

## RALPH JOACHIM

*Nocturnal Revolution*, 2009  
acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 in



courtesy: R.Blitzer gallery

## JOÃO MELO

### The Secret

**T**his story happened in Haifa. I have never been to Haifa, but I've always wanted to write a story that takes place in the city. Likewise, I will not die without writing a story located in Mexico City, in Venice, in Salvador, in Kathmandu, and another in New York. The (almost) Shakespearean question that plays havoc with me, when I am caught up in these delights, is whether the guardians of patriotic integrity in the national literature will cease considering me an Angolan author for daring to locate my tales in spurious, exogenous environments instead of restricting myself to local Bantu landscapes.

Thus, I remember—with a shock no doubt identical to that experienced by those condemned to be roasted in the medieval bonfires of the Inquisition—that the playwright José Mena Abrantes was accused of not being Angolan for writing a play called *The King's Orphan*. It was about the peripeteias of a Portuguese girl, who was part of a group of white teenagers sent to Angola in the seventeenth century by the king of Portugal. The girls were to marry the settlers before they took up with native women and contributed—as Viriato da Cruz has said, albeit in another context—to the darkening of the race. *Yaka*, one of the best novels by the celebrated author Pepetela, was also considered a colonial novel because the central characters were members of a settler family in Benguela.

More extraordinary, in both cases, is that the accusers were well-known opponents of the country's governing party, which they considered to be antidemocratic and dictatorial. Thus they proved that, if not subjected to a permanent process of questioning and evaluation, even the most well-intentioned and generous ideologies—those formulated to function as forces of consciousness, mobilization and, most of all, human transformation—run the risk of becoming instruments for the exclusion of others and even of bloody repression and attempted annihilation. This is the reason why oppressed people tend to mimic their oppressors, and why revolutionaries become conservatives or even counterrevolutionaries. The contemporary world is not, therefore, a very pleasant place, but it is the place in which we are fated to live.

As you have surely gathered, I'm particularly pessimistic today. I have just connected to the internet, and I am reading a story in a Colombian newspaper about a woman in Haifa who managed to hide her deafness from her hus-