

Saturday Afternoon at Market Plaza

(after *Market Plaza* by Thomas Allen 1878-1879)

It's 1878 & everything is relatively great—for the moment—
America's at peace in the world
Trade is booming
Railways & shipping
Make travel easier in the nation
The country recently marked
One hundred years to wide acclamation

Walt Whitman publishes "Leaves of Grass"
A controversial book of poems years back
Thomas Edison patents the phonograph
The Battle of the Alamo ended 40 years ago
Tho its effects will resonate far into the following century
Along with slavery & the decimation of Indigenous peoples

But here San Antonio breathes a collective sigh of customariness
Thomas Allen's painting offers a panoramic view of a day in the life of
The city's early citizens
Commoners involved in the business of life
The commerce of daily existence
Mexican men women children enjoy a tranquil day at the plaza
Arrayed in their Saturday finest
Women in muted colored skirts shawls rebozos
Dark earthy red light lavender zesty ocher
Attend to their chores
Tables set out in cotton cloth
Men in straw sombreros & colorful zarapes mill about
In quiet conversation
Food simmers in a pot *al aire libre*
Coffee served *al costumbre*—the custom
Roosters & hens peck about the ground
Raising a rousing ruckus
Roisterers of the yard even
A turkey vulture joins the fracas

In the background covered wagons
Sit beneath a faded celestial blue with pink tinged clouds
As workers load their wares onto the wagons
Cattle idle at rest
At the local market *El Amigo del Pobr.*

(No doubt *Pobre* left off perhaps
Not to offend the locals)
One can buy liquor tobacco & other assorted goods

Left to right beneath the orange striped
Canopy a man in a white hat has fallen asleep
His right hand on his cheek maybe he worked late into
The night or stayed out late last night
A lone white dove hovers over the plaza descending
As if in benediction blessing the populace
Light falls on the *catedral San Fernando*
A staunch bulwark of Destiny's manifesto
[One black dove has already alighted]

Slightly off center in front of the oranges
The painter has captured a red sashed figure (perhaps a poet)
—a man of more means of greater leisure—by chance
The painter is the poet
In white—a Whitmanesque reveler—mise-en-scène mid-smokes
Left leg bent over the right
Taking in the expansive expressiveness of the moment
The brio & gusto in this touch of Time
The painter beholding himself

The grace & dignity of a genteel gathering
The miracle of life
The budding of spring
The love of living
The openness of community
That will become this poem

Start anywhere
Look long look deep
We cannot join in
They are too far removed
For us to reach

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