the beginning of my life as a painter. With my first gallery owners, I found myself producing works that pleased them and the market, replicating works with a motif repeated for a long time. But I thought it was normal, I was looking for the public, the collectors, I wanted to be recognized as an artist.

12. The construction of being: if we start from the assumption that we are not born with a fixed essence, but rather we build ourselves through our actions, do you think you have already defined who you are, or are you still an unfinished project?
Yes, I think I have defined who I am. I think I have an intellectual conscience that makes my thought, through my work, convey emotions and finally I also have a personal biography created over time with my activity.

13. Shared solitude: we are born and die encapsulated in our consciousness. How do we reconcile this unsolvable existential loneliness with the deep human need to connect and love?
I am sure that, for an artist, existential solitude is the lymph that allows creation. It is a spring that generates thoughts and stimuli. Art is the tool I have chosen, through the creation of paintings, to convey my need for connection and love.

Will and Desire

14. The architect of values: stripping yourself of imposed dogmas and traditions, what is the most unshakable belief, principle, or value you have built for yourself?
Certainly the most important value I have built over the years is that of authenticity, remaining faithful to one's path, to one's vision, indifferent to the solicitations of the market. Remaining authentic in proposing my visual language.

15. The vital pendulum: if life often oscillates between the pain of unfulfilled desire and the emptiness of having achieved it, how do you find a peace that does not depend on pursuing the next goal?
I think it can find peace at the very moment I paint a picture and time ceases to exist, without thinking about the final result, its public consent or its sale.

16. Amor fati (Love for Destiny): have you managed to make peace with your worst tragedies or failures, to the point of embracing them and considering them beautiful and essential elements of your story?
This question reminds me of the concept of "existential Kintsugi". The ancient Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold. The damage is not hidden, but exalted. It becomes the point of maximum beauty and uniqueness of the object. Thus, I think, that failure or tragedy do not become obstacles, but convey the essence necessary to regenerate energy and extract more richness from the negative experience.

17. The engine of suffering: do you consider pain and discomfort strictly necessary conditions to reach a higher state of lucidity and wisdom?
I don't think that for an artist, pain and discomfort are necessary to reach a state of lucidity and wisdom. Maybe pain can be a stimulus, the famous "tormented genius" for some but I don't believe it so much.



The family, 2020, Oil on Linen, 160 x 160 cm, “Characters” Series © Stefano Puleo



Night fishing, 2020, Oil on Linen, 150 x 120 cm, “Characters” Series © Stefano Puleo

Time and Finiteness

18. Being authentic: In a noisy and fast-paced contemporary world that constantly distracts us from the essentials, what are your refuges to remember who you really are?
When I find myself exhausted by external factors that distract me and do not allow me the right concentration, I take refuge in loneliness and inaction, defined as “Creative Idleness”. It becomes vital because it becomes pure oxygen that allows you to find new ideas and more authentic intuitions.

19. Awareness of death: Knowing that our time is limited, does the certainty of finiteness act in your life as a paralyzer or as the main driver of your urgency to live?
Certainly the main driver of the urgency to live. Knowing that I have limited time pushes me to give more value and impetus to my creativity.

20. The illusion of inheritance: If in the immensity of time all our actions will finally be forgotten, what real and intimate value do you attribute to the idea of transcending?
For me, transcendence becomes synonymous with presence, the perfect moment when, while you create, time stops and you become one with your work. I don’t create to be remembered, but to say that I have been there, that I have lived for art. Creating beauty has an absolute value in the very moment I paint, regardless of who will remember it, even if my name will be forgotten, the thought remains, however, that my work will arouse an emotion in a person and that perhaps it will imperceptibly change his way of looking at art.

By: Héctor Díaz
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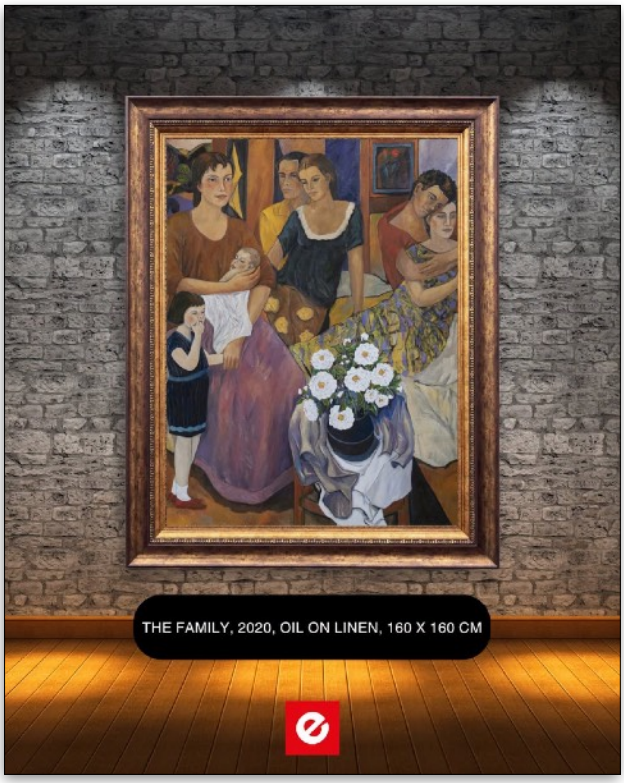




CRUCIFIXION, 2012, OIL ON CANVAS, 200 X 150 CM



THE PAINTER AND THE FAMILY OF ARLECCHINO, 2018, OIL ON LINEN, 150 X 120 CM



THE FAMILY, 2020, OIL ON LINEN, 160 X 160 CM



NIGHT FISHING, 2020, OIL ON LINEN, 150 X 120 CM

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Cover:
Stefano Puleo © Stefano Puleo

Back Cover:
Crucifixion, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 200 x 150 cm, “Characters” Series © Stefano Puleo

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