

## JAN WURM

*Robert at the Fair, 2009*  
oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in



courtesy: the artist

## STEPHEN D. GUTIERREZ

### Walter Is Ugly!

“Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Walter Ramirez strikes terror in the hearts of many! He can’t help it!”

Walter hunkers down, tries not to be seen. But it comes at him anyway, clashing with his attempt at invisibility. Oh, man, it doesn’t get any better than this, does it? But it does, it does!

“Walter Ramirez scares men, women and children! He’s a monster! He is taken away in chains! Read the latest!” The bellowing kid posted at the lip of the median strip plies his trade beautifully, moving with jerky assurance.

A newspaper stabs the air.

“*¡Es el diablo, se dicen!*” A bland face sprouts horns to support the charge.

“Oh, c’mon,” Walter protests. “That’s too much.” But the kid goes on. His face returns to normal, a screaming oracle.

“Walter Ramirez is frightful! He pleads guilty! He cries on the stand! He admits to his crime!”

A blimp passing overhead spells it out: “Walter Is...” But Walter’s eyes blur before he can read it all.

He is back on the street with his young foe, the latest messenger of the grim truth prancing around in glee.

“Extra sunset edition! Walter Ramirez is satisfied with the sentence! Death by stoning!”

“Fuck.”

“He deserves it! See for yourself!” He ain’t telling no lies.

Splashed on the front page of the familiar newspaper known for its lapses in taste, its slightly yellow edge (He hasn’t gone to school for nothing! He knows something about something, this Walter does!), is the damning evidence, exhibit A (and B and C and D)—Walter himself.

“Shit, man, there I am.” He stares at himself staring out at the world. It is a grainy black-and-white photo he can barely make out.

But the kid moves closer. “Take a good look, buddy.” Walking backwards, he thrusts the newspaper over his shoulder. Tufts of hair sprout from under the cap worn jauntily, a regular baseball cap flung backwards on his head. But they don’t hide the ears.

They are not something Walter wants to see. Nobody does.

“Goddamn, man, there they are,” he mutters to himself. He sinks lower in the seat.