

MINERVA ORTIZ

Siblings 2, 2006
Alkyd on masonite, 36 x 18 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

KAREN JOY FOWLER

Interview with Andrew Sean Greer

Winner of the 2018
Pulitzer Prize for Fiction

Andrew Sean Greer is the Pulitzer Prize winning author of six works of fiction, including the bestsellers *The Confessions of Max Tivoli* and *Less*. Greer has taught at a number of universities, including the Iowa Writers Workshop, been a TODAY show pick, a New York Public Library Cullman Center Fellow, a judge for the National Book Award, and a winner of the California Book Award and the New York Public Library Young Lions Award. He is the recipient of a NEA grant, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. He splits his time between his home in San Francisco and the Santa Maddalena Foundation writer's residency in Tuscany, where he is the Executive Director.

KAREN JOY FOWLER: My first question is, because you are hysterically funny in person, why did it take so long to get hysterically funny in your books?

ANDREW SEAN GREER: That's a good question. My book *Story of a Marriage* does not even crack a smile.

KJF: It is a beautiful book, I love that book.

ASG: Why did it take me so long? The real answer is that when I wrote *Less* I was too sad to write a sad book. I was really low, and to have to work on another wistful, poignant novel, I just couldn't do it. The only way out was to make fun of myself. You might notice that Arthur Less shares some of my attributes, so to make fun of Arthur was to make fun of me. I just didn't want to make fun of other people. I wasn't comfortable with that, but when I finally figured out I could make fun of myself, that was great for me. It changed my daily life because I could make use of small humiliations that would happen to me that would normally get me down.

KJF: And now it's just inspiration.

ASG: Yes. It would take like a little bit, and then I would start making something sad into a funny thing. This is how comedians must work. I always wondered why all these funny things happen to comedians, but the things that happened to them are not funny. They probably just figured out how to make them funny to get through the day.

KJF: You talked to me about this book prior to writing it, or possibly when you were writing the poignant, wistful version, and you told me that it was going to be a book about the generation of gay men right after AIDS who grew up without the preceding generation. Funny is not what I expected.

ASG: In the novel there's only one paragraph that actually talks about that, because I decided it was the saddest thing I could possibly think of for a book to be about. So many of these men in the generation ahead of me died, tens of thousands. It was the first generation to