

ANDREA BORSUK

Slip Into Silence, 2011
oil on wood panel, 24 x 36 in.



courtesy: the artist

ANA MARÍA SHUA

Perhaps

If the elephants hurt and the big top tastes bitter, if the snakes make the trapeze break out in a cold sweat and the tigers devour your memory, if you can hear the cries of the magician asking for help but no one can see him, if the lion tamer whips the horseback rider and there are no clowns, most of all if there are no clowns, it's best to leave quietly, without anyone noticing you, perhaps it's not a circus, sometimes it's better not to ask.

The Innovative Trapeze Artist

As the years go by, the trapeze artist is conscious of repeating, of plagiarizing, himself. As with every artist, this awareness causes him grief. Seeking originality, he launches himself without a net, without a safety wire, and finally without a trapeze. But what is a trapeze artist without a trapeze if not a bloody heap on the sawdust of the circus ring and even then, what a shame, nothing original.

Like Hercules

“Just like Hercules!” say the well-read spectators when the strongman lifts a horse and rider with one hand. “Like Hercules!” say others, when the strongman stops an advancing semi-truck with his chest. “It’s Hercules!” exclaims a young lady who thinks she recognizes him as she watches him handle a bull and lion with his bare hands.

But it's not Hercules. Tired of his boring and secret (but necessary!) job, Atlas has decided to try the easy feats and applause of the circus. At exactly 7:00 p.m., when the first star comes out, the heavens will permanently fall.

Two Halves

Charles Tripp, the armless wonder, earned his living as a carpenter before joining the circus. Eli Bowen, the legless acrobat, had two tiny, differently sized feet protruding from his hips and was considered the handsomest of circus artists. In one of their collaborative acts, Bowen steered a bicycle while Tripp pedaled. The spectators applauded like crazy, never thinking about all the things we could do if we had that other half we know nothing about, the half we're lacking, the other part of these unfinished bodies that we, out of ignorance, imagine are complete.

It Happens to All of Us

If the contortionist has arthritis and the trapeze artist suffers from vertigo, if the horseback rider tears her debilitated meniscus and the magician loses his reflexes, if the juggler gets macular degeneration and the lion tamer loses the strength to crack the whip, what does it matter, there's no such thing as old age. You're always as young as your dreams, as your wishes, as your youngest lover, as your heart. And there will always be a place for us in the circus: it's only a matter of putting on a little more makeup when the years turn us all into clowns.

Strongmen

Circus strongmen train with weights and barrels, but in public they usually lift people or animals to prove they're not cheating. Hugh David Evans was an exceptional American strongman. According to the obituary published by the *Detroit Free Press* on November 15, 1934, he was a man with

a strong build and a lot of heft: on one occasion he amazed P.T. Barnum by lifting a 1,300 pound horse with his teeth. He was also able to split a silver dollar in half with a single bite. Nevertheless, his feats were overshadowed by a small, fragile-looking kid who weighed just 125 pounds: the latter was capable of lifting himself up with one hand for twenty seconds at a time.

—translated from the Spanish of Ana María Shua
by Steven J. Stewart

Ana María Shua (1951–) has published over forty books in numerous genres: novels, short stories, poetry, drama, children's fiction, books of humor and Jewish folklore, anthologies, film scripts, journalistic articles, and essays. Her writing has been translated into many languages, including English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Korean, Japanese, Bulgarian, and Serbian, and her stories appear in anthologies throughout the world. She has received numerous national and international awards, including a Guggenheim fellowship, and is one of Argentina's premier living writers.

Steven J. Stewart was awarded a 2005 Literature Fellowship for Translation by the National Endowment for the Arts. His book of translations of Spanish poet Rafael Pérez Estrada, *Devoured by the Moon*, which was published by Hanging Loose in 2004, was a finalist for the 2005 PEN-USA Translation Award.

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One Snip and It's Over, 2011
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