

Organic Canvas

by A. D. Beevers

"What shall we do with the body?"

"We can make a sagittal incision into the thoracic cavity here." The sculptor traces a latex finger across the pallid flesh. "It would juxtapose what you've done to the skull."

"You're obsessed with incisions, you should've been a surgeon." The painter rearranges his tools perfectly parallel to each other for the umpteenth time that night. Filbert brush, Montblanc pen, steel rongeurs: each utensil sits patiently, packed neatly into a canvas satchel, only emerging to execute its unique *raison d'être*. Brushes coat, pens write, and rongeurs gouge, but the painter's purpose is the most vital: to create what no other dares.

"I lack the condescension for medicine." The sculptor scoffs. "They think science should have a monopoly on the corporeal, then string up bones with tasteless steel. It's an atrocity if you ask me. Alive we are so *ugly*, who would want to remain that way forever?" His own toolset lies scrambled in a corroded iron bucket by his feet. A commotion of chisels poke upward, reaching for the easel like dead cypress branches impaling the heavens. In several places, hammers, scribes, and bone saws sprout from the metallic foliage. The sculptor has abandoned hope in controlling his instruments, they defy domestication. Even when unleashing them for work, the rusted horde strikes with a ravenous will of its own.

"The innards are unsightly." The painter taps an ox hair brush gently against the gnarled abdomen. "This liver is cirrhotic and unappealing, your design would put it on display."

"Exactly! This piece should have meaning, we can accentuate the destructive impact of alcohol." The sculptor sketches his idea into the epidermis. "Spreading each rib outward like sunbeams creates a focal point, capturing the gaze and dragging it deeper... there's beauty in such repulsion."

"It'll be too avant-garde."

"If you reject innovation, you shouldn't have come."

Loathing lurks behind the men's fragile veneer of professionalism; waiting for opportunities to incite conflict. Their collaboration spans six pieces—some too grotesque, some too pleasant—all failures. This series of artistic miscarriages gnaws away at their brittle sanity.

"Halt."

The apprentices whip around to face their mentor, a specter-like man with disappointment carved into every wrinkle. "You cannot work properly with an improper mindset." He wafts towards them, footsteps inaudible upon the polished linoleum floor. "That is not flesh before you but opportunity." He caresses the artwork, avoiding the delicate etchings. "You see a body where you should see a medium: yours to shape, mold, and sculpt as you please. A blank slate of aesthetic expression—an *organic canvas*."

"I cannot counterbalance my partner's incompetence."

"His work is gaudy and uninspired."

Their mentor swats away the protestations like flies.

"Whatever you elect to do, make haste; the exhibition is tomorrow. This must be your magnum opus, as it will be your last chance to satisfy."

"We will awe them."

"You need not demand so much of yourselves; if you prove yourselves wretched artists, you will make fine canvases." With those final words of encouragement, he slips away.

The artisans bask in the uncomfortable yet familiar silence, a token of their mutual hostility. Finally, the sculptor speaks.

"What do you think of Beksiński?"

"Too dismal. How do you like Matisse?"

"He's a hack." The men fiddle with their masks, drawn tight to protect from the putrid effluvium.

"Are you familiar with Vostell?"

"Naturally, he's one of my favorites."

"Likewise, I've hung *Wochenspiegel Beatles* in my personal studio."

"Perhaps we can make a compromise?"

"A *dé-coll/age*."

"Precisely, the outer layer would be yours to paint..."

"—And a few transverse lacerations will give you enough space to expose your scrimshaw." The artisans bounce from idea to idea, struck by inspiration.

"We can highlight our contrasting techniques with a vibrant exterior and a shadowed interior."

"Cultivating a chiaroscuro composition."

"Our magnum opus!"

The men rush, abuzz with inventive vigor. The painter dips his cherished sable brush into a vial of sanguine ichor, the sculptor plucks a polished silver scalpel from his bucket, and together they prepare to work.

A faint groan returns the artisans' attention to their inchoate composition. The sarcoline canvas trembles on the easel. The gold filigree restraints stand their ground, preventing a complete structural collapse. Distasteful cries escape from what once was a throat, rattling what used to be teeth, producing an obnoxious cacophony. Though the babbling annoys the men, each of whom prefers to work in sterile silence, they set upon the canvas with creative passion.

END

Word Count: 745