

Nora Sturges

Marco Polo's Travels

INTRODUCTION

IN Nora Sturges' latest work, *Marco Polo* comes unhinged in time. The thirteenth-century prototraveler appears in modern garb as a contemporary tourist, his adventures detailed in small-format paintings reminiscent of images from Renaissance illuminated manuscripts. Redoubling the time travel, Sturges' depictions are influenced by (but not borrowed from) the magical realism of Italo Calvino, author of *Invisible Cities* (1972), a collection of Marco Polo's accounts to Kublai Khan of the fabulous cities he encounters while traveling through Kublai's empire.

Like illuminations without a text, these images are removed from their original narratives, prompting the viewer, as Sturges has suggested, "to construct a vague and changing story, a story with the mood of a dream or a half memory." Marco Polo takes on multiple appearances, becoming the universal curious and anxious traveler as he puzzles over religious customs, loses his way in alien landscapes, and encounters his own disquiet with the unfamiliar. Sturges' idiosyncratic juxtapositions invite strangeness—tales of another country where the commonplace is replaced by the unreasonable or the merely possible: the land of the "Foot and Hand" bistro, of insects the size of robins.

Nora Sturges holds an MFA in painting from Ohio University and is currently associate professor of art and head of painting at Towson University. She has had solo exhibitions across the country including ones at the Second Street Gallery in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the Bachelier Cardonsky Gallery in Kent, Connecticut. Her work has been published in *New American Paintings*, and three images from the Marco Polo series appear in *Unsplendid: An Online Journal of Poetry*, accompanied by the poetry of Ned Balbo.

D.C.

Copyright © 2008 by Nora Sturges



Marco Polo and His Porter, Lost (2001), 12 1/2" × 10", oil and acrylic on panel



Marco Polo Arrives at Samarcand (2007), 12" × 8", oil on MDF



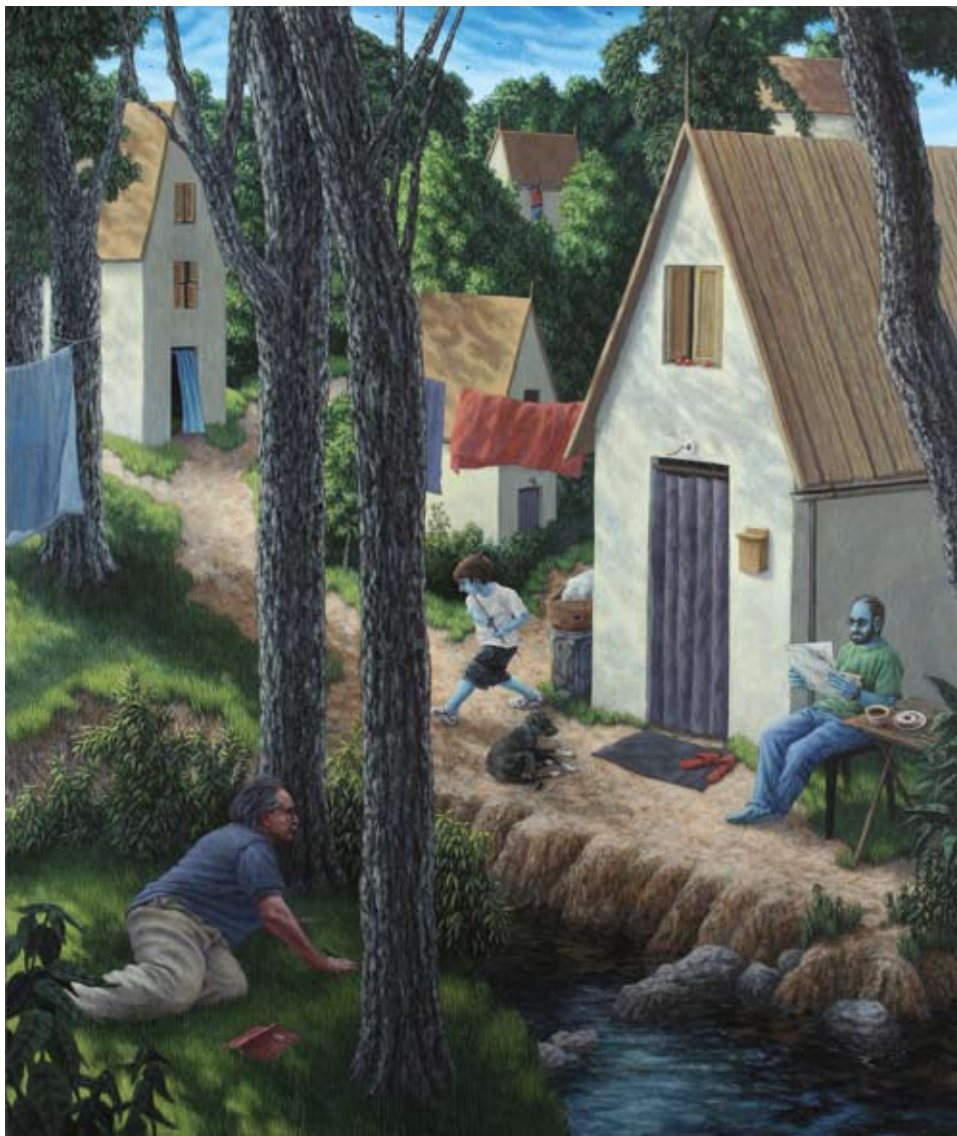
Marco Polo Shopping (2006), 12" x 8", oil on MDF



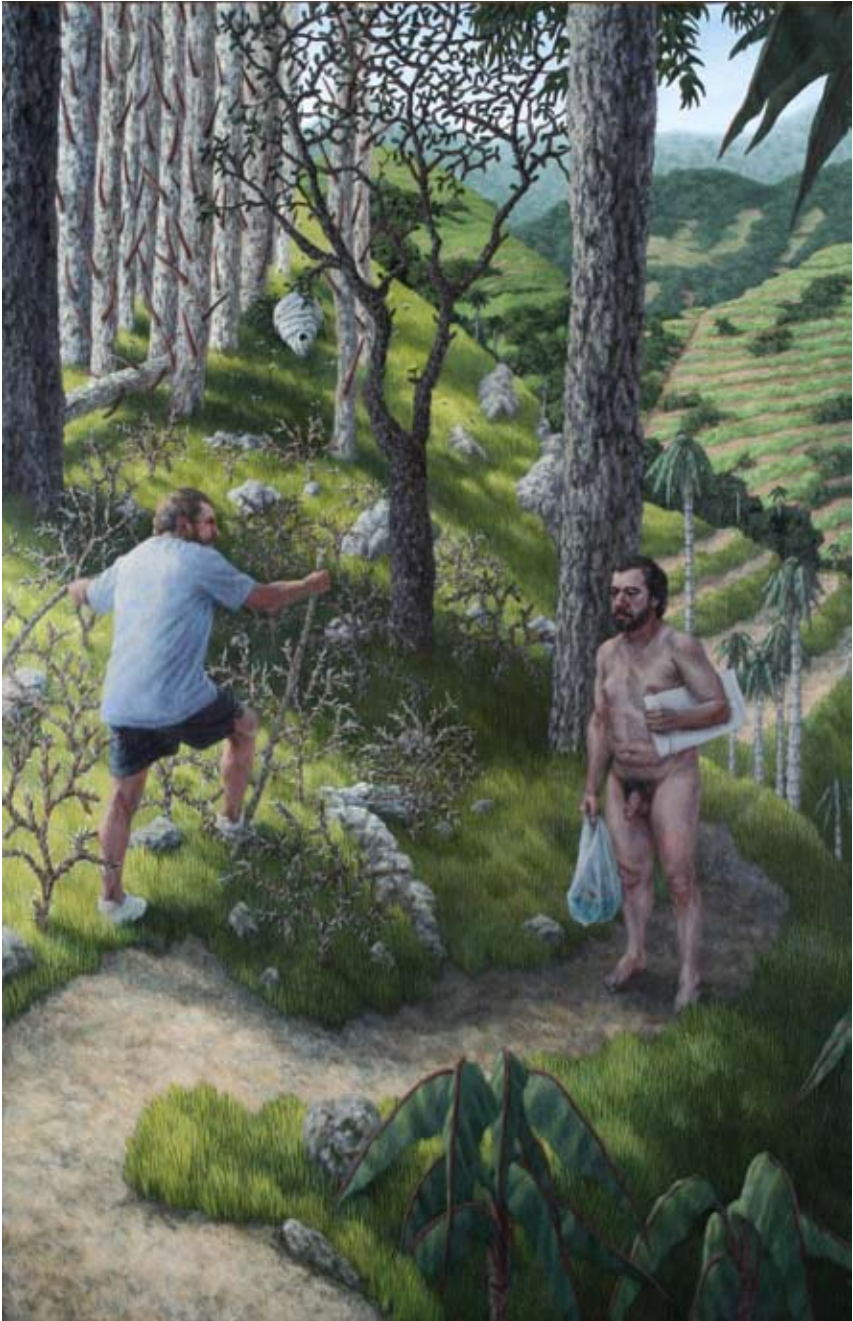
Marco Polo Visits the Museum at Soncara (2005), 11" × 9", oil on panel



Marco Polo Among Idol Worshipers (2005), 13 1/2" × 8", oil on panel



Marco Polo Watches Blue People (2002), 12" × 10", oil on panel



Marco Polo Avoids a Naked Man (2002), 12" × 7 3/4", oil and acrylic on panel



Marco Polo Gets a Blister from New Shoes (2002), 9" × 11", oil and acrylic on panel