

WORLD AT LARGE

By Nicholas North

WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest editor/author TINA CABRERA writes: As writers and humans in general, what compels us to tell stories? Why do we seem to return to the same story over and over again? I think part of it has to do with an attempt to capture the world at large. For our part as writers, we construct worlds on the small scale and by means of limited settings. We do this because we want to feel that we are not alone and that while we suffer, so does everyone else. Yet, we want to be unique in the telling of our tales. I've been thinking a lot about the elusiveness of originality. Even when a story seems unique and original, it always contains the familiar; otherwise, we wouldn't be drawn to it. Nicholas North's WORLD AT LARGE is at once unique and familiar with its blurring of boundaries between the small and large and between two protagonists: Vic Macarelli and Mac Vicarelli, both artists who visit a museum with microscopic figures that reflect back their lives and desires. In effect, the tiny sculptures become a microcosm of the larger world that they inhabit. North, the narrator and creator of this grand fiction seeks to change his tenuous relationship with the "you" of his story by the very telling. Isn't that our objective as we navigate the world stage? I am enamored with the irony, absurdity, and sarcasm of this engaging metafiction within metafiction, worlds within worlds; The words of Nicholas North ring true for this writer: "The thing about fiction--what I love about fiction--is the way it allows us, me, to recreate our lives, to construct Edens and Utopias, from the simple garbage of words and the common stink of languages."*

Per Carlo, March 17

1.

Last week, Vic Macarelli (artist), visited the Glasnost era museum dedicated to the work of Nikolevsky, Yev-Nikolai. The museum is located within the compound of a 10th century Orthodox nunnery in the city of Kiev—Kiyv—Ukraine and is famous for its exhibition of micro

miniatures. Located in the main gallery are two rows of microscopes focused on tiny sculptures. One shows a scabies mite shod in black stilettos (*Sarcoptes scabiei labouaine*). Another has a map of Madagascar carved on a sesame seed and a third, the Palace of Versailles, complete with *parterre* gardens, etched onto the head of a pin.

But the one Vic liked the best was *Calla Lily Trapped inside a Hair Follicle*. A microscopic long-stemmed lily inserted into a hollowed out strand of hair. Vic figured it was a hoax until he saw the tiny hair positioned on a slide tray.

2.

A week later, artist Mac Vicarelli visited the Brezhnev era museum dedicated to the work of Yev-Nikolai Nikolevsky. The museum is located next to a 10th century Rosicrucian cemetery in the city of Odessa—*Odesa*—and is famous throughout the Crimea. Inside the museum are two rows of microscopes focused on tiny mechanically-driven dioramas. The first shows the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza, complete with whip-masters and a scowling Khufu (*hw-fw*). The second has a re-enactment of Marie-Antoinette at the guillotine with a mob of ten thousand crowded into a space the size of a molecule. This one is accompanied by a sound track. Mac cocked his ear to the lens and heard the queen cry ‘No, not my head! Not my pretty Austrian neck!’ In the last one he saw Vic Macarelli (artist) look up from the microscope in the next room and scratch his head. Mac figured Vic figured it was just a hoax.

3.

I recall quite clearly the two of us standing beside the last exhibit. You told me you didn’t want to look into it—you were scared or something. ‘It frightens me,’ you said and shook your head,

your hair coming loose as you did so and your face taking on that pouty look I love. I assured you—I said, I remember reassuring you—that none of it was real—the little parasites in high heels, the pharaoh, and the story of Vic and Mac and Kiev and Odessa was just a fabrication I put down on paper because, well, I was pissed off because things aren't like they used to be. You have a job now. I can't drink anymore (let's leave that where we found it) and there's some question about who the father is.

But understand: your neck is not on the guillotine and you are not the Queen of France. I would never do that to you. I would never inflict such atrocities upon you, Maryann, anymore than I would concoct some spy body to survey (in the sense of surveillance) your life (and find out who the fucking father is!) anymore than I would throw you in front of a speeding train or sentence you to years of hard labor like a pyramid builder, while whip-masters lashed, and I watched them, thinking about you, of course. The finest gift I received from you was a strand of your hair I recovered from the bathtub, the same day—you remember—that I bought you a rose.

'You bought me a calla lily.'

'A lily, right. A calla Lily. I'm sorry.'

If only you would change your mind. If only you would do that. I promise I will dismantle all this improbability (that so frightens you). Promise to disassemble this frightening world-view of our world and make a new world, a pretty and not so scary world. I can do this for you.

In the final sequence of *World at Large* I have Mac looking into Yev's last microscope. I've thought about this one for awhile. I began the paragraph (energetically, confidently) with a gerund (ing)—Mac look-*ing*; Mac lean-*ing* forward, that is, Mac bend-*ing* down to look into the microscope but after reading it a few times, I thought, *go simple*.

Mac looked into the last microscope. He saw a big black circle. It looked like an eclipse of the sun but instead of a yellow corona this one was blue. He fiddled with the focus (you could that) and was a little shocked to discover a big eye was looking back at him. Even more shocked when he felt the force of a gale at his back. This was the breath rushing from the big nostrils just behind him in the face with the big blue eye. It was bloody disquieting. Mac told himself it was just a hoax.

5.

The thing about fiction—what I love about fiction—is the way it allows us, me, to recreate our lives, to construct Edens and Utopias, from the simple garbage of words and the common stink of languages, the shit, even, of speech, the rancidness of slang and the cruel combustion waiting to explode inside the neologism—too many examples to quote, let's move on.

There are two endings to this story. I do not know which is the real or which is the best ending. I do not know who the father is or if it was Mary Ann's hair (a single clean strand) I recovered from the bathtub. But I do know that was the day I bought her a calla lily (actually, a rose).

6.

In another room of the same museum Vic looked into the last microscope and saw Mac looking at a big black circle. He saw him pull away in shock and then tremble in the rush of air at his back. Vic knew Mac had seen a big blue eye with golden flecks in it staring back at him. Mac didn't know whose eye it was of course but Vic knew that his own eye was blue and there were not only flecks in it but they were—

7.

Because this is fiction and because my name is Nick, the following can happen, does happen. Marie-Ann goes into the museum and looks into the first microscope. What she sees is the hair I recovered from the bathtub lovingly combined with a calla lily (single long stem) I bought her the same day. In the next, a blue sky followed by a sunset, lurid yet romantic. In the next, a Cross and Rose both dating to the 10 century (that explains the rose). Next, two Rosicrucian symbols (a rose by any other name. A lily? A calla lily?) Next, two cymbals. Next, our beating hearts beating together. This one comes with a soundtrack and when Marie-Annette cocks her ear to the lens she can hear the sound of our lovemaking. In the last frame, an eye--mine, I believe--is looking back at her. She knows this eye, blue, my eye, and there are not only flecks in it, but just as Vic is thinking (and Nick is writing) Marie-Antoinette (who knows who the father is) is saying

'Golden'.

I would like to think he has my eyes.

I would like to think I have his eye.

My name is Nicholas. I am Nick. My name is Nikolai Nikolevsky. I am Yev. This is fiction and I do not exist.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I wrote WORLD AT LARGE while I was on a metafiction kick and in lust with Donald Barthelme and others but mostly Donald who I believe writes the best metafiction ever. Since I sometimes wonder if I exist I wanted to play around with images/reverse images, actions/counter actions, probability and absurdity and the mirror like character of reality, time in all its conjugations and the Buddhist thing that all phenomena are conditioned by 'dependant origination'. Language is important to me. Every word is a 'final', It just won't do for one word to substitute for another.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Sono nato in Canada ma sono cresciuto in Italia, nel sud, in Campania—una bella parte del paese. Ho un master in letteratura ma in realta' odio l'universita', quindi non sono andato avanti per il mio dottorato. Vivo il mio amichetto vicino a Toronto con i nostri gatti imaginari 'Ghost' e 'Phantom'. Scusi gli apostrofi, ma non ho una tastiera italiana.*

EDITOR'S BIO: *Tina V. Cabrera currently resides in the ATX area with her husband, dog and two cats. She teaches as Assistant Professor of English for Temple College and devotes her free time to writing and making art. Visit her website at tvcannyuncanny.com Her stories 'Waking Hours (Fiction) and 'Waking Hours (Anti-fiction) are published in this issue (fiction).*