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Extract from the novel *The Hour of Waking Together*

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Kirmen URIBE

Extract from the novel *The Hour of Waking Together*

I knew the story. What I didn't know was the truth.
Carlos Fuentes

FIRST MEMORY OF KARMELE URRESTI

1.

Certain stories inhabit the mind of writer for a long time, years even, before surfacing. For most, that is as far as they go: the promise fades, they fail to come alive somehow, or simply go astray in the brain's recesses. A few, however, refuse to give up their initial potency.

This is such a story.

I often heard talk of the Urresti family at home; Ikerne Letamendi Urresti was after all the same age as my mother and they had been friends since childhood, spending summers together when Ikerne came to Ondarroa for school holidays. In the aftermath of the Civil War books were a luxury my mother said her family could not afford – but when she went to the house at Antsosolo, where Ikerne summered with her grandparents, she could always find a way of laying her hands on one or two. If the girls made a plan to go out after siesta, she would arrive before the appointed time and this way Ikerne's grandparents would ask her to go through into the parlour and wait while their granddaughter finished her meal. My mother would take down a book from the shelves and dedicate that half hour to reading.

I have a clear memory of the day, during my time as a university student, when Ikerne visited us at our family home in Ondarroa. Her mother Karmele came too.

Ikerne, having heard about my literary aspirations, had urged Karmele to tell me her story; it was the kind I always liked. Karmele's advanced age did nothing to diminish either her elegance or her mental agility, not as far as I could tell, but I must confess, young as I was and the future being all that mattered to me, I failed to keep a clear sense of the many

historical facts, dates and names with which she regaled me. If that visit seems very present to me now it is out of regret at not having probed this woman about her extraordinary life – been both more curious and attentive – at a time when she was still in possession of all her faculties.

And yet the feeling of that conversation stayed with me, very much so. The years have done nothing to diminish the memory, in fact quite the opposite: I have grown increasingly interested in everything I heard that day. Simply put, I could see that Karmele's experiences, all she had been through, that era, her milieu, also made up part of my history and in a sense lay behind my own origins – like a kernel of my very identity. It is true, none of us is an island, and the mores of our day, our upbringing and our culture do form us, but it is also true that we are the children of all that has gone before.

One other anecdote concerns the genesis of this novel. A few years ago my wife showed me a photograph of the team she used to play beach football with as a child – games took place when the tide was out, a tradition in towns along the coast. The photograph is from the 1980s, and though she would have been no older than ten I could immediately tell which of the little girls was her – beaming, she has a football under her arm. Behind the team posing on the wet sand, an eye-catching collection of angry graffiti adorns the harbour wall: it is quite striking. I asked myself how it was, how it could have been, that we were happy in such times, in the midst of such bloodshed and the grave political tensions.

It wasn't until 2010 that I talked myself into writing about the life and times of Karmele Urresti. And though I may have had another novel published in between, since the moment the idea came to me – on a train in Boston, Providence, as it happens – it has been a constant in my thoughts. I have been gathering information and carrying out interviews since then.

Thomas Mann thought that the truth of an event could only be uncovered once a good deal of time had elapsed, or at least once the society in which it occurred had moved on sufficiently.

Though neither of these conditions may be anywhere near coming to pass, it is my sense that the preliminary 'documentation' phase is now complete and the time has in fact come to reconstruct these events in my own way – indeed that such a reconstruction may not be put off.

It is indeed the life of one woman, but at the same time – why not? – it is the story of a people.

2.

At the end of March or beginning of April 1953 – the accounts differ – Karmele Urresti visited the convent school in Berriz for what would be the final time. Not unusually, spring was late arriving that year, and after almost forty days of constant rains, the clouds had finally dissipated. As the faint rays of morning sun chased away the mists, radiant meadow greens pervaded the whole town.

Karmele made her way from the station on foot and, turning up one of the steep streets, paused for a moment and contemplated the land that lay beneath Mount Oiz. It struck her as hopelessly precipitous and wild. The last scraps of mist were retreating through the peaks, little by little, as delicately as a bed sheet drawn back to reveal a bare midriff. She tried to tell herself perhaps, perhaps, the place would not prove so cheerless to her daughter.

At the same time, Ikerne was out for a walk with the other convent girls. They had stepped out in the morning, crossing the bridge over the river and instantly overtaking their guardian nun, scattering across the hillside. They had been cooped up inside all winter long and could not wait to play in the fresh air.

The black and white silhouette of a second nun came into sight along one of the paths. Advancing towards the girls, she called out the name ‘Visitación’ as she came. Ikerne knew she was the one being called, but simply went on playing. ‘Ikerne is my name, not Visitación,’ she muttered. ‘Ikerne, that’s my Basque name.’

The nun approached and grabbed her by the shoulder: ‘Your mother is here.’ No sooner had the words been spoken than the girl ran off down the hill, as fast as her legs would go, losing her glasses in the burst of excitement.

She had not seen her mother since the Christmas holidays. Her delight was mixed with a troubling presentiment – such an unexpected visit, and on a weekday. She could hardly contain herself. She changed out of her walking boots and dashed down to the visiting rooms, wanting to make the most of any time they might have together. And there was her mother: a slim figure dressed in black. Her dark garments accentuated her drawn, despondent features.

They talked about the family, Karmele delivering news of Ikerne's grandparents and of Aunt Anita, who had a soft spot for the girl. Then, tenderly brushing a fair lock of hair from her daughter's forehead, she said:

'Ikerne, it's going to be a while till we see each other again.' 'I know, till Holy Week.'

'Longer than that, I'm afraid. I can't find any work here. I'm going to Venezuela.'

'We're going back to Venezuela? Hurrah!'

She had lived in Venezuela only until the age of three, but had fond memories of the place: the sultry Latin American heat, certain plants and exotic animals, the beach where she used to play with her father. The house in Caracas reared up in her mind, and the time the dog, Txino, had bitten her younger brother Txomin... Her mother's voice cut across the happy thoughts:

'No, Ikerne. I'm going on my own. You and your brothers have to stay here for now. We'll be together as a family again soon, the four of us: you, Txomin and Patxi, and me. Until then, we'll write. I've brought you a pencil, envelopes and some stamps.'

Ikerne leaped from the chair in a rage:

'First Anita goes, now you. I hate you, both of you.' Her mother set her jaw.

'Txomin behaved far better than you, and he the younger.' The girl burst into tears.

'At least let me come to Santurtzi. To wave you off.' 'It isn't possible, Ikerne.'

The mother dried the girl's tears with a handkerchief. The daughter would fall asleep that night with the indelible memory of that perfume on her face.

A few days later, Karmele Urresti set sail for Venezuela aboard the *Marqués de Comillas*. She travelled alone, having left her eldest two in their respective boarding schools and the youngest with the grandparents in Ondarroa. The mother left at sunrise and, at the same time as the transatlantic liner was sounding its horn, the bells at the convent rang out, calling her daughter to Mass.

Following the Eucharist, the girls queued up to receive Communion. Ikerne was last in line. When she reached the front, the priest drew back in horror: she had stuck the stamps all over her glasses, and the face of General Franco had been scrawled all over and turned upside down.

‘What’s the meaning of this, Visitación? Respect for *El Caudillo!*’ The Mother Superior came over, wrenching her away.

‘Little so-and-so.’ she said. ‘You’ll see how we deal with girls like you.’

PART ONE 1927–

1943

NIGHT OF THE ARTISTS IN IBAIGANE

3.

In 2008, Bilbao City Council acquired a painting by Antonio Gezala to go in the collection at the Fine Arts Museum. It had previously been in the possession of a single owner for a long time. The piece, entitled ‘Night of the Artists in Ibaigane,’ a recreation of a 1927 party at the stately Bilbao home of that name, measures a mere 90 x 95cm, but from the day it was first shown in public it has captivated me.

The first eye-catching thing is the innovative placement of a festive scene in a nocturnal context. Until that time there had been a tendency for painters to focus on daytime scenes, rural landscapes or seascapes, and for the people depicted to be more or less static. The soiree that is this painting’s subject, however, takes place inside the Ibaigane atrium; an atmosphere of frenzied elegance marks it out as taking place in the 1920s. Though the picture brims with revellers, none of their faces have been given any detail, making it difficult to identify who is who. The men are in tailcoats and the women wear short evening dresses – blue and green, in the main, some cut away to show bare backs, others draped with shawls. Waiters move among the guests holding drinks trays aloft.

Gezala casts the scene in a reddish-brown, calling to mind the light that gathers in rockpools at low tide. The composition is pyramidal, as though the elements of the picture were distributed across a very large imaginary triangle: groups of couples crowd together in the bottom left and right, and at the top in the centre, completing the triangle, a model boat, itself with three masts, hangs from the ceiling. The focal point is a couple of dancers in full flow; the eye is unavoidably drawn here. The man has a long baton topped with pale red, green and yellow feathers, and wears a long white cap with a tassel – it seems to be a nightcap, juxtaposing his dinner suit to hilarious effect – and if any doubt remains over the gaiety emanating from the figure, the sheer joyfulness, he is also wearing a pink tutu over his suit. And the woman, in her green dress, one of its straps falling down as she spins around, wears a man’s hat, its brim drooping down over her forehead. The dance is all energy, both bodies have a clear kinesis to them, hers with one leg stepping across the other, his with knees bowed and

the baton twirling high in the air; the whole room appears to spin to the same beat: the stairways, balustrades, lights, and the paintings on the walls.

To all appearances, they are doing a ‘cake walk,’ a style of dance very much in fashion at the time. It had originated with African slaves in the Deep South who would gather wearing long gowns and brandishing sticks also topped with feathers. The gowns were intended to ridicule the plantation owners, as was the chicken-like strutting; in the eyes of the slaves this was how their gauche white masters moved – a connection reinforced by the feathers. Later, in a familiar historical move, the lampooning ‘cake walk’ was appropriated by the well-to-do, and the dance became all the rage, firstly in the US and then in Paris and London, followed by cities such as Bilbao, in parties such as the one at Palacio Ibaigane.

In the background of the picture a set of stairways leads up to the first floor, cutting diagonally across the composition. A group of friends lines up at the top on the left, each holding a feathered baton. At the foot of the stairs to the right are the musicians, also dressed in elegant evening wear; a six-piece band of bassist, drummer, violin player, piano player, saxophone player and, half-hidden behind the piano, a trumpet player.

It would be a number of years before I learned that the trumpet player was none other than Txomin Letamundi Murua.

4.

Karmele Urresti and Txomin Letamundi met in Paris in December 1937. This much we know for certain. Karmele was just twenty-two while Txomin was about to turn thirty-six.

Though we do not know the precise date of the encounter, the pair had already appeared together in a photograph of the folk ensemble they both belonged to, an image taken at the Paris studio of one Boris Lipnitzki: we see her dressed in the traditional attire of a Basque dancer and him in the frock coat of an orchestral trumpet player. The ensemble was called Eresoinka and, with support from the Basque government's cultural ambassador, it brought together a large number of exiled dancers and musicians. Specifically, the photograph belongs to a series intended as promotional material for recitals on December 18, 19, 20 and 23 of that year, which were to take place in Paris's Salle Pleyel.

José Antonio Agirre, the first president of the Provisional Government of the Basque Country, now also in exile, had recently been given some advice – decisive, as it turned out. 'You will lose the war on the ground,' Agirre had been told, reputedly by a Swiss politician, 'but you will win hearts and minds.' In truth, even at the outset Basque leaders had been doubtful of their side's chances in the Civil War. They were hemmed in to the north and, with no air force at their disposal, the question could hardly be avoided: how long would a popular army, whose high command was even made up of volunteers, be expected to last?

Their only hope lay in the international community: the only way Franco would be defeated was if other countries intervened in the name of democracy. But of course no such intervention ever took place. Both France and Britain were quick to wash their hands of the conflict, standing back during the initial uprising against the Spanish government and then as the dictatorship established itself – this even though Germany and Italy were openly in support of Franco.

So dire had the situation become by the time Bilbao fell, in June 1937, that thousands had no option but to flee across the French border. Agirre, however, had other means for carrying on the fight. Though in exile, they would continue a kind of resistance by advocating the Basque cause elsewhere in the world, raising international

awareness of the outrages committed by Franco's forces. Sport and culture would come into it: in 1937 the recently formed Basque football team played matches across Europe, and the Eresoinka group also toured in several different countries. Among Eresoinka's number were illustrious composers, painters, dancers and singers – the cream of the Basque art scene at that time. Over 100 artists were involved, among them Karmele Urresti and Txomin Letamundi, she as a singer, he the orchestra's trumpet player.

The Eresoinka show mixed contemporary numbers with some from a more traditional Basque songbook. Modernity and tradition side by side. The repertoire included works by the Basque-French composer Maurice Ravel; this may have been why the group in full was present at his funeral in January 1938 at Paris's Lavallois cemetery. In spite of Ravel's request to his brother that the ceremony be discreet, and for no authorities to be gathered, not even a Mass, an extraordinary crowd came unbidden. Ravel was much loved in the French capital.

When the people dispersed, Txomin went over to Karmele, and alone the pair went and stood before the granite Ravel family headstone. For a time, neither spoke. Ravel had been laid to rest with his parents; Karmele thought of her father, whose exile had taken him to the French-Pyrenean town of Larresoro, and of whom she had had very little news, while Txomin's thoughts were of Ravel's solitary death, the fact he had never married – perhaps he had been unlucky in love or perhaps the music had simply taken up too much time. It occurred to Txomin that perhaps it was the destiny of all musicians to be alone; that seemed to be the way it was going for him. Long-term relationships frightened him.

He ventured a few words:

'I met Ravel, you know. I was as close to him as you are to me now.' 'Go on. Trying to impress me?'

But it was the truth. He and Maurice Ravel had played together nine years earlier, at the home of the Bilbao Philharmonic Society. Before an enthused audience, and accompanied by the Bilbao Symphonic Orchestra, Ravel had played the piano. *Le tombeau de Couperain*, *Alborada del gracioso*, *Tzigane*, *Hebrew Melodies* and *Le Valse*. But it was also part of a time too remote, somehow too diffuse, for Txomin –

the same as any other moment before the war that he might call to mind. After just a few years, it all seemed to belong to some distant age.

Txomin tried changing the subject:

‘Tomorrow’s my birthday.’ ‘You’re making that up, too.’

5.

Karmele Urresti's family had lived in Ondarroa for generations. Her grandfather, Bittor Urresti, owned one of the local shipyards, probably the largest in the borough, employing around sixty workers; it was the single largest source of work locally except for fishing. Sail boats, steam boats and rowing boats were all made there, this last category including the celebrated *traineras*, large open-sea rowing boats manned by several oarsmen. *Trainera* building was a speciality of those northern shipyards, for all that the rowing experts of the time claimed, with not a little malice, that the Urresti *traineras* were only of use in strong winds: if the waters were calm, they said, there was not an oarsman who could get them to move.

The River Artibai, before it meets the sea at Ondarroa, runs down a narrow, steep-sided valley, and its ebbs and flows are tidal – something that has never prevented shipyards from lining its banks, which they have done since the Middle Ages, sometimes equipped for the building of deep-draught fishing boats. The Urresti family yard lay on a meander on the right bank, while on the opposite side the houses of the old port lined the beginning of a ridge that led up to the mountain, giving the appearance of these homes having been strung between the back of the riverside church and the peak that reared up behind the town.

In those days carpentry skills were passed down from father to son, diplomas were unheard of, and such things as the scantlings, upon which the boats' dimensions were based, were made freehand, without recourse to set squares or triangles. These thin wooden templates were stored on hooks in the roof beams and brought down as required for the manufacture of different components. Each carpenter had his own set of tools, also passed down the generations; hammers and the like would be kept in a toolbox along with the nails, neatly ordered from the smallest tack up to the so-called 'Jesus nails'.

A twenty-metre hull could be put together in two months using techniques that had prevailed since medieval times: first the keel would be made ready, next the prow and the stern, followed by the bolting in of the frame and inside that the flooring. The final touch was for a pair of eyes to be painted on the prow, originally a Phoenician tradition – the eyes would help the vessel navigate its way home – which

went on to become the trademark of the Urresti shipyards. A communal meal, attended by all the workers, would mark the completion of each boat.

Bittor Urresti's wealth was based on his First World War cargo ships. An anecdote is told about one of these, a much contested story which also gives a sense of the shipyard's standing in those times. The Biscay Deputy General was due to attend the launch of the *Antsosolo*, said to be the largest wooden craft ever built in the northern shipyards to date. But the devilishly winding roads between Bilbao and Ondarroa delayed him. The boat's deep hull meant it had to be launched at high tide, and when a favourable wind picked up the decision was taken: they launched with no presiding official. Crowds gathered by the church in town to watch the ship pass and, amidst general rejoicing, raise the ship's flag on the parapet banner; the Deputy General arrived unnoticed. His return to Bilbao was said to be a more torturous experience still, and he apparently swore never to return to the district of Ondarroa.

The people on these coasts have never been well known for respectful feelings towards the ruling class.

Versions also differ as to the final destination of that immense cargo ship. There were sceptics, and others who bore some kind of a grudge, who claimed the voyage was never completed, citing the end of the war, which was around the same time as the launch; in this account the *Antsosolo* went no further than the Bilbao docks, where it was used to store large quantities of rubbish that piled up along the River Nervión. And then there were those I spoke to, including the last of the shipyard's workers, who assured me that she did ply the oceans in service of the Allied cause, only later to be sunk by a German U-boat in the Atlantic.

6.

KarmeLe Urresti's father, Francisco, was nicknamed 'Scowler' in the town, though whether this was ironic (as such title often are) or because he genuinely was bad-tempered, I have not been able to ascertain. As for duties within the shipyard, an agreement was soon reached within the family whereby his brother looked after the shipbuilding side of things and he was in charge of the steam engines – he had trained as a machinist. He built a workshop for himself on a plot of land next to the Antsosolo shipyard, a bleak expanse above the inlet, intersected by the road to Mutriku. Like his father with the cargo ship, he also named one of his two fishing vessels *Antsosolo*, and the other was called *Jontxu*.

Francisco, who went around in a beret and round spectacles, was of the class of man that takes pleasure in working with their hands once they learn they have the gift. He was also a home-loving person, seeing as his daily routine took place exclusively between there and the workshop, and he was extremely fond of the hours spent, with the aid of a map, recounting his travels in Africa to his children, tales of all the dangerous places he had loaded and unloaded ships in his time, of crocodile-infested waters and savage beasts on land.

He was twice married. First to Dolores Iturrioz, who bore him four children: the boys Joseba and Josu, and the girls KarmeLe and Ana. Dolores tragically died during a flu epidemic in 1918. Once the mourning period was over, Francisco accepted that he needed a new companion and, seeing no better option than the sister of his deceased wife, asked for Carmen's hand in marriage – in those days not just a licit practice, but to an extent quite common. Though Carmen had by this time set up as a schoolteacher in the city of San Sebastian, and was being courted by a young man there, with whom she had begun promenading in the city parks, she broke off the engagement, accepting her brother-in-law's proposal and returning to her hometown to care for her sister's four children. In time she grew to love her husband, and the marriage produced two further children: the boys Jon and Gaizka. The six siblings and half-siblings bore the same surname.

Once the second nuptials were complete, seeing that the family had outgrown the house in the port, Francisco moved them to another he built above the workshop

on the inlet. As well as the house, he built a school to one side of the workshop so that his wife could carry on as a teacher. He forged a Basque national flag into the house's wrought-iron balcony – in keeping with his desire for all classes at the school to be held in the Basque language – but the outbreak of the Civil War cut short such dreams. Carmen was never to give classes in Euskera.

Francisco had been a supporter of Basque independence from a young age. It would seem he attended a Sabino Arana rally – the founder of Basque nationalism – in a small square in Ondarroa, and was converted on the spot. The politician spent part of his summers in nearby Lekeitio, and his 'mission' speech in Ondarroa brought about a thoroughgoing nationalist awakening in Francisco. Though the myths Arana drew upon largely concerned a mountain-dwelling people, he first generated support in Bilbao and nearby towns on the coast. In time, Carmen also took up the cause, becoming President of the Ondarroa Women's Association of Nationalists and going on to speak at many a rally herself.

Francisco and Carmen were determined that each of their six children should learn a trade, and, with the exception of Anita, succeeded in this aim. The oldest, Joseba, for instance, entered the seminary, first in Orduña and then in Valladolid. Josu went to follow in his footsteps, but the priestly life did not suit him and he came home to assist his father in the workshop. Karmele graduated as a nurse from the University of Valladolid and soon found work in the Basurto Hospital in Bilbao; at that time the care of the sick fell solely to nuns, and they took a dim view when Karmele and the other professional nurses started work at the centre.

Anita, however, did not pursue any such career. In the town people thought it strange. 'You'll have to set her up in a shop,' they warned, to which the father replied: 'Anita, in a shop? That girl's heart is so big she'd end up giving everything away, right down to the counter.' And in any case, Carmen and Francisco were pleased to have a helping hand at home.

7.

Palacio Ibaigane, the stately home immortalised in Gezala's painting, was at the time a residence of the businessmen Ramón Sota, and we know the date of the social gathering was February 26, 1927; in the picture a page from a calendar, fallen on the floor, says as much.

Ramón Sota was one of the wealthiest and most distinguished men in Europe.

The turnover from his various interests was greater than the state budget, and King George VI would later knight him for services to the United Kingdom in World War II when he leased the British government a large portion of his fleet; a dozen German ships were said to have been sunk by Sota vessels. His multifarious dealings included mining, shipyards and insurance firms, but the Sota y Aznar maritime company was the jewel in the crown. Its ships ploughed the waters of both Europe and the Americas.

The Sota patriarch was renowned for his altruistic acts. He supported several projects linked with the stirrings of the Basque independence cause and with Basque culture in general, including the publication of the *Hermes Review*, to which writers such as Ortega y Gasset, Rabindranath Tagore and Ezra Pound contributed, as well as poets of Spain's celebrated Generation of '27, and many eminent Basque thinkers, painters and artists.

Sota also liked to christen his ships with Basque. The task of choosing the names fell to his friend Resurrección María Azkue, president of the Euskaltzaindia or Royal Academy of the Basque Language from its inception until his death – another institution defrayed by the magnate. This was no easy task for the academic, and he came up with the idea of using the names of Basque mountains, which were as numerous as the Sota fleets were well-stocked.

Palacio Ibaigane, built in 1900 in a Basque style, brought together the feel of the region's small cottages with the illustriousness of a medieval fortified house. A path bisected the gardens, coming out at the foot of some stairs that led up to the atrium.

From there, passing through the main gate, one entered the covered courtyard with its hardwood staircase, and the property included fourteen bedrooms, salons and billiards room, and a chapel with its own sacristy and organ. The renowned musician Jesús

Guridi often gave recitals for the family on Sundays, indeed he composed a number of his most notable works during his long stays at the residence as an honoured guest.

Ramón Sota fathered eleven children, out of whom the most rebellious was the second from youngest, a boy named Manu, who as well as being unruly grew into a good-looking man, a sharp dresser with a seductive smile. He studied at Salamanca and Cambridge, and taught for a time before returning to Bilbao where he became a leading light in culture and the arts. More radical in his thinking than his father, and supportive of a fully independent Basque country, he had no qualms about writing a letter to Woodrow Wilson at one point in which he made a full-throated call for independence, quoting Wilson's renowned Fourteen Points on the self-determination of peoples, which had been set out in a speech in 1918 before being seized upon elsewhere to support the emerging European states of the day.

His exact role in the family business is difficult to pin down; he seems to have carried out the tasks of a translator and a secretary, but was never officially either.

Perhaps in knowledge of his ill discipline, or because he was always a smooth talker, his father entrusted him with public relations tasks. It turned out to be a wise decision; Manu Sota certainly had a way with people. He was capable, for instance, of borrowing his father's favourite ship, the *Goizeko Izarra*, to go to *feria* in Seville – sailing straight up the River Guadalquivir and weighing anchor on the riverfront.

Invitations to join him on board were then extended to all the grandees present at the event. But it was his parties that he poured most effort into and which won him deserved renown. He held celebrations for his circle of friends and organized zany competitions in which, for example, they might all dress as bellboys – him included – and stop taxis in the city, taking people's luggage for them, vying to see who could win the best tips, whether in the form of roses, champagne or seafood platters. On other occasions, circus events were enacted, and the invitations included calls to dress up as acrobats, clowns, lion tamers and even lions.

Naturally, then, the party of Gezala's painting was Manu Sota's doing, a party held for no other reason than to show his gratitude to the participants in a private ceremony at the Hotel Carlton five days earlier, a commemoration of the tenth anniversary of painter Adolfo Guiard's death. The event had been such a success that, in a bid to prolong its spirit, Manu decided to stage a repeat for the artists involved,

but this time in his own home; he took the opportunity to invite Antonio Gezala and at the same time commissioned 'Night of the Artists in Ibaigane'. It was far from the first time Sota had commissioned him: Sota's many interests included the theatre and he had penned a number of plays himself, employing Gezala as the set designer. When the maritime company was in need of a logo, Gezala was given the job, coming up with the image of a ship's prow coursing through oceans, its knife-like edge splitting the waves.

Gezala was also responsible for a very special portrait of Manu's younger sister.

In fact it is not a portrait in the conventional sense but a depiction of the young Begoña de la Sota, who would have been 23 at the time, in motion: wearing a short skirt, a rain coat and one of the Basque berets, and with her gloves still on, she is seen passing through the revolving doors at the Hotel Carlton. The viewpoint is from within the hotel, and her figure appears fragmented between the different sections of the door, which at the same time propel her forwards – an effect not dissimilar to that in some of Marcel Duchamp's paintings, where the presentation of different sections of a single body serves to underline the passingness of the moment. An overwhelming fragility hangs about the image, with the sense that Begoña will soon have gone – soon have come, that is, through the door and into the foyer. Gezala seeks to set down this fleetingness, time's inexorable passage, the world's moment-to-moment dispersal and disappearance.

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Translated from the Basque by Tom Bunstead