

## 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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