

José Ignacio Fletes Cruz's *The Second Chance: The Ark of Noah*

art selection and comment by [John Kohan](#) in the [May 2023](#) issue



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The flood story makes modern readers squirm. We would far rather look at charming storybook images of the animals parading two by two into the ark than deal with the underlying theme of divine wrath unleashed on all of creation. Nicaraguan artist José Ignacio Fletes Cruz suggests another way to interpret this foundational sacred narrative. In this oil painting on canvas, the ark is presented not as a refuge where God seals off Noah and his family from a doomed world but as a bustling community center open to all—a second chance for humanity.

Fletes Cruz paints in a naive style, rooted in Nicaraguan folk art, which he mastered in a Christian commune founded in the 1960s in the remote Solentiname Islands in Lake Nicaragua to put the egalitarian principles of liberation theology into practice. The group's support for the Sandinista Liberation Front's rebellion against dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle ultimately led to its destruction. Fletes Cruz has remained true to the community's original mission, even if its utopian ideals now lie in tatters in postrevolutionary Nicaragua.

Viewing the ark of Noah as a type for the church has a long history in Christian theology and art, but there is no hint of ecclesiastical stuffiness in this carnivalesque scene of milling crowds beside the high-and-dry boat. The people have taken over the ark and keep watch on its deck for the new captain of the ship—one who comes in the name of the Lord, bringing social justice and salvation. Says Fletes Cruz: “Christ has revolutionized everything—and that is my message.”