

ED SMILEY

Land of the Space of Today, 2013
title based on a phrase from *Finnegans Wake*
acrylic and acrylic transfer on canvas, 30 x 24 in



courtesy the artist

ANA MARÍA SHUA

Meet the Author

He was tired, and it was very cold, but at last he arrived at Zorzales de la Frontera after a seven-hour journey. The cigarette stench in the bus was nauseating. The windows, as usual, were hermetically sealed. But wasn't smoking forbidden? Apparently neither the passengers nor the driver had violated that rule, yet the odor remained, omnipresent, oppressive. Gustavo gratefully inhaled the frigid air at the tiny village station. Had someone been smoking in the vehicle while it was parked? Did buses really park? Or were they in constant motion, wending their way along the nation's highways? At the garage: that was the answer. The bus had been at some repair shop, and before or after checking the engine, the mechanics had taken refuge inside the vehicle to drink their *mate*, talk, play cards—and smoke.

Gustavo had quit fifteen years ago, and even back then, when he was a big smoker, he couldn't stand the smell of a cold butt in an enclosed space. Wasn't it true that it doesn't take much to saturate one's sense of smell? He remembered a TV program on the Discovery Channel that explained it all so clearly: odors were represented by differently shaped blocks that fit into spaces corresponding to olfactory cells, and they sealed them up, causing a saturation effect. Then, after a brief period of exposure to the odor, the person stopped noticing the stink. The brightly colored animation reminded him of the game of *Tetris* and how the pieces fit precisely and neatly into one another, and yet here he was—Gustavo Manzone, seven hours later, trapped in the poorly heated bus, wiggling his toes inside his shoes to warm them up—still breathing that stale, sickening smell that gave him a headache.

Two people boarded the bus in Zorzales; and then two more, a mother and her baby, got off along with Gustavo. The woman's husband was waiting for her. There was no one else at the station. He took out his cell phone and called the numbers he'd been given. Rule number one: always ask for a phone contact. No, don't be silly, what for, we'll be right there waiting for you, people would say. But Gustavo had had too much experience with icy, deserted, windswept stations at dusk. (He refused to travel at night.) One number connected him to an answering machine, and no one answered at the other. It must have been the city government office; everybody was probably gone for the day.