

## LINDA CHRISTENSEN

*Blue Dress, 2012*  
Oil on Canvas, 35 x 35 in



courtesy: J.Cacciola Gallery

## LILIANA HEKER

# Travel Fatigue

Heading out, it occurred to Señora Eloísa that getting a ride back to Azul was a lucky break. The sales rep who worked for her daughter's future father-in-law picked her up at the hotel right on time and seemed like a decent person. He carefully placed her lizard-skin suitcase on the backseat and even apologized for all the merchandise crammed into the car. An idle apology, Señora Eloísa thought. Those initial conversations with strangers always struck her as pathetic. Yet no sooner had the car taken off than she felt herself obliged to make some trivial remark about the suffocating heat, which led to an exchange of opinions about low barometric pressure, the likelihood of rain, and the benefits of that rainfall for the countryside, an opinion that drifted smoothly into a discussion of Señora Eloísa's husband's properties, the trials of land ownership, the joys and woes of being a sales rep, and the various attributes of many other professions.

By the time they reached Cañuelas, Señora Eloísa had already discussed—first cordially, then with growing indifference—the personalities of her three children, her eldest daughter's imminent wedding, the cheese platter for the wedding banquet, good and bad cholesterol, and the most suitable food for a cocker spaniel; and she in turn had become acquainted with certain facts about the man's life, facts that, even before arriving at San Miguel del Monte and after a blessedly prolonged silence, she could no longer recall.

She was sleepy. She rested her head against the seat back and closed her eyes, lulled by the dull, soporific hum of the motor, like the sound of cicadas at siesta time on smoldering afternoons. *Mind if I smoke?* She heard it as if through a haze of oil. She struggled to open her eyes.

"No, please. Go right ahead."

Languidly, she gazed at the driver. No way could she remember his name: Señor Ibáñez? Señor Velasco? Professor Belcher? General Mayhem?

"It's great company when a person's driving."

This time she opened her eyes, startled. Who? Who was great company? She looked around for a clue, but nothing, nada: just the man smoking away, with his eyes open a little too wide. The cigarette, of course. She tried hard to sound animated:

"Everyone tells me it's amazing how smoking clears the mind."