

## ANA MARIA SHUA

### “War”

—translated from the Spanish by Steven J. Stewart

#### The Spartan Mother

“Return with your shield, or on it,” his Spartan mother told him when he set out for battle. But the battle was brief and bloody, like all of them, the Spartan army was defeated, the hoplites are fleeing now, his shield is heavy, very heavy, it’s hot, the blood from his wounds attracts insects, the shield weighs a third as much as his complete armor and it would be so easy to drop it, the enemy cavalry is chasing him, the sweat runs in rivulets over his skin covered in leather and metal, his stiff arm can hardly hold the savage weight, the salty sweat burns his eyes, now he’d like to see you, Spartan mother, returning with your shield, but he immediately shuts down this bad thought, he knows his mother, knows she would be capable of returning on her shield, capable of returning home dead, as dead as she’d like to see her son, her own son, because she would rather see him dead than defeated, better dead than a coward, would prefer him dead to knowing what he’s done, her son, what he’s doing now, in this very instant, tossing aside the hated shield, let them use it to bring somebody else’s son home, taking off the hated helmet while still running, the hated armor protecting his chest, turning toward a small grove, hiding in the bushes, the shrubs, watching from there as the enemy cavalry destroys the conquered hoplites who run weighed down by their enormous bronze-plated wooden shields, those shields that protect them from their chins to their knees but only from the front, that protect those who advance but never those who flee, the riders are catching them from behind, they’re skewering them now, the enemy swords and lances burst in red flowers of blood, he won’t return with his shield or on it, a mother can have many children, he only has one life, the world is vast, Sparta isn’t everything.

#### Joys of War

If the simple pleasure of seeing people killing each other, if the pleasure of seeing half-naked men rending each other with axes or swords, if the pleasure of seeing arrows piercing the belly or chest of a human being, if the pleasure of seeing tanks firing their tracers, if the pleasure of seeing bombings that destroy buildings and leave corpses exposed, if the pleasure of seeing one’s neighbor die all without guilt, without harm and without personal suffering from one’s bed watching a war movie, if only that simple pleasure were enough for us.

#### The War Was Terrible

“What was the war like in Europe, Grandpa?” ask his grandchildren. The war was terrible, says the grandfather. I say it was in Europe because it wasn’t just in any country. The borders shifted. Without leaving the village, sometimes we were in Russia, sometimes in Germany or Poland. There was nothing to eat: potatoes every day. With the peels, cooked in the fire. To buy bread, my mom had to cross an international border. Just one loaf per person. She took short steps walking back, with the loaf hidden in her skirt, between her legs, so it didn’t get confiscated on the way.

The war was terrible but I was young, thinks the grandfather without saying it, looking at his grandchildren with love, with hate, with envy. I won that war; it’s this terrible war I’m losing.

#### Make War

Make love not war, make a fuss not war, make food not war, make a beeline not war, make good but don’t make war—but, if there’s no other choice, then go ahead and make war, make war until it’s finished, to the death, until the enemy’s completely destroyed, until they’re exterminated, until love and fussing and food and beelines and goodness are nothing more than excuses, drills, operations, forms, and modes of war.

## JUDITH SCHAECHTER

*Ax Wielding Maniacs*, 2021

Stained glass, cut, sandblasted, engraved, enameled, stained and fired, cold paint and assembled with copperfoil, 32 x 32 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST

**Ana María Shua** (1951–) has published over eighty books in numerous genres: novels, short stories, poetry, drama, children’s fiction, books of humor and Jewish folklore, anthologies, film scripts, journalistic articles, and essays. She has received numerous national and international awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, and is one of Argentina’s premier living writers.

**Steven J. Stewart** has been awarded two Literature Fellowships for Translation Projects by the National Endowment for the Arts (2005 and 2015). He has published two books of the short fiction of Argentinian Ana María Shua: *Microfictions* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009) and *Without a Net* (Hanging Loose Press, 2012).