

Ned Balbo

Marco Polo Welcomed at Moriana

That's one solution: put up a façade.

This villa, sheetrock-thin and midnight blue,
whose courtyard is a painted bamboo curtain
(trompe l'oeil fruit tree, effervescent fountain),

welcomes you with falsehood undisguised.

These women, too, each safe in her facade.

One bows; the other stands beside a chair—
your makeshift throne, bright purple, murex-dyed—

as if to shade a potentate or pope,

her parasol held high. Should you sit down
or stand, unmoved? She's fixed you lemonade
strained salmon-pink, straw tilted on a glass

you're pretty sure is real. Fluffed slippers wait.

"Don't bow—" Your hostess takes your bag from you,
eyes sycophantic, awed, or simply awful
as she smiles: what does she think she's owed?

Their plot will play out in its own good time....

For now, you'll hold your tongue: admire the stage-set,
not the slum beyond; commend the paint job,
not the rubble, vacant lot, bombed walls

neglect and violence wrecked past all façade.



Nora Sturges

Marco Polo Welcomed at Moriana

2005

oil on panel

10x12.5 inches