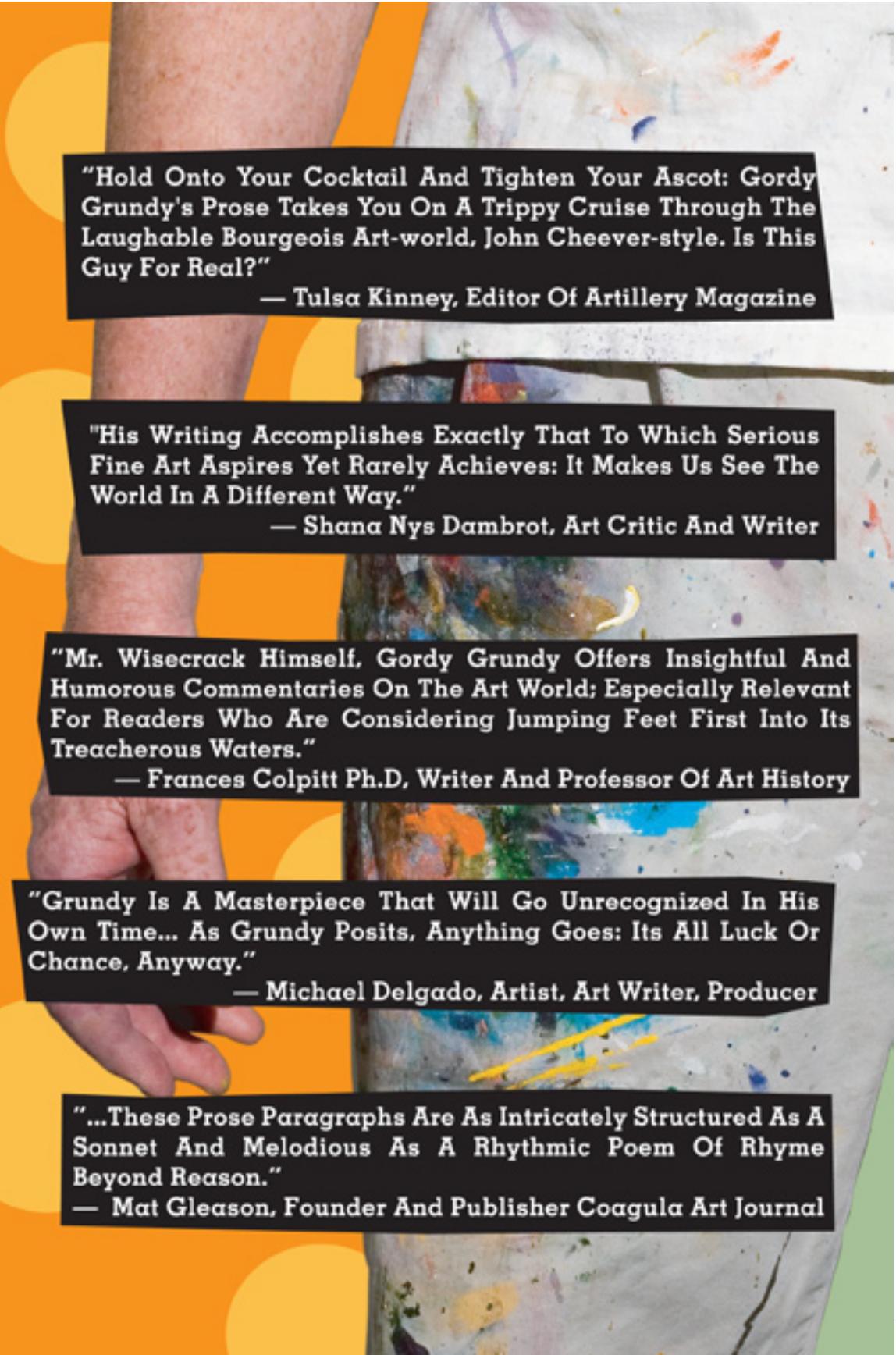
A photograph of a person's arm and hand, wearing a white t-shirt and pants covered in colorful paint splatters. The background is a solid light green color. The person's hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with fingers slightly curled. The paint splatters on the pants are in various colors including blue, orange, red, and purple.

ARTIST'S PANTS

A BIG PACKAGE OF HUMOR AND
ANGST FROM ARTS COLUMNIST

GORDY GRUNDY



"Hold Onto Your Cocktail And Tighten Your Ascot: Gordy Grundy's Prose Takes You On A Trippy Cruise Through The Laughable Bourgeois Art-world, John Cheever-style. Is This Guy For Real?"

— Tulsa Kinney, Editor Of Artillery Magazine

"His Writing Accomplishes Exactly That To Which Serious Fine Art Aspires Yet Rarely Achieves: It Makes Us See The World In A Different Way."

— Shana Nys Dambrot, Art Critic And Writer

"Mr. Wisecrack Himself, Gordy Grundy Offers Insightful And Humorous Commentaries On The Art World; Especially Relevant For Readers Who Are Considering Jumping Feet First Into Its Treacherous Waters."

— Frances Colpitt Ph.D, Writer And Professor Of Art History

"Grundy Is A Masterpiece That Will Go Unrecognized In His Own Time... As Grundy Posits, Anything Goes: Its All Luck Or Chance, Anyway."

— Michael Delgado, Artist, Art Writer, Producer

"...These Prose Paragraphs Are As Intricately Structured As A Sonnet And Melodious As A Rhythmic Poem Of Rhyme Beyond Reason."

— Mat Gleason, Founder And Publisher Coagula Art Journal

You Never Really Get To Know
Someone Unless You Walk A
Mile In Their Pants.

ARTIST'S PANTS

I am a Libertine. I'd rather go to a Bacchanalia than to a Basilica. I am a lover, not a fighter. I'd rather dance than walk. I prefer indulgence to restraint. I am Pan.

Like something wild unleashed from Pandora's Box, ARTIST'S PANTS introduces us to Gordy Grundy, a Los Angeles based artist with a penchant for comedy, tragedy and mayhem.

Over the last decade, his column 'Genuflect' has kept the art world in stitches. Now, the best-kept secret is out. It's our turn for fun.

This first collection offers thirty-five essays that will make you laugh long and loud.

This is not a book about Art; ARTIST'S PANTS offers the universal experience of being human. Loving, hating, giving and taking, Grundy takes on a holy war to salvation.

Upon the advice of a Deity, I must fulfill my destiny to bring peace to the world. Naturally, I canceled my weekend plans.



GORDY GRUNDY is a Los Angeles based artist. His visual artwork is collected and exhibited internationally.

A native of Southern California, he began his writing career for the *Tar Pits*, an underground newspaper targeted to the Newport Harbor High School market.

Since then he has been writing for such publications as the *Row Run*, the *Coagula Art Journal*, *Artillery Magazine*, the *LA Weekly*, *ARTLIES* and many others.

Grundy is actively involved with several art, literary and service groups. He currently resides in Echo Park, Los Angeles, California.

Visit www.GordyGrundy.com

FORTUNA
EX LIBRIS



This Book Belongs To

ARTIST'S PANTS

Book by GORDY GRUNDY

Artist's Pants

The Fellowship of Fortuna, A Brief Introduction, v.1.0

Fortuna: VisionQuest

Fortuna Now

ARTIST'S PANTS

GORDY GRUNDY



The author would like to thank those
for their help in this project.
John Tottenham, Chris Buzzini and Margel Nusbaumer

COPYRIGHT © Gordy Grundy

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical mean, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author, except from an approved reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

ARTIST PROOF EDITION
Limited To One Hundred

Acknowledgment is made to the following, in which various forms of this book's pieces first appeared.

All but one piece first appeared in the Coagula Art Journal.

Catalogue Essay for Transit Projects: 'Survival L.A.' at Raid Projects, Los Angeles "Strategies, Survival Skills And Guerrilla Tactics For The Fine Artist"

Book Design And Artworks By The Author

Cover Photography By Meghann McCrory

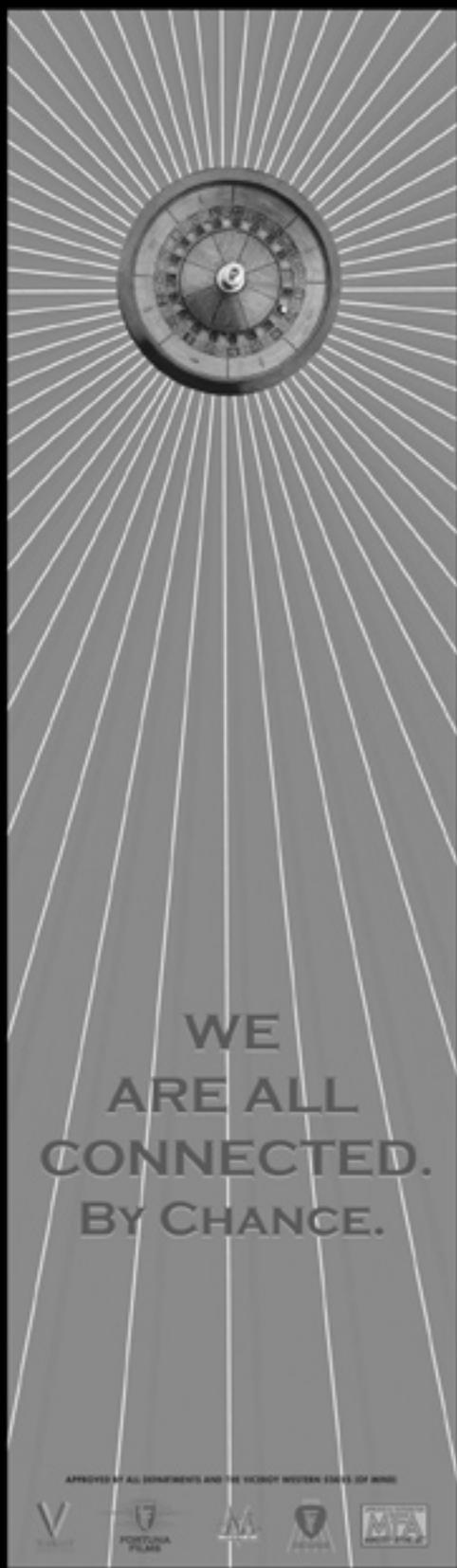
Printed in the United States of America

Visit our website at www.GordyGrundy.com

For Luck



**CHANCE:
THE COMPASS
OF LIFE**



**WE
ARE ALL
CONNECTED.
BY CHANCE.**

APPROVED BY ALL DEPARTMENTS AND THE YACHT WESTERN STATES OF MIND



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTIONS

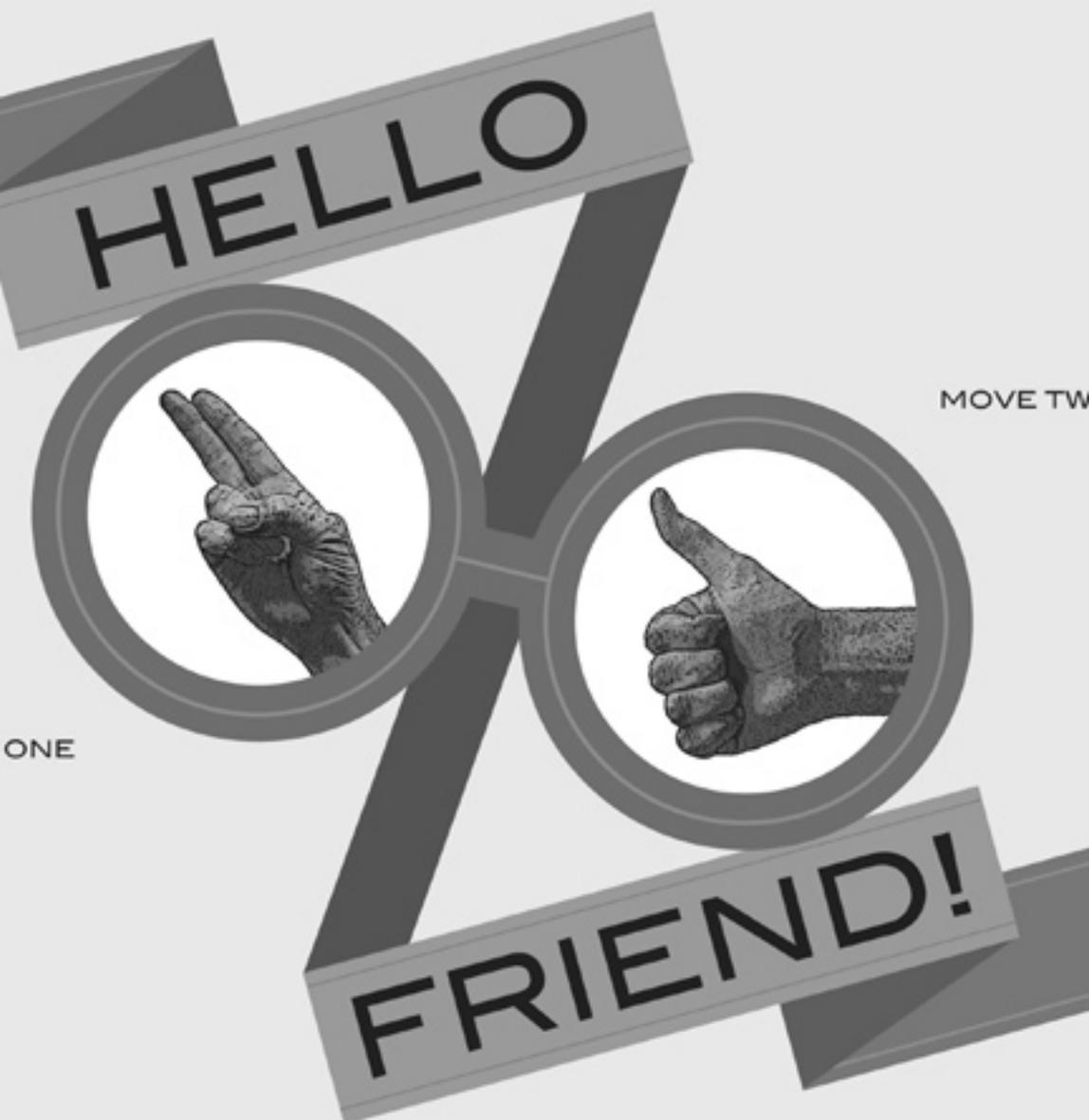
Mat Gleason	xv
Shana Nys Dambrot	xix
Michael Delgado	xxiii

ARTIST'S PANTS

The Warm, Chilly Winds Of Change	27
The Thin Purple Line	39
I Wake Up Screaming	47
Doghaus	55
Scam Artist	59
Change, Change And More Goddamn Change	65

75	At Issue With Art Issues
79	The Big Paddle
87	My Two Dukes
91	The Studio Visit
97	Gung-Ho! Hell, No!
101	Living In Wartime, Part One
111	Better Than: A Fortuna Salvo
117	Gutted
125	My Year In Purgatory
135	Captain Ahab The Artist
139	South Of Surreal, Part One
145	South Of Surreal, Part Two
149	Midway Blues
153	Nanny-Nanny-Poo-Poo
163	Looking For My Religion
173	Solid Gold Nails
179	The Christmas Cottage
187	Fine Art Cacophany

The Perfect [Human] Storm	193
Screen Saver	209
It Sounds Like The Ocean	217
Sod-Busters, True Love And Arts Activism	221
Blood [Not So] Simple	227
Profit And Loss	233
Cheeky	237
Living In Wartime, Part Two	245
Artist's Pants	255
Economic Opportunities For The Fine Artist	261
Survival Skills, Strategies And Guerilla Tactics For The Fine Artist	269



MOVE TW

ONE

E ARE ALL CONNECTED

FLASH YOUR SIGN!

INTRODUCTIONS



MAT GLEASON

It used to anger me when Gordy Grundy would be late for his deadline. Perhaps you heard a strange scream while driving through downtown Los Angeles over the past dozen years? That might have been me, ready to go to the printer's (*a quaint notion in the era of the internet*), still without a *Genuflect* column, held hostage by a popular columnist.

My readers wouldn't pick up the rag if there was no Grundy and so I waited, in between howls.

It took many years to get it through my thick skull that these essays were taking so long not out of disregard for my impositions of time. No, these seemingly effortless essays on the simple expectations one man has in regards to the quality of life, these prose paragraphs are as intricately structured as a sonnet and melodious as a rhythmic poem of rhyme beyond

ARTIST'S PANTS

reason.

This does not happen by accident, nor is it paced to complete in conformity to a calendar. This happens by the sweat of one man's brow and the spark of his unique, dare I say genius.

The occasional sophisticate will pull me aside at an art world affair and ask, with great consistency in curiosity over the years and among the personalities so interested, the question will be "Tell me just who this fabulous Gordy Grundy is..." In any line of work, when you are asked the same question enough times, you prepare a fallback answer. Mine has become, "He wears an ascot, never spills his drink, and falls in love with whomever he makes eye contact. Think twice before assuming you can keep up with him."

I could hardly add anything to complement the words he has authored, except to gloat that I finally made him wait for this essay until after the deadline on which he had insisted.

As you read this compilation, you'll soon genuflect with joy, and to get you to do so is why Gordy Grundy was put on this earth.

MAT GLEASON *is the Founder and Publisher of the Coagula Art Journal.*





All Wheat. No Chaff.

THE FORTUNATES

SHANA NYS DAMBROT

A MILE IN HIS PANTS

Gordy Grundy is one of my favorite art writers in Los Angeles, despite the fact that he rarely actually writes about art. It's not his opinions he shares with his loyal readers, though lord knows he's got plenty of them, it's himself. Or rather a version of himself, a character based on himself; close enough to the real thing to ring true. The first person narrator in his work is a looking glass version of Gordy, distorted the way painted self-portraits are distorted; trading verisimilitude for deeper insight, but not telling the whole story.

Grundy is at heart I think a conceptual artist whose work in visual art and the written word each express the evolution of his gold-plated freefall, using whatever means seems most suited to the task that day. He once told me he has

ARTIST'S PANTS

written a post-Modern neo-vaudeville nightclub review, *The Blackouts*.

He has a flair for the dramatic, he's picky when it comes to martinis, and most of his confessions are as fictional as surrealist paintings.

He floats in and out of his own dream states at will, but rather than disorienting the reader, he leads us by example to do the same, demonstrating time and again just how easily breached the walls of perception actually are.

His writing accomplishes exactly that to which serious fine art aspires yet rarely achieves: it makes us see the world in a different way.

He exaggerates, he embellishes, picks scabs and flirts with disaster. He practices stylish gonzo art criticism like Hunter S. Thompson mashed up with Susan Sontag. He manages to always embrace the present moment completely while simultaneously pondering its meaning.

Like a beatnik Gatsby, a Rat Pack Clem Greenberg, he's a holy fool, always willing to put his own comfort level at risk in the service of something larger. Like me, and maybe this is why we're friends, serendipity is the organizing principle of his life and he makes decisions based on what he feels will make the better story later.

In one essay he asserts, "I am a man divided. My soul

cries for salvation, yet my body seeks sin. I am straddling the double yellow line of change. One foot is firmly placed on the sizzling asphalt of hellfire while the other is set on the path of righteousness.”

Bullshit, Gordy. You’re one of the happiest people I know. Anyway, nice pants.

SHANA NYS DAMBROT *is an art critic and editor based in Los Angeles. Her work appears in Flavorpill.net, Artkrush.com, Art Review, Modern Painters, Uber.com/art, and, once upon a time, The Coagula Art Journal.*

THIRD: \$2,500.00
BEST ART CAR: \$2,500.00
SHOW CAR: \$2,500.00

DEMOLITION DERBY

ELDORADO SPEEDWAY
THE SUPERSPEEDWAY OF THE WEST
RACING EVERY SATURDAY NIGHT -- RAIN OR SHINE!
CAPRICE COUNTY, CA

ENTRY FEE: \$100 PER CAR
HEATS: \$100 PER CAR
250 (INCL. COCKTAILS)
EVENT ADMISSION: \$10
EMO_DERBY@FORTUNANOW.COM

THE PIT GATE WILL OPEN AT 3
FIRST HEAT 6PM
ART CAR SHOW 5PM
CAR SHOW & CONTEST 6:30PM

HEAVYWEIGHTS'
PARK PUNK BAND
IN STAGE 9PM

DJ VALIHI
THE MOCAMBO MIX
UNT FIVE, 11PM

CHEF TARA THOMAS DOES
CHILI DOGS, SLAW & BBQ BEANS

GARLIC GRITS ON A STICK
FROM TULSA KINNEY'S KITCHEN

BEER GARDEN SPONSORED
BY EL BARCO LIQUOR STORE

PANTS MUST BE WORN IN PITS. NO OPEN SHOES.
NO ONE UNDER 16 YEARS OLD ALLOWED IN PITS.
WWW.FORTUNANOW.COM



MICHAEL DELGADO

Artist Gordy Grundy is the quintessential Angelo. He's not sure if salvation comes from physical and spiritual discourse or pagan hedonism. It's THINKING about a soul cleansing dip in the Pacific ocean and instead snapping your fingers for another martini. Simultaneously Prophet and Philistine, Grundy proclaims that the gravelly road to salvation may just as well be paved with the asphalt that has little gold flakes ground into it, as only Hollywood can lay down. (In Grundy's dogma: self expression= emancipation)

'Artist's Pants', is a compendium of articles and musings from 1997 to the present day and at once lays bare an unchecked romanticism for a LA that might have never existed, while also serving up darkly humorous anecdotes from a contemporary tale of self-destruction. This is not a bad

thing; at least we get mayhem and confession with style and laughs.

As a barefoot acolyte in the temple of Warhol, Grundy puts a particularly Los Angeles, nay, Southern Californian scent into the incense of a regional self-journalism. You can recognize the hard-boiled rat-a-tat-tat of Raymond Chandler, the poetry of Nathaniel West, the dreamy feel-good of the Beach Boys as well as the “Why can’t we all just get along” desperation of the Rodney King legacy.

Grundy of course understands none of this--or does he? Like Warhol, he plays dumb and hangs with questionable company.

Gordy Grundy is a masterpiece that will go unrecognized in his own time. I stole that line from an unheralded artist named Mitchell Syrop and this makes perfect sense. As Grundy posits, anything goes: its all luck or chance, anyway.

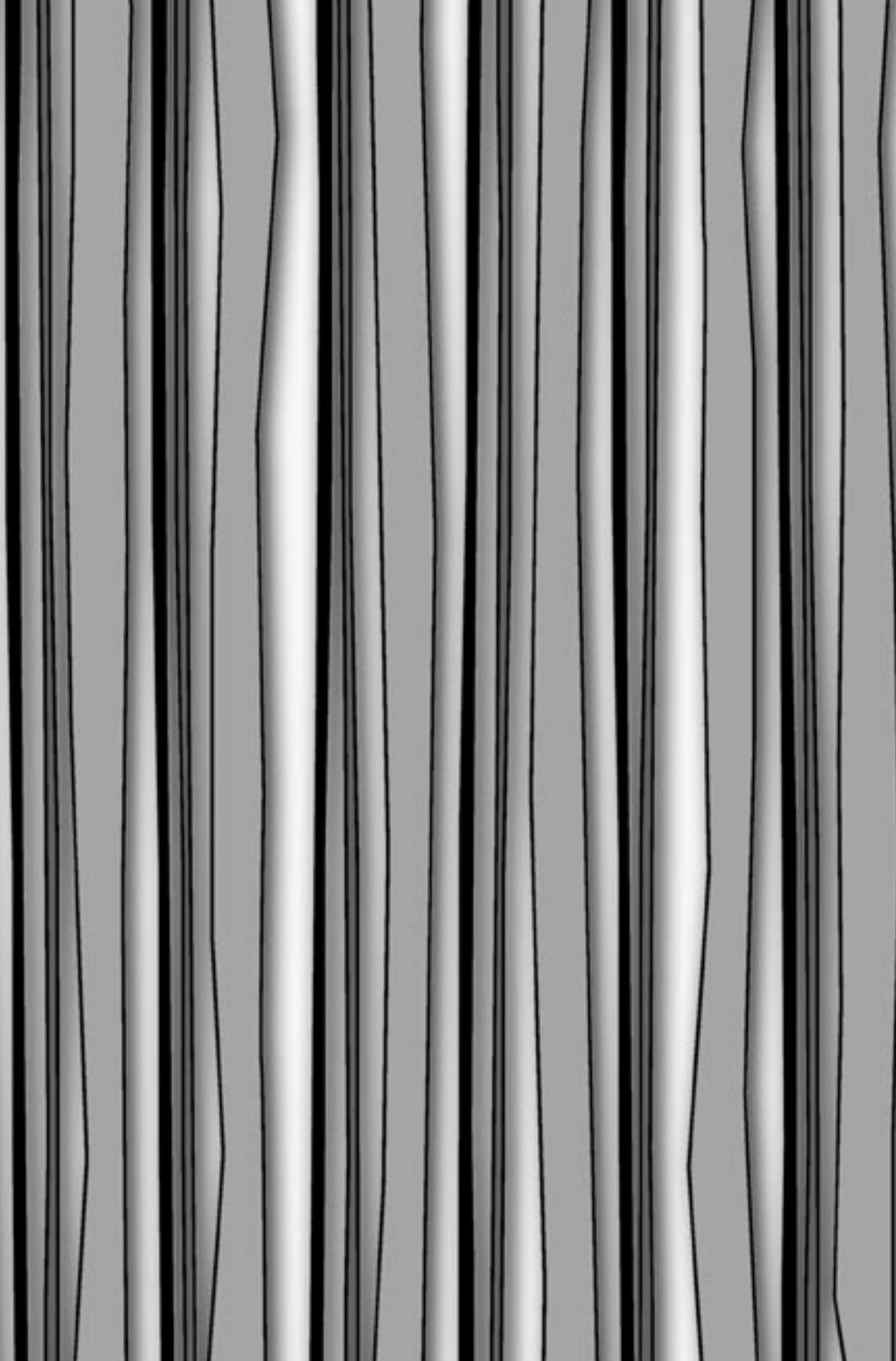
MICHAEL DELGADO made art, then wrote about others as an art writer for the LA Weekly, before moving to Minneapolis to produce television as if there was none in Los Angeles. After producing specials for MTV, he is now back in print as the Associate Publisher of METRO, a Twin Cities lifestyle monthly. He's thinking about just making art in LA again.



Feeling of change
as epitomized
by a roller coast
reaching its apex,
the drama of the
first drop, the
first rush?



ARTIST'S PANTS



THE WARM, CHILLY WINDS OF CHANGE

I am a man divided. My soul cries for salvation, yet my body seeks sin. I am straddling the double yellow line of change. One foot is firmly placed on the sizzling asphalt of hellfire while the other is set on the path of righteousness.

And the gap is widening. I'm afraid it might split the seam in my trousers.

Change is absolute. We, and the world around us, are always changing. I am older than I was five minutes ago. I get better looking every day. I know less than I did yesterday.

Change is good. Change is fresh, exciting and zesty. Yet the winds of change feel rather chilly, coming through the hole in my pants.

Many believe you can change your habits in twenty-one days. I believe this to be true for I have picked up many bad habits in far less time.

I want change. I need change. I want to change my artwork, my day job, my home life and my love life. I'd like to be more physically fit. I'd like more dough.

Hell, I'd like to change just about everything. Except for my truck. I love my truck.

Change must be initiated. Unfortunately, I am not sure how to do it and I need advice. I have many influences to choose from. Who's right? What's wrong? Who knows?

Maybe I've seen too many detective films. Just like Nick and Nora Charles or a game of *Clue*, I decided to invite all of the 'suspects' to a swank dinner party to smoke out the 'murderer.' In this case, the suspects would be my 'influences' and the killer would be 'How to change.'

Recently, a group of twenty suspects came over for drinks, dinner and my divinity. My Metaphysicalist Lily Larraleaf sat next to the Duke Kahanamoku. Madine DuPreen, an art curator, was drinking heavily with author Jack Kerouac and painter Jackson Pollock. Fitty-Thent was hashing fashion tips with Cary Grant. Captain Jack Sparrow sauntered out of the bathroom in a cloud of smoke and Sir Richard Branson was chatting it up with Don Diego de la Vega in the living room.

It was an odd, wide-ranging mix.

Hoping for a denouement, I had turned my painting studio back into a dining room. I brought back grandma's antique mahogany and extended it with a few card tables. It was still a tight fit. Cocktail glasses competed with elbows. We didn't mind.

Trading artwork for services, I had L.A. art collector-caterer Tom Peters kick it out. The seven-course menu was inspired by the great chefs of the Renaissance. Not only did we have a bartender, but the cocktail waitress was a kitten with a whip.

In the background, a string quartet quietly played Arcade Fire covers. We even had an ice sculpture that towered over the seafood spread. It was a bacchanalia.

One guest was represented electronically. A flat-screen monitor topped with a web cam occupied a chair. Since I could no longer afford a plane ticket for my Viennese psychiatrist, he agreed to participate via video web link.

On the monitor, Dr. Burstebagge was speaking rapidly and gesturing wildly to someone out of camera range. In the background, an accordion was playing a zippy polka. My elderly, pear-shaped shrink wasn't wearing his usual plaid, tweed suit. He was bare-chested, which made me nervous. I couldn't see what he was wearing from the waist down, but I was afraid he might stand up.

Editor's Note: Long time readers will recall the misadventures

of the esteemed Austrian psychiatrist Dr. Emile Von Burstebagge, a staunch Freudian with a penchant for Las Vegas. Due to an HMO insurance scam, Grundy was able to fly the bestselling author of 'Id's It!' to Los Angeles on a weekly basis over a period of several years. With his thick and incomprehensible accent, the therapeutic advice of this great man was often misinterpreted. The resulting confusion led to the first of Grundy's many adventures and arrests.

I tapped a spoon on a wine glass to get the attention of the assembly.

“Ladies. Gentlemen. I’d like to thank you for coming. Now, how in the hell do I effect personal change?”

There was silence, a moment’s pause, and then everyone started speaking at once. When they started yelling, the string quartet stopped playing in protest.

I ting-ting’d the wine glass once again.

All eyes met mine. Before I could say anything, all eyes turned to something far more compelling.

On the flat-screen, a young woman, nude, was serving Dr. Burstebagge a large martini. She then disappeared from view. The accordion started up again.

“I’ll have what he’s having,” said Cary Grant. Everyone laughed.

Oblivious to his Los Angeles audience, Dr. Von Burstebagge was clapping his hands and bobbing his head to the polka beat.

I leaned into the monitor and gently barked, “Doc-

tor! We're on!"

It startled the hell out of him. As Burstebagge snapped to the screen, his thick round glasses flew off his head. He yanked a bed sheet to his neck.

"Vat?! Vat?!" exclaimed the Doctor as he fished for his glasses.

The accordion music wheezed to a stop.

I tapped the wine glass once again and addressed the general assembly.

"Alright," I coughed. "Change? How do I effect change?"

Fitty-Thent, my thug-life advisor, was the first to speak. "Phuck-dat. Why you wanna change, when change gonna bite you in da ass anyway?"

"*Is* change going to *'bite you'* in the fanny?"

The forceful voice came from a silver translucent glow seated at the end of the table. Fortuna, Creator of the Universe and Purveyor of Luck, pointed her sword at Fitty-Thent. "Maybe change will *kiss* your butt."

Clark Gable started to say something but caught himself. He just grinned and scratched his jaw.

Fortuna continued, "Take the chance. Make a change. Either way you're lucky. Good or bad, it's all luck."

Gable leaned over to Fitty-Thent and quietly asked, "You play cards?"

"Change. It's kinda simple, really," said Kerouac,

“The hitchhiker who doesn’t put his thumb out isn’t gonna get a ride. I know.”

“You must *prepare* for change!” said Lily Larraleaf enthusiastically. “You need to pack a bag.” My Metaphysicist folded her hands together and closed her eyes as she spoke. “Before you take a journey, you must pack your satchel. Change will not come until you are ready, not until you have the skill set to cope with the change.”

She lowered her voice into a husky, bedroom octave. “Now remember, Gordy...”

Instantly my eyes closed and I started to feel drowsy.

“Deeper into the Blue. Remember the archetypes. The wise wizard who will beckon to your call. Remember the safety and security of the monkeys. Think of the golden key and the blue light bulb.”

“Horseshit,” said Clark Gable.

“No. No. I can dig it!” Jean Krupa, my bongo teacher, jammed a pink cigarillo between her lips and slapped the table with a fast riff. “It’s all in the beat, baby. Listen to your natural rhythm! Find your downbeat. Find your strength. The melody follows.” Then she turned to Gable and said archly, “Horseshit? It takes a jackass to know it.”

Gable grinned at her and winked.

Krupa swooned and gently melted into her chair.

“It’s part of the flow.” Duke Kahanamoku, the am-

bassador of surfing, shook his water glass, making waves in the goblet. The Duke said, “It’s no worries. Wait for the swell. You don’t paddle until you got-ta wave. *Chill*. Whatever it is, whenever it is, change happens.”

“*Shit* happens,” said Fitty-Thent.

A wine glass screamed above my head and exploded against the wall. Everyone turned to see Hunter S. Thompson, pale-faced and wild-eyed. He was wagging a boney finger at me.

“CHANGE IS FOR THE WEAK AND DEPRAVED!” Thompson screamed. His cigarette holder was clenched between bared teeth. He stomped his foot and stormed from the room.

A minute later we heard glass break and the front door slam.

Gable smiled, “There goes the authority on depravity.”

“We have no shortage of *that*,” laughed Cary Grant.

Charles Bukowski got the attention of my house-boy, who was serving drinks and dessert. “Hey-Hey, bring me whatever Thompson had.”

I tapped the table. “Ladies. Gentlemen. Let’s stay on point.”

John Wayne punched the table with his forefinger, then at me, “Quit moanin’ and belly-achin’. Change?”

Change! You ride at dawn.”

“He’s not ridin’ nanny-where.”

It was Madine DuPreen, my personal curator and art critic. She was drunk.

“Nuthin’s gonna change until you go back to your earlier work and throw it all out. Ya gotta shtart—start over.”

A loud hiccup seemed to perk her up for a second, but, like a champagne bubble, Madine popped. She fell face first into a plate of tiramisu.

Cary Grant folded his napkin and said, “Well put.”

I addressed the crowd. “If *Greatness* is thrust upon you, then therefore must not *Change* also require an external motivation?”

“*Absolutely*, dear boy,” said Thurston Howell III. “Self-induced change smells like an unused gym membership.”

“Change is a reaction to the physical world,” intoned Lord Bagby.

My Parole Officer, Ernest B. Dick, snorted. “Yeah. Nothin’ like a steel toe’d kick in the ass.”

Captain Jack Sparrow arched a wide eye at the officer. Hiding his face with his cap, he stood and casually sauntered to the exit.

Madine DuPreen was snoring loudly in her plate

of tiramisu. Jean Krupa leaned in with a spoon and dug a little trench around Madine's mouth so the curator wouldn't suffocate. Jean patted her back and whispered, "I *never* liked his earlier work either."

A *harrumph* trumpeted from the flat-screen. It was Dr. Emile Von Burstebagge. The great man started to speak. "I zink zee ..." Gesturing with both hands, he dropped the bed sheet. The doctor scrambled to cover himself.

Attempting to maintain some dignity, he intoned, "I zink dee zolution to dee parrobulum ees..." The co-author of '*Oprah & Me: Yes We Can!*' spoke at length; all of it was unintelligible.

Suddenly, John Wayne pushed back from the table and stood up with both fists clenched, fight-ready. "*Why you son of a bitch!*" he hollered at the flat-screen.

Burstebagge ducked.

"Whoa, cowboy," said Cary Grant, as he massaged a cuticle.

"That liver-bellied Nazi just told our boy he should have sex with his goat!"

Burstebagge sat up, eyes wide, surprised, and confused.

The nude Austrian stripper leaned into the screen and said, "Aye don't zink he said *dat!*"

"*I heard it!*" hollered Wayne. "I heard it with my own two ears!"

"What's wrong with having sex with your goat?" asked Charles Bukowski.

Madine DuPreen sat up with her eyes still closed and her face half-frosted with tiramisu. "Hold it down in there!" she shouted, "I'm trying t'get some *sleep!*"

I couldn't take any more advice. Change is change. Change comes as it comes, when it comes.

I signaled for the attention of Lily Larraleaf. Silently I mouthed, "Get-me-outta-here."

She walked over and leaned into my ear. Lowering her voice an octave, she spoke deliberately. "Gordy. Take a deep, full breath...And another... You are at the top of a staircase. Take a step down. Twelve. Down another, eleven..."

My eyelids got heavy, very heavy.

The caterwaul in the room faded until I could hear it no longer.

"Nine...Down the stairs...Eight..."

By the time she said, "Seven," I was out.

Viel Glück

GORDY GRUNDY

Wie immer



MEIN BERLIN



Going

Going

THE THIN PURPLE LINE

I am in the throes of quitting smoking and it's been rather nasty for this chimney-like abuser. Upon the advice of a Deity, I am about to fulfill my destiny. When your Id gets that kind of kicker, it's probably best to leave the bad habits behind and travel light. Unfortunately, unpacking this habit is Hell.

Not so long ago, I had a vision. Fortunately, this time I was not driving the car but was sleeping rather soundly in my own bed when a blinding light awakened me. I sat up, startled. The clock read 1:11AM. A dazzling golden glow, spinning like God's own disco ball, hovered above the foot of my bed.

From it, a female voice said, "Fernando Suzuki?"

I yanked the covers to my chin, not out of fear,

but modesty. I sleep in the nude and I didn't want to get slapped. Plus I had just woken up and, you know, the wood was a bough.

"Fernando Suzuki," repeated the voice like a thunderclap.

"M-my—my name is Gordy Grundy," I replied.

"Sorry," said the now-velvet voice, "Suzuki is my 4:20."

Suddenly, the light before me exploded like a thousand roman candles. A sound, a crash, both frightening *and* comforting, was so loud that I knew the neighbors would be calling the cops again.

From this radiating light, a woman began to appear. At first I thought it was the Statue of Liberty. She was robed, sandaled and her gaze was steadfast. Instead of a torch, she held a down-turned sword that was emblazoned with the word 'Fortuna' on the hilt. It was then that I realized she looked just like Angelina Jolie.

"You're Grundy then?"

"Yes," I replied, "Yes!"

I didn't mean to sound eager but it was obvious that my time was up. I was grateful to go in my sleep, without pain. I've lived a good life, however short. I've seen Beauty go in and out of fashion and back again. I remember art before it had issues. I'm sick of hearing about the Middle East, global warming and the box office dearth in Hollywood. My regrets are few: not enough sex. Not enough

dough. I've never been to Tahiti...

I raised my arm and extended my hand.

With the speed of the ethereal, Angelina slapped me upside the head with her sword. The blow made a loud, hollow *thwack*, but it didn't hurt.

"I'm not here for that," she said tiredly. "Besides, *you're* not gonna die painlessly in your sleep."

"Then how am I gonna...?" I started to sound hysterical.

"I shouldn't say," she snickered, "But it's a good one."

I yelped again like a scared puppy. Angelina shook her head and wiped an eye as if she were recovering from a laughing jag.

"Oh! It's nothing you can't handle," she said reassuringly. "You're an artist. You already know all about destitution, ridicule and insignificance. *Relax.*"

Her glow seemed to burn a little bit brighter as if she were getting down to business.

"I'm here with a message," she said. "You've been chosen as a Messenger. You must bring peace to the world."

My pause was long. I couldn't help but sound sarcastic. "World peace?"

"Yes. World peace."

"How the hell am I gonna do *that?!?*" I cried.

She whacked me again with her sword. "Stop swear-

ing so much. Your art. Use your art to prove that religion is fashion... we figure, if humanity realized that religious affiliation is no more important than the label in your collar, then all of you might stop killing each other. It's a last ditch effort. We've tried everything else."

"Last ditch—What?!" I cried.

"Mankind hasn't done anything interesting since you nailed Christ. Just—Just use your art."

"*Art?!—Lady my art dealer's in jail.*"

"I know," she said apologetically, "That's why I wanted someone else. Unfortunately, I don't manifest destiny; I just swing it."

The room was silent except for the quiet "But... But... But..." which was coming from my mouth like an Evinrude outboard motor.

She glanced at her wristwatch that looked like a sundial on a strap. "Hey, I've got a 3:15 in Philadelphia. You'll have to figure it out. You're a smart ass. And you're lucky. And now, you're the *Messenger!*"

By then, my morning erection had all but vanished. And so was she. Her sharp features began to blur and the light began to intensify in the room.

I called after her, "Messenger?! Why can't I be a spokesman?" I was whining, "*You know what they do to the Messenger...!*"

But it was too late. She was gone. The last thing I saw were those fleshy lips fade into the light.

And the room fell dark once again.

I couldn't sleep after that. It wasn't the cover girl vision or the alarming message that kept me awake. It was the cops, pounding on the door, trying to break up another party.

The next day felt like a bad hangover. It wasn't the usual "Another round! Another round!" thundering in my head like two trashcan lids banging together. It was "World Peace! World Peace!"

Damn. I wish she said "Lottery Winner! Lottery Winner!"

Now, I must follow the Vision of the Goddess Fortuna, Creator of the Universe and Purveyor of Luck. I must fulfill my destiny to bring peace to the world. Naturally, I canceled my weekend plans.

If it is a journey that I must begin, then let the first step be sound. I listed all of my bad habits and crossed the first one off the list. No more smoking. For a while.

Detox is a condition of which I am completely unfamiliar and highly unprepared. I need to marshal all of my resources. Thank God I'm still drinking.

This morning, Day Three, I took to the Internet to learn more about my harsh new reality and the changes that are torturing my body. Phlegm? Plentiful. Insomnia? It's killing me. Clammy hands? Don't shake mine. Night sweats? I'm swimming. Two showers a day? I can't get clean. Lack of concentration? What...? Sudden anger?

Fuck you! Emotional jags? Y-y-yess-ss. And the website promises that several nights from now, I can look forward to a flood of vivid nightmares...

This detox is gonna kill me. Better that, than the Lady with the sword.

All I can say is the Goddess Fortuna had *better* be a Vision. Because I'll be *really* pissed if I find out this was merely another hallucination. Or is that the razor sharp edge of the thin purple line?





EDIA

BO.
GP.
PA.

I WAKE UP SCREAMING

“C’mon, get him!” The voice roared like it had a coupla tear drops tattooed at his eye, ham hocks for forearms and an intense dislike for me. The command was answered by a flurry of footfalls in all directions. Here we go again.

I was standing in the middle of a long alley. With mayhem about to round the corner, I wouldn’t be able to make it to the end of the street in time. So instead I ducked into the alcove of a doorway. The door was locked.

Two sets of heavy steel-toes on wet asphalt were running my way. I leaned back into the deep shadow for cover.

As they slowed down, my heart raced faster and the headache pounded louder. It was obvious that my hiding spot, the only break in a long brick wall, would be a point of interest. So much for a fade.

They were creeping up. Two of them. The crowbar felt as light as a feather in my hand. I wish it had more weight. I'd be lucky to clock one, stun the other and make a dash. If I got lucky. No one ever does in these situations.

They were on me; I could hear them breathe. At least I held the element of surprise. I raised my crowbar. A head breached the corner. I brought the bar down—on his shoulder. He screamed. I screamed...

I wake up screaming.

While the dreams differ in context, location and intensity, they all end the same. I wake up screaming. My throat is dry, my forehead is on fire and the sheets are cold and wet.

I asked for it, for the dreams to invade. The palette is very heavy right now. My superhighway to the universe had gotten bogged down in traffic. I was no longer 'at one with.' I wanted liberation. I needed connection.

My bartender is good at short-term solutions. This impasse required bigger ammunition. To cope, I turned to Lilly Larraleaf, my Metaphysicalist. I spoke of my desires, grand designs, fears, heartbreak and backache. Life feels as if I'm towing the Queen Mary with a rowboat and a broken oar.

Sweet Lilly Larraleaf suggested turning 'down time' into 'now time.' The harmony of the universe and the consciousness of a dream state could work *for* me rather than *haunt* me. She said I could solve most of my problems while I slept. I liked the idea. Horizontal beats the hell out

of vertical; I'd rather lie down than run around.

Using her powers of suggestion as a fast track to the universe, Lilly mantra'd these words into my soul, "...and in your early morning dreams, you will vent the questions and frustrations of the day. Every problem will find its solution in your early morning dreams..."

...It was a lovely day at the beach. We were lulled by the warmth of the sun, the lazy cry of the gulls and the sparkling diamonds on the sea.

Suddenly the idyll ended with cries of alarm that rippled across the long peninsula of sand. I opened my eyes to find beachgoers standing up and pointing seaward.

The horizon was rising. That far line, fuzzy to see, was lifting higher, rather quickly. A big wave was building and moving toward the coast.

Panic convulsed everyone on the shore. Folks were grabbing gear and running over the dunes to the berm of the highway and the safety of their cars. Instinctively, I grabbed my duffel but it slipped from my hand. There was no point.

The shoreline began to recede very quickly, exposing rock and shell never seen. Fish flopped. The roaring surge moved out, massing into a wave that grew ever more rapidly in height and speed. The force of the oncoming wave was shoving the air, creating a wind of increasing velocity.

I looked back. Those running for higher ground stood no chance.

The wave came. I could do nothing but watch. It

was magnificent and beautiful, glorious as it rose to block out the sun. Its wind punched me off my feet and the world was under water...

I wake up screaming.

...There are three variations of the artwork, each with a slight difference. The disparity between dull and genius is a hair's breadth. Slight is the key to sublime. I am devoted, a frantic disciple.

Design C looks good, but a new background develops into D. If I recolor every third horizontal bar in B, I get a new E. There is something about A which is still buggin' me. My fingers fly over the keyboard. The pressure for perfection has shoved my heart up into my throat, making it hard to breathe. I regret the changes to K and I delete L. Q is interesting but no improvement over B or C. F, H and J are tossed in the trash. Wait. I retrieve J. As always, the original, A, looks best; I'm likin' it. Yes. No. Hurry. If I can take the bottom half of Q, recolor it like E, then...

I wake up screaming.

...The jungle growth is dense and I'm running as fast as I can. I need both hands out in front of me, to clear a path, to leap a log and to catch a stumble. I need a third hand to keep from choking. Cho-Cho, a chimp, has his arms tight around my neck and I can't breathe. I know he's scared. I hear him whimpering. I can't run as fast as I need to with a cute lil' monkey on my back. Not so far behind us, the panther sounds like it's gaining ground...

I wake up screaming.

...It was the easiest studio visit I have ever had. Collectors Bambi and Stanley Throckmorton were standing before a large painting, “No. 43” from my Space’d Series.

“I can part with it for ten thousand dollars,” I said. And after a pregnant pause, I added quietly, “That’s *after* the thirty percent collector’s cut and the gallery commission.”

As I turned away, I could see Bambi elbow Stan in the ribs. He coughed. She batted her eyes. Not that she needed to; Bambi was fifty years younger and a lot more fleshy than her spouse. I knew I had the sale.

Through his oxygen mask, Stanley wheezed, “You’ve got a deal.” I was as pleased as spiked punch. I clapped my hands and replied, “Can I offer you folks a glass of wine?”

As I turned there was a loud *rrr-ripping* sound that ceased all conversation and bonhomie. My enthusiasm and my elbow had pierced the canvas of No. 43...

I wake up screaming.

...Your deadline is in twenty-four hours. We need a thousand words with an illo. Write superlative words.

I wake up screaming.

...I know the city well. For the last two hours I’ve been cutting in and out of buildings, climbing fire escapes and zigzagging alleys with those fukkars on my tail. I think

I've lost them—I know I have. But now I'm lost.

Nothing looks familiar. I don't recognize anything. It doesn't even feel like my city, my home. How could I have gone so far astray?

A right. A left. A block. A plaza. Left again. Nothing. Even the air smells different. The people look different. I am so lost. Panic lost.

And so tired. I've been at this—how long? I've got to keep going. I want to get home. I need peace, to rest, to sleep. I am so tired. My legs are killing me and I'm starting to stumble and misstep. My eyes are burning; the lids sting red. I just want to rest. To find comfort.

I've never been so alone. Alone boring to the core. Never so lost. I keep going. Rounding another corner, hoping to find something familiar, some sort of hope. I keep going, but I start to fear how long I can keep moving. The feeling is desperate; I've never felt this desperate; desperate as an absolute.

I turn another corner, into a square. The light is a little brighter and I can hear seagulls somewhere far off. I don't recognize anything but it feels a little more familiar, a little more at ease, closer to home. I dunno why. I'm still lost, but I welcome the relief.

I follow a short, yet inviting street that leads me to a wide cobblestone promenade lined with art nouveau street lamps. Gulls flock and dive for fish. It's a harbor, a seaport, partly industrial, mostly recreational. A few palm trees remind me of Spain or Italy but the steep surrounding mountains make me think of Seattle. But it's older, much older and foreign.

A bray of horns and celebratory huzzahs erupt like an echo and I turn my attention across the harbor. Colored lanterns illuminate a party and a band plays on. A large yacht, a motor sailer, held high on a dry dock, slowly slides into the water. Cheers and bravos cascade once again. It's such a beautiful ship. With clean lines and a straight bow. I don't think I've seen anything more elegant.

And then I wake up. This time without screaming.



DOGHAUS

Turmoil being relative, one of the most significant events in a year of many was the acquisition of a roommate. After several years of living alone, my tranquil, selfishly hedonistic lifestyle was shattered.

If Hollywood were to tell this story, I would be reunited with a son I never knew I had or a drooling old codger who dispels life's lessons in an amusing manner.

Fortunately, I was reunited with my dog.

Excited to have him again, I imagined that old Din and I would be running through flowered fields or sitting on a dock of a bay. Instead, we take naps. Din is no longer the young buck that I remember. Din is now a senior citizen.

I had not lived with (Gunga) Din for many years

and I was ecstatic. I love my dog for many reasons and cute tops a long list. A Dobie with floppy ears, he is handsome and spry for an old man of fourteen years. I imagined that our reunion would be like old times. It wasn't.

As of last week, I have officially capitulated. I am now dog and he the master. It is no longer my studio but his doghouse. I guess a smelly, deaf dog is better than a strange child suddenly calling me Daddy.

I can't imagine what it's like to be old but I am learning rather quickly. Caring for and living with an old man has taught me many Life Lessons. The experience has made me responsible. As I care for this old dog, I am forced to think of the Cycle of Life and how precious time is. I have learned that Love does conquer all or at the very least, Love forces us to put up with a helluva lot, gladly.

I don't mind the lack of sleep, wakened hourly by his hacking cough. I no longer stop him from shredding the carpet. He barks orders at me, literally. I fully accept all foul odors. I keep the lights on so I don't step in something foul. I burn a lot of incense. I make two trips a week to IKEA for new rugs.

My life has become Din's. As I write these words, he stands loyally and lovingly by my side...dry-heaving.





SCAM ARTIST

I recently received an email from a Mrs. Sylvia James, a collector deep in the heart of ol' Alabama, who wished to buy 'No. 91' from an old painting series. I don't sell much artwork off my website, so when I do, it is a pleasant surprise.

Mrs. James had sent the email very early in the morning, which led me to believe she had been up all night drinking Mint Juleps. Her typing and manner of speech were odd, a Southern charm I presumed. Since most art is purchased while intoxicated, I thought nothing of it.

Mrs. Sylvia James is a busy woman. Not only is she about to give birth, she is moving to merry olde England. A woman of obvious good taste, she inquired about a painting commission for her new home. As always, art is the perfect gift for all occasions.

The shipping company that would be moving her 'home decors' contacted me. They needed to know the dimensions of the painting, so that they could quote a cost to Mrs. James. I assumed it was a Chinese firm, for the email began with 'Dear Mr. Grundy/Ma.'

Mrs. James then sent an email, happy with our progress and her love for 'No. 91.' She was going to send a postal money order with an amount that was \$1,700.00 above the price of the painting. It would help her out if I could pay the shipping...

Something started to smell like a backwater bayou. I recalled a recent news item on Internet scams, illegal money transfers and unwitting victims. My love and adoration for Sylvia James began to fester and rot.

As a crime lord, Mrs. Sylvia James is quite brilliant for she targets the most vulnerable in our society. The American artist is eager, open and always fast to help. Beaten down by years of insignificance, the artist is psychologically ripe for abuse. Starved and grateful for the attention, the artist will go to great lengths to maintain the involvement. Mrs. Sylvia James is a monster. This is more despicable than preying upon senior citizens or small children.

Seething with rage at this heinous scam and the abuse that she may be inflicting upon my creative brothers and sisters across the world, I contacted the Los Angeles office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

A friendly young woman answered the Fraud Division phone. I immediately imagined her as blonde and athletic, an Eastside kind of gal. I explained the scam. She asked many questions. I liked her.

“And you feel the scam artist may be targeting... who?” she asked.

“Artists.” I replied.

“Oh,” she said. But it sounded more like “So?” I wouldn’t say she was suddenly chilly but I sensed a disinterest.

“We’re working on it,” she said. I almost believed her.

As she was hanging up the phone, I swear I heard her snicker, “Get more agents, Lou. They’re after the artists.”

As I write these words, Mrs. Sylvia James is out there duping and attacking the creative in our society. This She-Wolf is cajoling them into what will be a federal offense. Her talons will shred the artist’s dignity and their sense of trust. Her guile will rearrange the lives of these innocents. They will brag to their friends about sudden good fortune. They will dig deep into storage to find ‘No. 91.’ They will clean up and repaint a scuffed section, while wondering how the piece will look in the country home outside London.

Mrs. Sylvia James must die. This monster must be apprehended and brought to justice. Or maybe I’ll mete out my own.

I am offering a reward. If anyone has any information that could lead to the arrest and conviction of Mrs. Sylvia James, I will personally award them 'No. 91.' I don't know what she looks like, but I do know that she is a bad typist.

Since I must go at this alone, outside the law, I can't really offer any kind of Witness Relocation Program. I've got a couch, but that would only be for a couple of nights.

Please send any clue, no matter how irrelevant or insignificant, to the HotTip Line listed below. All information will be kept confidential.

Someone, somewhere, knows something.





**GOOD
LUCK**

CHANGE, CHANGE AND MORE GODDAMN CHANGE

TO MY GREATEST CONSTERNATION

I want change. I'm waiting for it. I expect it.

Next to my front door, I have two bags packed, always on the ready. The smallest is fit to support a romantic assignation or a bender of three days or less. The larger bag, a nondescript duffel, is designed for a longer journey.

Inside I have neatly folded a variety of clothes appropriate for any occasion or situation from an urban alley to a country club. A tuxedo, plenty of art supplies, a pair of swimming goggles, a year's ration of Excedrin PM, theatrical make-up, cash and two false passports are just a few of the economically packed items.

I'm ready for change but both bags are covered in dust. (Actually, the smaller one gets some use but not enough as to be commensurate with my young age.)

I'm ready for change and I'm insulted that I have to wait for it. Change should happen miraculously and fortunately. *Bon Chance* is a gift from the Gods, an appointment of talent, grace and aesthetic superiority.

Well, I'm sick of waiting. This Prince is used to some service. I've been signaling the Headwaiter for quite some time now and I haven't caught his eye. I'm ready for action, goddamn it, and it hasn't been forthcoming.

Recently I was perusing an issue of *Missionary Life*, a glossy monthly, and I was surprised to find an article on change. It suggests that if you want to better your life, you should cough up a total tithing of forty percent. It also proposed the theory that if you alter just one small thing in your life, it will eventually effect a greater change, like a loose bolt flying inside your transmission crankcase.

The author also gave a laundry list of suggestions, which I have re-translated for your applicability: You can move. You can switch mediums. You can change your day job or your phone number. You can discover a new vice. You can try a new haircut or take a vacation.

I'm not a Calvinist and I never tip forty percent, but I knew I had the gumption to change at least one thing in my life.

A SIREN'S CALL

I had to get outta town. This time by choice, but I had to get out fast nonetheless. I know how to read an omen. When my over-burdened camel, Ol' Sanitee, took

one look at the little, tiny toothpick I was about to place in her basket, she leapt to her feet with a camel's roar. She meant business, so I dropped the stick. I knew I had to get outta town.

This Westerner instinctively travels west. The Siren that whispers in my ear wears a lei of fragrant white and orange flowers. Besides, I was on a budget. My coffers are as dusty as a coffin. If you want to find the cheapest vacation, look for the biggest ads; Hawaii always wins by several column inches. Honolulu dominates Maui or Kauai every time by at least a point size.

AMERICA'S VALHALLA

With the alacrity and clarity of the Artist's Mind, I was able to calculate the most luxurious comfort and beauty for the fewest clamshells. The cheapest package in paradise is the shopping mall they call Waikiki. It didn't matter; I had a card hidden up my sleeve. If Air Greyhound books two people to a seat or if I had to rest my head on the placemat called a pillow at Motel Poi Poi, I had the key to Shangri-La.

My plan was to get there cheap, sleep cheap and spend all of my time at the place I revere as the Mount Olympus of America. With the help of a friend and a fake I.D., I was able to gain entrance to the Outrigger Canoe Club.

For centuries, democracy and its friend the guillo-

tine have forced royalty into hiding. America's most superior race has taken refuge at the Outrigger Canoe Club.

The OCC is a rather small private club at the foot of Diamond Head. The facilities are comfortable and beautiful but not luxurious. Its sweeping view of Waikiki, the green mountains of Barber's Point and the great wide Pacific will always bring a hush at sunset and a murmur of approval for nature's showmanship.

The OCC is also artist friendly, just ask Billy Al Bengston.

What makes the OCC exceptional are its members. They are the descendants of American missionaries, whaling ship captains, daring entrepreneurs and royal Hawaiians.

These men, women and children are unassuming of their privilege. They share the grace of naturalness. No one walks, for they lope. Their bodies are lean and their muscles long. These are not the people of barbell vanities; their physicality is borne of outrigger paddles, surfboards and ocean-fought strength.

Their faces are not lined from worry, just careful thought. Strong white teeth flash against sun-browned skin. Everyone stands naturally tall. This is not the beauty found in fashion magazines but in generations of well-bred character.

Envy keeps me at the OCC. I remember watching a beautiful, raven-haired mother and her young son scouting the waves, waxing their boards and going out for

an afternoon surf; I want to be that kid.

The work day ends early at the OCC. My peers would return from a few hours of labor managing the family trust to hoist a canoe above their heads and go for a paddle.

Their world possesses an aesthetic that a Ralph Lauren or a Tommy Hilfiger tries to capture but never will. *Olympia*'s director Leni Riefenstahl, the Nazi Bruce Weber, would run out of film at this place.

These *alii*, the Gods and Goddesses of America, live at the Outrigger and I was privileged to bask in their community. But I am not one of them. I am not rich and I am not *that* good looking. I do not lope.

My itch and scratch for a vacation was dire. I needed calm and repose. This trip was so spontaneous that I could not find a guardian to accompany and nurse me.

Alone and left to my own devices, it wasn't more than three hours after setting foot on Hawaiian soil that I fell into the grasp of a posse of artists and scalawags that rivaled all I was trying to escape in Los Angeles.

Unfortunately, I returned more exhausted and war weary than I'd been when I left. I guess I can't help it; I will always be a sailor on shore leave.

TABOO TERRACE

I just moved, but this change was not self-initiated as suggested in *Missionary Life* Magazine. My landlady fell in love with a crusading journalist and gave me the boot.

Fortunately, I was able to land, not on the hard asphalt of the street but onto a very large pile of bamboo leaves.

Over the last five years, my choice in residences has been for amusement rather than home and heart. Since the scribe was taking my room, he offered me his, a small house four blocks away in Echo Park. He got the girl and the view and I finally got to drop my anchor in a safe harbor that I can call home, a mooring this psyche sorely needs.

I said, "I'll take it" before the journalist could tell me about my new digs. From his description I assumed that he was a design and style writer.

"The creme colored manse with lagoon blue trim is fronted with a grove of tropical bamboo, the symbol of prosperity, growth and upward mobility. True to the early Twenties style of Los Angeles architecture, the whimsical home is perched high off the ground, Hawaiian style, as if ready to embrace a tsunami. This and the lush landscaping will welcome every guest to the charms of the South Seas."

Now, if I were this guy's editor, I'd make a few changes to the copy. "Grove of bamboo" might be more accurate as "a few clumps" and "Los Angeles style architecture" demands adjectives such as "ramshackle" and "clapboard." Besides, I'd never call the threat of the reservoir above my head or an address in a floodplain as "tsunami friendly."

However you may describe it, I call it home. The

rent isn't bad. It has an old fashioned bathtub which suits me fine. The "whimsical" floor in every room has its own concept of level and the kitchen reminds me of a galley in a small, leaky yacht.

Since cooking anything more aggressive than cold cereal is out of the question, I have turned the dining room into a spiffy painting studio.

Without air conditioning, my place actually does offer the climate of the South Seas. My oscillating house fan feels like the trade winds.

Over the last eighty years, my neighborhood was built with complete disregard for building codes. My street of single story homes and duplex apartments is oddly private despite the fact that everyone is living on top of each other. When my neighbor sneezes, I reply with a "Gesundheit!"

Everyone has a loud dog and we create our privacy with walls of sound. Everybody cranks up their world; music is an invisible property line. As a result, a stroll down my street offers everything from a rural Ranchera to Handel to the Gorillaz. A chorus of dogs sing along in disharmony.

The natives are certainly friendly. On the first Saturday night in my new pad, I came home after midnight to find a party next door and one across the street. I went to both; I got the bum's rush from one and stayed for hours at the other, having a great time even though I did not speak the language. It's a dangerous Welcome Wagon.

I need not worry though. I am a mere block away from a private mental health facility, which seems friendly enough.

Since the journalist and I were trading places, we also switched phone numbers. The move saved us 15 dollars each in charges.

It was later that I learned he was not a food and lifestyle writer but a cop-busting investigator. He writes about police corruption and his sources are gang members and those at the Graybar. Now every dirty cop with a beef has my address and I have been fielding collect calls from jailbirds.

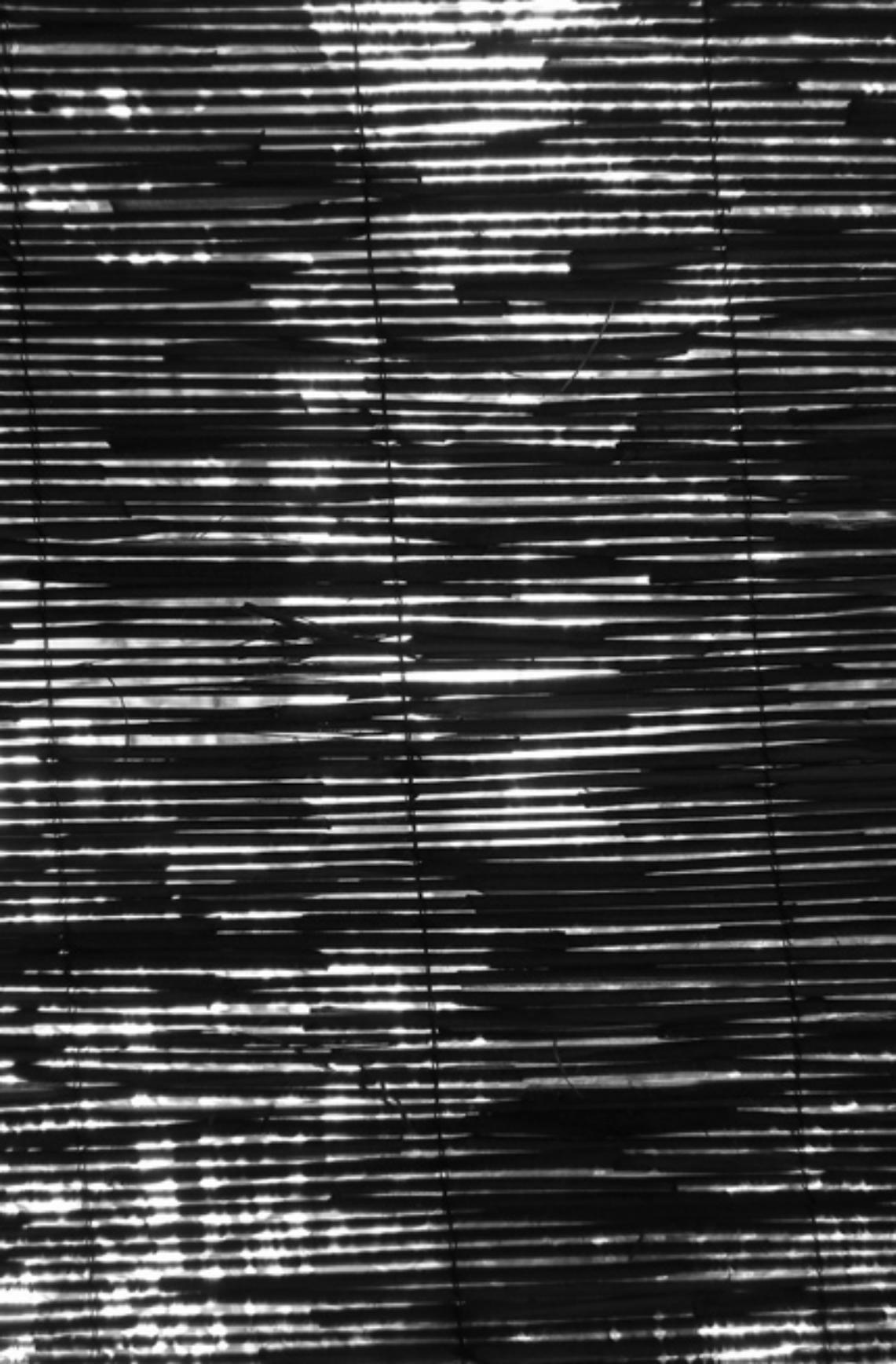
Talking to members of our penal colony is very exhausting and laborious. Since the one holding the phone is generally not the one making the call, they have a hard time grasping the idea that this number has changed. "Who you?" they scream repeatedly, "Who you?"

It makes me jump every time.

NO SMALL CHANGE

One axiom to remember is, "You always get what you wish for, plus a sharp stick in the eye." Never again will I take the advice of a Calvinist nor will I tell Lou my barber to try something new and kinky. I'm throwing in the towel and holing up behind the bamboo grove.

As an admission of defeat, I am about to paint a house sign which I will hang upon my porch. The Polyneesian styled letters on bamboo will read "Taboo Terrace" because nothing really ever changes. You just can't re-cast the die.



AT ISSUE WITH ART ISSUES

Making art is one thing and Art Issues are another. Art Issues is the speed trap in a small town. It's the obscure zoning law you find out about too late. It's the balloon payment hidden inside a home loan.

Art Issues are elusive. In the art world, they are paramount. To the layman, they're inconsequential.

In order to comprehend an Art Issue, one must invest three years and five figures in grad school. The fashion industry announces their annual color scheme with great pomp and circumstance. The art world announces their annual Art Issues with nothing more than a sly wink and a nod. You either get it or you don't.

It's another one of those 'goddamn things.' I had painted myself into a corner. Rather, in a painterly way, I had 'fallen but couldn't get up.' A dark cloud had ren-

dered my easel idle. It's been over five weeks since a brush has touched a canvas.

As artists, writers and seekers know, one occasionally hits a dead end. Sometimes too much thought does not allow for maneuvering and you can't find your way out of a cul-de-sac. I had gotten lost and in frustration I was beating my head against the wall.

I like to be self-sufficient; I thought I could solve the painting problem myself. In all honesty, I was just being polite. I rarely talk about my work. I know that anytime an artist starts talking about *their* work, my eyes glaze over and my head starts to nod. I really couldn't bare the cruelty of doing that to someone else.

My painting problem persisted with no solution in sight. Finally, after endless hours of self-flagellating torture, I realized I needed help. I needed Art Issues. It was time for a studio visit.

My pal, painter Alan Wayne came over. He is a thoughtful Minimalist and I have always appreciated his counsel. He looked at the last three pieces and made a few comments. His pronouncement acted like Draino. The clogged pipes began to flow.

I realized that I had instinctively turned what should be a simple image into a painterly discourse. That's why the bright colors were becoming muddy and the bold lines had turned into cowardly hesitations. The paintings were deviating from their original intention.

I had gotten lost.

Problem solved. A weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I was free once again.

Liberated, I showed Alan the new series, a conceptual work that does not use paint as a medium. He liked it. He encouraged more. Then he laughed and said, “You know, with this work, you are bringing on a new Art Issue.”

I blanched, “Wh—What do you mean?”

“With this, you can’t call yourself a painter. You’re an artist now. Or a conceptualist. Mixed Media is in your lexicon.”

My head started to ache. I could feel another Art Issue coming on.

I’ve *always* called myself a painter. I’ve never seen myself in any other way. I don’t want to be an artist. Should I destroy the new work and stay a painter? Do I accept the new identity and change the monogram on my towels? I don’t know.

Just when you think you’ve got all of your Art Issues lined up, there’s always one making a f***ing issue.



THE BIG PADDLE

DEATH OF A SHOWMAN

In Los Angeles, showman Michael Todd was busy packing. He had to catch a plane to New York in order to attend a Friar's Club roast in his honor.

It was a special time. He was lovingly married to the most beautiful woman in the world. He was the proud father of a baby girl. His recent achievements had earned universal critical praise. For the first time in his life, his finances were stable and abundant. Life could not have been better for Mike Todd.

That night, Friday, March 21, 1958, Todd gave his bride, actress Elizabeth Taylor, a good-bye kiss. Much in love, Elizabeth wanted to join her husband at this prestigious testimonial where the great entertainers and comedians of the day would be roasting the headline-grab-

bing Todd. Unfortunately, Elizabeth Taylor suffered from a heavy cold. She had just started work on the film “Cat On A Hot Tin Roof,” and she needed her strength. Reluctantly, the devoted wife agreed to stay in Los Angeles.

Mike Todd was one of the greatest American showmen that ever lived. Known for his brash personality, Todd would risk everything he owned (or could borrow) on his belief in an idea. His Broadway successes overshadowed his many failures.

Todd’s greatest film achievement was the all-star production of “Around the World in Eighty Days.” This 1956 Best Picture won five Academy Awards and made Todd a fortune.

That night, Mike Todd met his friend and biographer Art Cohn at the Burbank Airport. The weather looked ominous. High winds and heavy rains stormed the Southwest. Not to worry, the pilot of the Lockheed Lode-star said that flying conditions were excellent above the storm. At 10:41PM, the Lucky Liz, the name with which Todd had christened his private plane, took off for the Great White Way.

Several hours later, shortly after 2AM, the pilot struggled to fly through a fierce storm that raged over New Mexico. No one knows exactly what happened.

Thirty-five miles southwest of Grants, the Lucky Liz crashed and exploded in a rugged valley between clouds and mountains.

All on board died instantly.

WHERE ARTISTS GO, REALTORS FOLLOW

Marfa, Texas.

THE HEALING POWER OF POP

Too tired to light a cigarette? Too numb to switch off the televangelist? Too weary to cinch the knot on the noose?

The “down” times in life must be tolerated; they are part of the balance. To sweeten the bitter, music is often the first step on the climb out of an emotional ditch. You can discolor the blues. Following are several songs that can bring fresh blood to those anemic times.

“Accentuate The Positive”

Johnny Mercer and Harold Arlen slap us upside the head with their succinct lyrics. Arlen takes a position of absolutes. “...Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative and latch onto the affirmative. Don’t mess with Mr. In-Between...”

You are forced to choose: Is that glass half full or half empty?

“Sing Your Life”

On his “Kill Uncle” CD, Morrissey gives us a sweet philosophy for the millennium. The wise and earnest lyrics urge us to know ourselves and be proud of it. Where

the truly jaded may sneer at such an elemental message, Morrissey has fortunately invested great wit and a bouncy beat. Sing it.

“Gone!”

The Cure has written a wild one for their “Wild Mood Swings” CD. It features a catchy, syncopated beat and swingin’ lyrics, yet the perspective is an odd one. Is it mood music for an intervention? It might motivate an addict into rehab.

Even if this point of view does not apply to you, the message is universal with a believable “go get ‘em” attitude.

If music can tame the wild beast, it can also be used to re-circuit a bad attitude. Gas up the carburetor with music! Your soul will sing.

TRUE TALES OF THE HYPER-REAL

You can be a winner without the effort. Succeed without sweat. Your laurel leaf crown is made of fresh-scent plastic.

Several stores in an upscale chain were selling trophies at \$39. (My friend bought one of the majestic faux silver cups on a heavy black lacquered base at the sale price of \$19. She wants to engrave it with “Trophy Wife.”)

No assembly required. Just place on your mantle and insinuate.

LINGO

“a full set of luggage” \ n : 1: refers to the heavy circles and swollen bags under one’s eyes, usually after a long night of wild and excessive behavior; 2: “*Looks like you’ve got a full set of luggage!*”

(Courtesy of Stu Gimlet.)

THE BIG PADDLE

Most tribal cultures feature their own customs, rituals and belief systems. The Southern California surf culture is no exception.

Long before Gidget and Moondoggie scampered across the sand, real surfers in the Thirties and Forties took a more philosophical approach to life, death and the sea.

This is a culture of self-reliance, appreciation and dignity. The Big Paddle reflects that ethic. Like the African elephant that lumbers off alone to die, an aging waterman grows to where he can no longer enjoy the things that give his or her life its meaning and pleasure.

When life is ebbing and the body gives out, the surfer knows that he is ready for The Big Paddle.

At sunset, on a day like no other, the surfer will wax up his favorite board for the last time. Sometimes, he or she will be joined by friends. A toast will be made for a safe journey. Other times, the ritual will be initiated alone. It is a time of contemplation and reflection.

Before the sun can set against the horizon, the waterman will place his board into the Pacific and start paddling. He aims to follow the sun. Forever.

He will paddle until he can paddle no more. He will endeavor until his strength has been depleted. He will die with dignity, on the Big Paddle.





**SOUL
AND
SWAGGER**

MY TWO DUKES

In the endless quest for Self and Meaning, I looked at where I came from and how that environment has impacted my life. Not only has the effort delivered some artwork, but surprisingly, a great idea for a show.

In the search for Self, I took a look at my hometown. I was lucky enough to grow up in Newport Beach, back when it was still a laid-back beach town. Newport is the crown jewel of Orange County in sunny Southern California. It's the kind of place where God would build a summer home. The media has a wide eye on it. Recently, several hit TV shows have put a spotlight on the high-ticket area.

I can't tell you how great the beach culture is, and how sad I am that I can never go home again. In looking at the issues, I realized that the same two forces that in-

fluenced my life also formed a very strong aesthetic which became the character of the county.

The art show is called '*My Two Dukes: The Soul and Swagger of Orange County.*' The Dukes in question are the Duke Kahanamoku and John Wayne, both one-time residents of Newport. Collectively, their influence has been social, political, spiritual and even economic.

Duke Kahanamoku, a Hawaiian, introduced surfing to the mainland in the 1920s and planted a seed of thought that grew into the gentle, respectful and earth-conscious ways of the beach culture. Now, with a surf shanty starting at ten million bucks, the beach culture has sadly eroded like a spring sandbar. The turf near the surf is now owned by people who like to look at the ocean rather than get in it.

The Duke lived a charmed and fortunate life. In a daring rescue, the Olympic Gold Medalist saved eight lives from a shipwreck in the Newport jetty. He is the acknowledged Father of Modern Surfing and an innovator of lifeguard technique and water safety. He traveled the world with the greatest of welcome. Hollywood loved him. The Duke was a Prince.

Actor John 'The Duke' Wayne made his home in Newport Beach. It's where he kept his 'Wild Goose,' a Navy minesweeper that was retrofitted into a sporting pleasure palace.

Right now, with our nation at war and the dial on

the Right, no icon shines brighter than ‘The Duke.’ Why, if John Wayne had been first into Iraq, we’d all be outta there by now.

Growing up in my household, it wouldn’t be too far-fetched to say that grace ended with “And God bless John Wayne.” He was the big man in town. He gave the county a little glamour and a big swagger. He made my mom swoon and my dad stand a little taller.

John Wayne represents an American ideal. The World War Two generation came home from the war wanting to build something greater. Hungry for home and hearth, they developed a set of all-American values that would forever ensure U.S. strength and power. John Wayne is an icon for this *gung-ho, go get ‘em* attitude.

For better or worse, everyone in Orange County walks with a swagger. We learned it from the Duke.

Orange County is the summation of American society and culture. If you took the American Dream and placed it into a Petri dish, then indulged it with any nutrient it craved, you’d get Orange County, California. Its social evolution over the last seventy years is fascinating.

God bless the Two Dukes.



THE STUDIO VISIT

It's so hard being misunderstood. I can't get used to the jeers and the laughter. Everyone regarding me with derision—Jeez, this is what a Minimalist must feel like.

Yah, sure, I may be talking strangely, almost incomprehensively, and, yes, my arms are flailing in the air like a madman, but I have a reason for my odd behavior.

I am a Man of the Season.

The kids on my block laugh at me. They yell “Spaz!”, “Kook!” and “Ants in yo’ pants!” It’s because I walk around with elbows flying and hands clawing at my face, while twirling around in circles.

This may look strange, but in Los Angeles we’ve just had a sudden Spring. The spiders hatched early. Taboo Terrace, my studio, is surrounded by a grove of bamboo; arachnids love bamboo. The little muthas spend all night

squirting out web-works just to snare me in the morning.

I'm not afraid of spiders. I don't dislike them. But have you ever walked through a web? It's sticky. It's invisible. It's everywhere. *And* there's a big ass spider somewhere on it.

Just thinking about it—I can feel something crawling down my neck. Here I go, again. I look like an aerobics instructor with a bad meth habit. Butoh on bennies.

Just when I was about to sign a contract that would have made me a millionaire's millionaire, I suddenly felt a spider crawling down my neck. It seems Hollywood is intimidated by a fast dance in the board room. Whatever the reason, it appears that my new reality show 'The Studio Visit' has been sent '*back to the coffeeshouse.*'

I thought it was quite brilliant actually; so did they. I was *this* close.

In the pilot, the show follows a group of artists, recent MFA grads, as they prepare for the studio visit of *their career!* The brass ring that we dangle in front of their glossy and glazed eyes is a room at the Whitney Biennial, a \$25 gift certificate to Pearl Paints, and a year and a half of unrelenting attention followed by a lifetime of obscurity. Over the course of eight weeks, the artists would fret and flail, building momentum to the biggest '*Studio Visit!*' of their lives.

The most difficult challenge was keeping the attention of the audience. Whenever the artists would begin to discuss their work, we simply learned to cut to a more

fascinating commercial.

Then, after months of excruciating drama, odd self-obsessed behavior and lots of pointless hard work, the day of the big ‘Studio Visit’ would arrive. We follow each artist as they clean the studio, prepare refreshments and medicate themselves in anticipation of the life-changing jury.

Six hours late, a limousine would pull up to the curb. The Don Trump-like host (or a dominating doyenne) would give the artwork a five-second look-see, toss a notebook of carefully prepared slides in the trashcan and ask, “Is there anything to drink?”

Tension would build as the wine was uncorked and the host extinguished his cigarette into the cheese and fruit plate. You could hear a pin drop.

At this point, I suggested a close-up of the artist’s sweat-beaded brow, an audio track of their heart rate and an inner-body cam to show the ulcer acid boring a hole through their stomach lining. It’s a shame there is no way we could show the artist’s soul staggering under the weight of this ultimate aesthetic authority. I guess we could always animate it.

Then, after looking bored and fidgeting with his watch, the famous curator (or dominating doyenne) would stand and announce the verdict.

To the lucky, lucky winner of ‘The Studio Visit,’ the glamorous art expert would enthusiastically announce,

with a trademarked cadence, “*Let’s put ON an ART show!*” Lights flash, champagne pops and canapés are served.

To the untalented losers, ‘America’s Favorite Curator’ would sneer a series of humiliations. “*Try your local coffeehouse.*” “*Here’s the address of a pay-to-play gallery.*” “*Try the county fair—they show children’s art.*”

At the time, my lawyer was trying to secure the tee shirt merchandising rights to these catchy insults. Oh well, ashes to ashes...

What excited me most was the spin-off potential. (Ka-ching. Ka-ching.) To satisfy the hungry market for cruel fraud and humiliation, we’d produce a similar show featuring mid-career artists in their late thirties.

Unfortunately, at that crucial contractual moment, with the Mont Blanc hovering over gold-embossed onionskin, I thought I felt a spider in my collar. The hee-bie-jeebies sent me into a spastic fit that alarmed the network elite. I tried to pass it off as the latest dance craze. I *should* have said it was an Ecstasy flashback. Sadly, I wasn’t smooth enough to save myself.

As they say on the Westside, the deal went South.

As a consolation, the Suits offered me a job as the art curator of the studio commissary. I politely declined; I already work for minimum wage.





GUNG-HO! HELL, NO!

If I hadn't grabbed onto the easel, I would have fallen on my ass. Suddenly the rough wood floor in my studio is as slippery as ice. It's so bad that I can't cross the room without doing a full arm-waving, leg-flying prat-fall. Then you add a tray of cocktails and the screwball ramps up a notch.

You see, a new series of art and my big mouth have contributed to the need for major changes in the current lifestyle curriculum. I want to try something tricky. To make the artwork, I've gotta be in a top form physically, emotionally and intellectually.

I'm going for the big fish. I'm tackling the questions that mankind has pondered for the last 3,000 years. *Why are we here? What is the Meaning of Life? Why bother?*

While the work involves many issues, the piece is ultimately about Redemption. This is a subject I prefer to regard through film and literature. *Other* people's hardship, struggle and strife are better read than endured.

Unfortunately, for this artwork, I have to *participate* in the Redemption. This is in contrast to my current comfort.

For the piece, this lover has got to become a fighter. This introvert has got to shake some hands. This vulnerable waif has got to get some armor.

This lazy drunkard needs the discipline of a NAVY Seal. That's why the floor is so slippery. I'm afraid to be all I can be. Or worse, I've gotta be what I'm afraid I am not.

The ship is leaving the dock, which is why I am having separation anxiety. The tie lines have been released and thrown onto the deck. The anchor is raised. I have left a steady income to follow a clear yet improbable path. There is no turning back. And in this moment of terror, I am paddling furiously against the current, which is pulling my schooner toward the falls of commitment.

Naturally, I have been paddling to oblivion with a variety of sensations. It's a fast dance beat.

I know why I am resisting change. The blanket that I had was awfully comfy; I really hate to let that go. Then toss in a fear of failure and one of success. That's a panicky stew.

I guess terror is part of the process. The new ad-

venture involves a skill set that I believe I possess. Nothing on the horizon appears insurmountable. What's the problem?

The roar of the falls is getting louder as I rush toward the edge.

Once I'm over, I can't resist.

LIVING IN WARTIME, PART ONE

HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE

Many of you don't know that I own an island in the South Pacific where I spend a great deal of my time. When I'm not dogging it in Los Angeles, Walihi is the place I call home. It is a refuge—it *was* a refuge, a place of tranquility and beauty far, far away from the many humanities of our world.

Walihi lies north of Tahiti and southwest of the Hawaiian Islands. Far from the shipping lanes, it is a small island that has been charted by only a few seafarers throughout history. Walihi (pronounced 'volley-high') roughly translates as 'The Island of Limitless Love and Endless Beauty to the Edge of Time.'

Despite its size, the island affords several lush green valleys and seven distinct beaches where long rollers, per-

fectly shaped, caress the wide shores of fine white sand. The surf is always up on my *moku*, my island.

The *hale nui* or Plantation House was built in the mid-nineteenth century by a reclusive whaling captain who had a startlingly contemporary eye for architecture. It was his passion to spend the cocktail hour facing West in a comfy chaise on a wide lanai. The few guests that I've brought to the island cannot witness a sunset without sobbing, for the beauty is so intense that it invokes a private and personal catharsis.

I don't mean to brag but there are two painting studios on the island, the smallest offering five thousand square feet of workspace and a motorized roof. Lack of storage is an ill wind of the past.

On the occasion when I go 'figurative' there are plenty of models, ready and willing. Unlike the guaranteed heaven of an Islamic kamikaze where seventy black-eyed virgins are awaiting, Walihi is populated with dark eyed men and women, none of whom are virginal. This is just one of the many reasons why nightclub Mocambo at Bacchus Beach on the north shore is always hoppin'.

Life on Walihi is idyllic, but the island is not a utopia. Even though the team of gardeners will snip the thorns from every rose and comb the thistles off a Koa tree, the Realities of Life are not ignored for they are accepted judiciously and rationally.

Red ants battle black ants and jellyfish invade the

shores after every full moon. Orchids blossom and die. Cows are murdered, tarred with marinade, then sacrificed upon my bar-be-que grill. A bartender may screw up a cocktail proportion. *Haole* guests will get a sunburn and a coconut occasionally falls upon my head.

Prominently placed on a rise in the ‘Valley of Higher Thought,’ there is a small but tastefully designed temple dedicated to Aristotle. A long reflecting pool edged with lotus blossoms mirrors the bright light of ‘The Eternal Flame of Reason and Objectivity.’ On nights when dark clouds obscure the ever-present full moon, the Eternal Flame fills the valley and glows like a volcanic beacon.

Nicknamed Led Zep, *Haleakala* or ‘Mount Stairway to Heaven’ is the island’s highest peak. The purple and black lava rock rises abruptly and dramatically to an elevation of 5,280 feet above sea level. The summit is narrow and affords a spectacular and unobstructed view.

When a Chinese junk crashed upon the ‘Reef of Irresponsibility,’ I salvaged the lazy susan from the galley and brought it to the plateau of Led Zep. The lazy susan was big enough to sit on and allowed me to spin slowly and view the world in 360 degrees. There I have witnessed seven solar eclipses. I have seen the umbra, the shadow of the Moon, cross the Pacific and darken the blue waters like the hand of a God. I have seen the fire of Bailey’s Beads, the flare of the Diamond Ring, and the horizon bleeding red in an endless sunset.

I rarely tell anyone about Walihi because it is too hard to put into communicable words. Life on the island is as easy as a fond memory. It is as soft as the Castillian leather in a SUV. It is as warm and constant as an electric blanket. It has the forceful power of a 9.3-liter engine, the refreshment of a sports drink and the sensuality of a stripper dancing with a pole. Walihi was all these good things but so much, much more.

Early on the morning of Tuesday, September Eleventh, I was collecting seashells in the 'Lagoon of Romantic Love' on the southwestern shore of the island. The water I was standing in was such a translucent blue green that no artist's palette could ever capture it. Ka'ne, my pet dolphin, was leaping and playing just a few yards away. The tradewinds cooled the early sun, crisp on my neck and shoulders.

Suddenly the seashell basket that was floating beside me drifted seaward so fast that I could not grab it. At first, I thought the tide was simply changing. Then I noticed an increasing pull upon my legs. The pull became a surge.

The water was draining from the lagoon with such force that I was knocked off my feet. The sea was leaving the shore. I staggered to stand upright. Ka'ne leapt high but his powerful tail could not propel him forward and he was swept away.

Any escape was useless. The outer reef, which just a minute before had been invisible and submerged, now stood exposed. Fish, suddenly stranded, flip-flopped their

useless tails in puddles of wet sand.

The water from the lagoon had fed the growing surge offshore. It was not a wave but a wall of water moving incredibly fast and forcefully. The reef was consumed and the lagoon was filled instantly. It lifted me up, gently at first, and shoved me along at increasing speeds. Suddenly I was thrown over the beach, across the park, over roads and through the fields.

Palms were ripped from their shallow roots. The Plantation House splintered into shards of glass, mahogany and sandalwood. Wild-eyed livestock thrashed to keep their heads above water. The wave carried us relentlessly forward. I could make no resistance nor offer help as friends flailed past me. The red striped walls of nightclub Mocambo zigzagged to abstract expression. Books were torn from their shelves and the shelves ripped from the walls in the 'Library of Progress and Modernity.' The bleachers in the volleyball stadium dissolved into splinters of broken bamboo. Onward the waters pushed over the island.

The great surge began to slow as the wave ran up the 'Valley of Higher Thought' and destroyed the temple. The 'Eternal Flame of Reason' was snuffed instantly.

Usually caused by the sudden displacement of land in an undersea quake, a tsunami (or *kai e`e*) is a rhythmic wave of kinetic energy. As it crosses the ocean at speeds over five hundred miles per hour, a tsunami often passes under a ship at sea unnoticed, for the wave averages a

height of only three to five inches. When it meets an island, a tsunami does not collide but rather envelopes. Water is piled upon the land kinetically.

This is not the source of its great destruction; the advance of the water destroys little. The devastation is wrought when the waters are sucked back to sea with a hellish force and uncontrollable fury; its retreat carries everything and everyone away with it.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

With the quiet power and speed of a tsunami, our American way of life has changed. The waters have just begun to recede and it is too early to determine the breadth of the destruction. All we can feel now is the shock and sting of the slap. Like the sadness that accompanies great beauty, there is opportunity in our tragedy.

These events have kicked open a fresh window into our sensibilities. We have been given a new chance to think deliberately. This situation is forcing us to determine value, to find what truly matters and what does not.

Life is not the same. Our channel has been changed. The Refresh Button has been hit. Some of what we see is good, some of it is bad and some of it is ugly.

Due to space limitations and the timing of good taste, my list of the Good, the Bad and the Ugly has been suspended. The waters are too turbulent. We are seeing and feeling so much; life is now a slamdance across the emotional spectrum.

I am proud and awed by the heroics of those who made a conscious and selfish decision to take a bullet for a brother. I am nervous when I see ten-gallon hats riding on six-gallon heads. I blanch at the patriotism of 0% APR financing and I cry proudly for the values of our Founding Fathers. I fear for unseen dangers. I am appalled by the hawks and disgusted at the doves. I get nauseous when the Neutra homeowner worries he may be a target for anti-Modernist thugs.

It's no wonder I drink.

THE HOLLOW

There is a sound that sometimes reverberates in my head. It haunts me often and fascinates me endlessly. The Hollow, as I call it, lives deep in my ear. It is as horrific as it is beguiling. I am seduced by it.

The sound is hard to describe. It is the cacophony of formed metal as it is forced into another shape. It is the howl of a car flipping over and over across Sunset Boulevard. It is the moan of a ship as it tears into an uncharted reef. It could even be the sound of an airplane as it enters a skyscraper.

The Hollow's screeching high treble is murdered by its hellishly low, pounding, and unforgettable bass.

The Hollow is a trigger to survival. It produces a unique, instinctive reaction. When faced with danger, the human animal will assess a situation and react accordingly. We judge the threat against our defensive capabilities,

list our options and scan for venues of escape before we make the decision to fight or flee.

The Hollow is a representative sound of a peril so fierce, so ungodly and incomprehensible that there is no retreat from it. Its force is so devastating and its path is so unpredictable that any fight is futile and all escape is impossible. Logic demands that we relent to its great and unknown power. To survive, one's muscles must go lax and follow the flow of the turbulence.

The Hollow demands that we lose our control and abandon our will, for that is the only survival option. Given the current threats to Civilization, all we can do is give a little blood, strengthen our vision and try to keep an even keel while the Hollow screams and howls in our ears.



Gordy Grundy's

BLACKOUTS

The Most Fun You'll NEVER Remember Having!





BETTER THAN: A FORTUNA SALVO

“Gong Long?” I asked.

“Yes,” confirmed my Transcendentalist, “Gong Long.”

I had just given the white robed monk, Hu Non Furst, an offering of a basket of fresh fruit. In return he gave me a mantra, ‘Gong Long.’

I wasn’t sure if I liked it. It was supposed to clear my mind, but all I could think of was a football pass play.

I asked for another mantra. He objected. The ceremony degenerated rather quickly. Long story short, I ended up wearing some fruit and he ended up with the wicker basket around his neck.

I needed a new mantra.

I am finding my religion. Every day brings another revelation. I mean, the room can’t get any brighter. But

I'd like a little shade. I am learning so much, so fast, that my transcendence feels like skydiving. I've *gotta* relax and you can't mellow without a mantra.

A mantra can be an unintelligible word, a concrete idea, or a vague notion. It can even be an action.

Some say a mantra should be given to you. As I was waiting for mine, I had a few ideas on what makes a good one.

1) A good mantra should be universal, something that all creeds and cultures can sink their teeth into. It must be a truth that has no room for debate or bloodshed.

2) It has to be simple, so I can remember it. A 'Triple A' Mantra should stay in the headlights.

3) There should be a pleasure principle. It's gotta feel better than it hurts; the heaven should outweigh the hell.

4) This Mantra must be convenient and fast. I have a problem with the Islamic prayer schedule. Five times a day is redundant, a real time-killer and hard to schedule around, especially during the cocktail hour. Conversely, the old Christian *once-a-week* is a long time between a good idea.

5) Enlightenment should be time and cost effective. Tom Barrack, the surfer/real estate king, speaks of a "Karma Bank." My mantra has gotta be a direct deposit.

6) And it's gotta be cheap. *I'm an artist for God's sake.* With the high cost of DSL, wartime and greenhouse gases, I really can't afford anything like the Mormon Com-

mission, the Episcopal Clip or the Pre-Tax Tithe. Plus, there's my bartender to consider.

There I was, a man in need of a mantra. Suddenly, just when I needed it most, *Fortuna* graced me with one.

One morning, just before I woke up, Rey Ray made a guest star appearance in a dream. He had a walk-on, without dialogue.

Rey Ray was my best pal's great-uncle. King Ray was a family man, congenial and hard working. I had a great fondness for him. And respect, for he served bravely in the Second World War. Ray was always great to me. We both shared the love of a cold beer and a hot tamale.

I can't remember the context of the dream, but I remember that I was standing on the deck of a burning galleon. I looked up and saw Rey Ray on the quarterdeck. Rubbing his round belly, the old man looked around, saw me and smiled. Johnny Cash wrote a soulful ballad called 'A Satisfied Mind.' Rey Ray had the grin of a man with a satisfied mind. He winked, raised his arms and flew into the night sky.

A little later, I woke up with the feeling that everything was gonna be OK. To see Rey Ray, I was reminded of a Life Lesson that I had learned from him. His sentiment would become my mantra.

I remembered, at his funeral several years back, Rey Ray's daughter recalled the rigors of a typical family picnic. Once they arrived at the park, big daddy Rey Ray

would command all of his kids and a couple dozen cousins to clean up the area. It's hard to enjoy the beauty of nature when you are looking at someone else's trash. (At a picnic, I'd rather deal with hungry ants, but these days you better look out for used condoms, spent shell casings, or rusty heroin needles.)

Naturally, the kids chafed at the chore, but they understood that a clean camp made their picnic more enjoyable.

The real mutiny began when the day was done and the car was loaded. Rey Ray told the kids to clean up the campsite, *again*. A cranky chorus protested the *injustice*. Why tidy up when we are cutting out? The kids wisely argued that they were leaving a place as they had found it. But Rey Ray didn't see it that way. He commanded the kids that they would leave the place *better* than they had found it.

What a frame of mind! This is the mantra I had been looking for. *Better Than*. It even has a whiff of elitism.

Better Than is beauty, symmetry and function. It's egalitarian. It's not limited to five times a day.

If I live *Better Than* and treat people *Better Than*, I might even stop kicking the dog. If you can pull it off over an *entire* day, you are practically guaranteed Life's greatest reward, a Good Night's Sleep. The Karma Bank would overflow.

Unfortunately, like anything worthwhile, it requires

some courage and purposeful thinking.

A tidy little package, *Better Than* is an attitude with clear purpose. I want to leave everywhere I go, better than I found it. I want to leave everyone I meet, better for the encounter.

‘Better Than’ is *fortunato*. It could even end wars.



GUTTED

I just put my dog down.

When I returned home, alone, from the veterinarian, I found a small present waiting for me on the front porch. It was a dead white mouse with big round ears lying in small pool of blood. It had been killed but not mauled.

So far that morning I'd been playing it reasonably brave, but upon discovering the gift, I lost it. I started to sob. That dead mouse was the sweetest and most thoughtful gesture a calico cat has ever given me.

The multi-billion dollar dog care industry tends to focus their advertising on the cute puppy or the canine middle-aged best friend. They don't tell you about living with an old dog. It's not easy. It's a lotta work. But I can now say I'm an expert in carpet care.

On the whole, I am not so fond of the human animal and I prefer to avoid them as much as I can. Other breeds are not as cruel, irrational or petty.

Needless to say, my dobie Din and I were close. For thirteen years, we'd been best pals. (Gunga) Din was handsome, spry and he walked with an elegant gait. His big floppy ears seemed to have a life of their own and I'll miss them the most. He was an Art Dog; the back of his head was usually stained with paint.

The long decision to end my best friend's life was heart breaking, soul searing and gut wrenching. Enough said.

An old dog complicates your daily life and kills your social one.

I had my last houseguest nine months ago. When we rolled home, I was obviously pre-occupied as hands were flying. Maybe I should have better explained the situation to Din or given him more attention, but the dog got jealous and pondered his revenge.

An hour later, happy as one can ever be, I danced out of the bedroom to mix more cocktails. Crossing the studio, I landed in something warm and muddy. There I stood, naked, hopping on one leg, wondering where to put the other foot. I held an empty cocktail glass in each hand. The melted ice tinkled thoughtfully.

There are some situations you just can't play.

I haven't slept well. For the last nine months, I have been harassed by a rather large rat. Around 3:30 every

morning, this behemoth climbs inside the wall behind my headboard and into the attic, where it slaps on a pair of Army Boots. Then he does winds sprints for six to ten minutes. It jogs just long enough to wake-me-wide, a guarantee that I will miss the last train back to Slumberland.

Regardless, there is no point in going back to sleep because in a short while the dog will wake and the real tension begins. From 4:40 on, he will get up every fifteen minutes, hipbones creaking and collar tags tinkling, to stand next to my bed.

He wants one of three things: 1) to check on me, 2) to be petted or 3) to be let outside for business. The first two are sweet; the third is a nightmare. Whereas some animals may bark their desire, mine chooses to communicate psychically. He'll just stare at me, expressionless. It is very hard to interpret these subtle signals that can lead to very dire consequences.

Thus begins the *pas de deux*. I leap out of bed and open the front door. He snorts, laughs at me, and nine times out of ten, trots back into the bedroom. But as I have learned, you can never be too careful. Trust me, an animal accident on white carpet really *does* ruin your entire day.

When the rat started to invite friends over for early morning relay races, I took on the problem *mano y mano*. Spring traps and sticky glue trays were set and poisons placed.

Until I caught a glimpse of it.

The rat was no ten-pounder with mottled fur and

a razor sharp sneer. In truth, my nemesis was a cute little white mouse with a long slender body and big round ears. My killing instinct vanished and the campaign to defend my household ended.

Frankly, living with an elderly dog, I was grateful to get the early warning mouse call.

As we age, so must our expressions of love. In a dog's hearty youth, you can slap 'em around and rough-house with affection. But in their old age, when a dog is nothing but skin over old bones, you need to caress them gently. You have to be aware of tender spots and aching hips. Plus, if a dog is deaf like mine, it's easy to scare them.

Not so long ago, I came home to find my old pal asleep on the porch. Glad to see him, I sat down on the stairs looking for a little sugar.

I guess if I were deaf, sound asleep and someone tried to rub my ass, I would have done the same thing.

My old pal whipped around with the speed of a teenager and snapped two big fangs into my palm. Not planning on pain, I flew toward the ceiling as the wild-eyed animal bit into an index finger. As I rolled past him, tumbling down the stairs, I could see that he was already feeling guilty.

Ya can't blame the dog. My knee is no longer black and blue and the scars are tattoos I will always cherish.

Last Fall, showing signs of senility, he suddenly refused to come into the house, even during the long rains

and bad weather. I was insulted, hurt and put out.

Actually, I was grateful and so was the carpet. I didn't have to go to IKEA every other day.

I had gotten tired of friends asking, "Have you tried doggie diapers?" To which I'd reply, "Who takes them off?"

Then there were the sensitive friends with a loving point of view. "Shit in the house?! *Put the dog down!*"

While Din was camping outdoors for three months, he made friends and created a little menagerie. There was the skanky squirrel with the threadbare tail and a wild cat with the sweetest little voice.

The squirrel stayed aloof but the gray striped feline moved in, sleeping on the porch with the old dog. Everyone needs someone to kiss or hiss at.

Then, suddenly last Christmas, Din decided to move back inside. The cat, his friend, hung around. And still does.

Assuming the dog would die at home, I had saved a fancy old bedspread, cardinal with embroidered gold detail, to be used as a shroud. The other morning, I draped the royal blanket over the seat of my truck and I carried my best pal to his berth.

The ride to the vet was a killer. Din rested his head on the center console and looked up at me with his big eyes and long lashes. I smiled because the perspective made his huge nose look even bigger.

Not wanting to slobber or linger, I had pre-paid over the phone.

When I called, the vet said the place was empty. When I arrived, there were five busy puppies waiting for their first shots and five new owners who each got the 'New Puppy' speech. Life can stand still but Death has a schedule.

The wait in the lobby felt like an eternity. The stiff upper lip of my grief, a reservoir ready to breach the dam, began to stew and boil into anger. *How long do I have to sit here? How dare you keep us waiting! Can't you see I'm here to kill my dog, you motherfuckers?* My nostrils were flaring and the upper lip was curling into a snarl.

Damn, I don't love often, but I love hard.

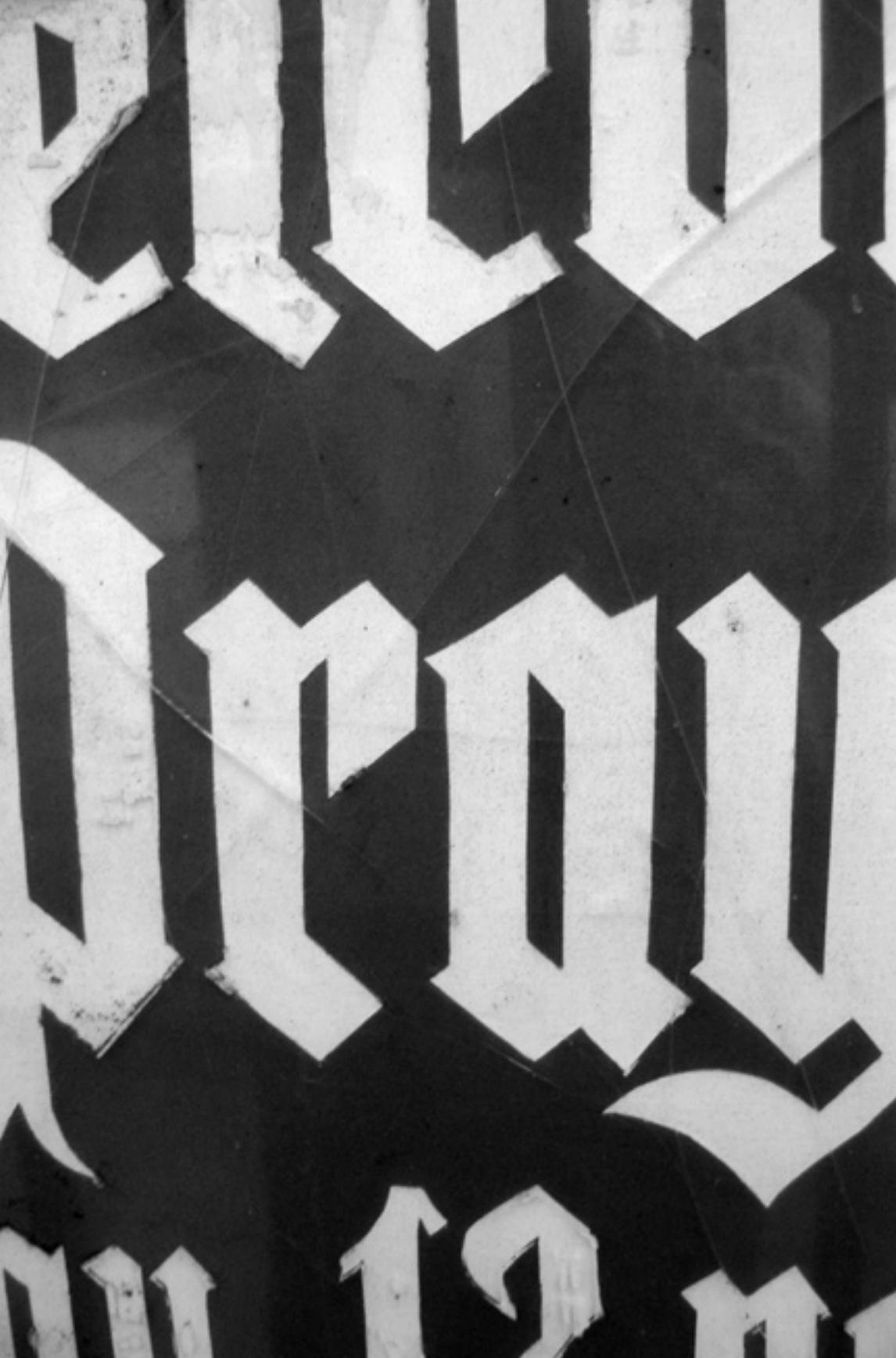
As I slowly stood on shaky legs, ready to unleash my hounds of hell, a nurse appeared and said, "Mr. Grundy, we have a room for you."

Over the last nine months, much to my surprise, a greater wisdom has been influencing my life. I have begun to see small details that evidence the connectedness and the eternity of all things.

I don't believe in doggy heaven but I do know that when my dog was lonely, a cat came to befriend him. I do know that, in my despondency, the cat gutted the little white mouse that kept me awake and presented it on my doorstep as a gift.

Now I'm ready for a quiet, good night's sleep.





MY YEAR IN PURGATORY

FOUR FLAT TIRES

I don't have the energy to lift the chalk in my hand and mark another day on the invisible cell wall. My Year in Purgatory is about to end, but I can summon no joy. The Man has turned this sunny optimist into a militant Nihilist with a terrorist's sensibility.

My refusal to take a Chemical Test at the suggestion of the Los Angeles Police Department had automatically revoked my driver's license for an entire year.

Hell is having no money in New York City, no escape from the Midwest or no driver's license in Los Angeles.

I am a native Southern Californian; if given the choice between having sex, breathing or driving a car, I'd take the highway. For me, every concept of freedom, happiness and well-being rides upon black rubber. Like per-

fume, splash a little motor oil behind your ear and this wolf will howl.

Without a car, my spirit cannot fly.

Obediently, I went through the many tortures of my punishment with the dignity of a Gentleman. I bore my burden with responsibility and great remorse. If the revocation of my driver's license had been for six months, my lesson would have been learned and a man rehabilitated. But the grinding hell continued and my remorse canker'd into indignant rage.

Now my angry red palette is bleeding muddy gray. Time has dulled my sharp anger. Like the captain of a schooner frozen in an Arctic flow, I can't tell if the snapping-crackling sound is the ice breaking apart to set me free, or if it's the sound of my hull crushing under the pressure. My bartender thinks it's the latter.

This ordeal has taken the oxygen from my bright light and the flame fights for survival. When the next person brightly quips, "Your year'll be over in no time!" I will gleefully kick their teeth in. I can summon the energy for that.

FERRIS BUELLER IS DEAD

When life throws lemons, I make a Tequila Sour. It has been one of my greatest talents, not only to make the best of a bad situation, but like all artists, to do it with effortless style. This time, I have failed. Miserably.

JEEVES IS DEAD

Faced with the destruction of my car and my driver's license, I was forced to quit my day job, which was located thirty-nine miles to the South. Public transportation was not a possibility for logistical and aesthetic reasons. The train and bus ride would add five to six hours of living hell to the commute and my sensibilities most surely would be assaulted.

Worst of all, it would devour my time to paint. Time is an artist's most precious asset.

My employer, not wanting to lose his brightest star, said that he would buy me a driver. I was shocked by this generosity, especially from a man who makes us inventory our paperclips at the end of the day and save our pencil shavings for kindling. Obviously, I had been taken off Double Secret Probation and was favored once again. I wasn't special, just economical. It's cheaper for him to buy a driver than to lose me.

Most people read the "Jeeves" stories with laughter; I read them with envy. The series of hilarious tales by P.G. Wodehouse involve the antics of a trust fund ne'er-do-well and his Christ-like butler Jeeves. Since I don't have a trust fund nor even the promise of one, I read of Jeeves with my jaw locked and my fists clenched. Long have I wanted a butler by my side, someone to haul my ass around, rescue me from unfortunate scrapes and untie the knots of my many romantic entanglements.

Now Jeeves would be mine. For free.

SHOPPING DOMESTICALLY

I immediately called a Beverly Hills domestic service called A Lovely Shade of Green Card and placed my order.

Chalmers, my new hire, was perfect. Well-educated in all aspects of criminal law, he was an expert French chef, held a gun permit and mixed a Martini as if he had invented them. Above all, he ironed my shirts beautifully.

Unfortunately, Chalmers did not last.

When I handed my boss the bill, the gin blossoms on his nose went from vermilion to purple. He pointed out rather loudly that Chalmers's hourly wage was eight times more than mine. Without opening the closed door, he removed me from his office. Through the gaping hole, my boss screamed that we would now be *splitting* the cost of a driver.

Chalmers, who had been waiting in the outer office, pulled me to my feet. With his little whiskbroom that always magically appeared, he brushed the wood chips and splinters from my jacket. I brushed the tears from my eyes. Chalmers had to go.

THE ECONOMICS OF HIRED HELP

I rarely have economic issues because this painter rarely has money. To afford the cost of a domestic meant that my search had to segue from Beverly Hills, where they are employed, to the impoverished part of town, where they live. Conveniently, this also happens to be the same neighborhood that I call home.

With due haste, I ran around the barrio with a staple gun. Colorful fliers with little tear-off phone numbers sprang up in laundromats, coffeehouses, taco stands and power poles.

I placed the phone next to my bed and waited for the cavalcade of calls. They did not come.

It was a surprise to me. Apparently, it's *impossible* to find someone who is well-educated in all aspects of criminal law, an expert French chef, holds a gun permit and mixes a Martini as if he had invented them for \$5.50 per hour.

I rewrote the job description: "Must have license. Hygiene a plus."

HOT WHEELS

Now that the hiring was under way, I had to contend with the issue of what the driver would be driving. The car salesman, a former art dealer, assured me that I had found a good deal on a new stretch limousine. It was a beaut. The king-sized trunk was so big I could stack my canvases vertically.

The next day my employer informed me that he had agreed to split the cost of the driver, *not* the car. He broke a crown when he mashed, "Get out!"

I didn't need to use the handle; I crawled through the hole in the door.

With the limo budget shot down, I lowered my standards to a Lincoln Town Car. It was black and quite

formal, appropriate to the lofty self-delusion that is my station in life.

Unfortunately, status would soon give way to practicality. It always pays to have friends in low places. A gallerist with a proficiency in criminal behavior took me aside and advised that inexpensive low key is better than flashy high profile when one is on probation.

Suddenly faced with a deluge of legal fees and no umbrella, I concurred. I needed to look for cheaper wheels.

Salvation came from a little old lady in Pasadena. An ancient, camouflage creme Buick Park Avenue was pristine, cheap and *mine*. I accessorized the bumper with a “What Would Jesus Do?” decal and added a D.A.R.E. sticker for balance. I was undercover. Sacrificing style, I became invisible with leather interior.

HELL ON WHEELS

No one remotely plausible had responded to my flier campaign. Maybe there's been a run on drivers in my area? Was I offering too little money? Hell, I wasn't asking to see a Green Card.

I was getting desperate.

I hired Pepito on the spot, without a thought. He spoke legible English and he wanted the job. In my rush to find someone after interviewing a parade of misfits, I forgot to ask if he could drive.

Later I learned there was a problem with peripheral vision that did not allow him to see minor details such as a semi-truck or a speeding moving van.

The constant near misses gave me such a cardiovascular workout that I no longer needed the gym. My right leg grew more muscular than the left from constantly pumping an imaginary brake pedal. I was sweating so much that my dry cleaning bill tripled.

I learned to accept my mortality.

At the Home of the Rolled Taco, he smashed into a concrete wall. At the Magic Gas Station, he backed into the side of a neighbor's car. The dents and craters on the Buick began to multiply. If there was a pothole, Pepito would find it.

Between the mindless chatter devoted to Christina Aguilera, a donkey-bray laugh and the near-death experiences, I found it best to close my eyes and feign sleep. This is very hard to do when your head is slamming against the window like a cork in a storm.

After four months, proud Pepito quit with indignation when he overheard a friend ask, "How's your house-boy?"

FREAKS ON WHEELS

It has become an ebb and flow of new faces.

PeeWee, Driver Number Two, was shell-shocked from an earlier accident and preferred the slow lane.

I thought I was trading up when I hired slacker Na-

oleon, who horrified my co-workers by stealing candy from the honor bar. Dude, not cool. This guy was so slack, he expected me to drive.

Blunted behind the wheel, dreadlocked Kush Kojo preferred two lanes to one.

Sweet Sue Lynn was a dairy fresh arrival from the Midwest. The redhead was a former stripper, which made her aces with my friends. She quit in order to follow her much discussed dream of becoming a pop star, music video director *and* Academy Award winning producer.

Stinky delivered every detail of his recovery from alcohol in a very dull and repetitive monotone. When I stopped paying attention, he would flip the radio to the all Metallica station. We fought for control of the dial.

Giggling PeeWee was rehired and kept on out of desperation. Blithely preferring his schedule to mine, Pee-Wee didn't have much to say, which pleased me greatly, but the heavily scented hand lotion turned my stomach. Now, any whiff of Calvin Klein triggers a queasy flashback. Frustration peaked with his talent for wandering off; I'd find the car in the parking lot but it took half an hour to find PeeWee.

A SLAVE TO THE ROAD

Not only an influence, these people dominate and control my life. I am as dependent upon them as a blind man relies on the eyes of his dog.

HELL HAS CONVENIENT, UNDERGROUND PARKING

They've beaten me. I can't take it anymore. I can't get out of bed. My rage against The Man and his machine has now decayed into utter resignation and complete resentment. With two long and dreary months to go, I don't think I can make it.

Already a drooling catatonic, I've had to hire Sportos Khan, Driver Number Thirteen, to write this essay for me.

DEAD END

With just two months to go, salvation may come from an unlikely place but I no longer have hope.

WWJD? What would Jeeves do?



CAPTAIN AHAB THE ARTIST

I love a good mystery-thriller. One of my favorite hobbies is Wild Life Forensics. It really beats the hell out of scrimshaw or model boat building.

You can call me Marlowe, or better yet, Nick Charles.

Wild Life Forensics is the practice of reassembling a jigsaw of clues and determining what you did the night before.

Who was I with? Where did I go? Where's the front bumper of my car? How did I get that bruise? Why is there blood on my fist? Who trailed lipstick from my collar to my shirttail? Why's my asshole sore?

Some cases can be easily solved with a phone call to a friend or the black and white of a police report. Others prove elusive, a conundrum of sketchy clues and hazy witnesses.

Unleash the Hounds of Baskerville! Another mystery is afoot!

Since the recent Solo Debut, I haven't been kissing babies and whistling at the sunny blue above. I've been behaving badly and acting out. There's been a weird obsession with Captain Ahab, but I don't know why.

The Wildlife Forensics Investigation has yielded the following results.

It seems to be the same story, night after night.

The house I rent has a deck and a long view. Posts stand like tall masts supporting a sail of corrugated roofing.

According to witnesses, it seems that I stand against the rail (or gunwale), my hands clasped behind my back, and stare sullenly at the far horizon. My body is generally pitched forward as if leaning into a gale, my legs splayed for high seas. I mutter silently between sips of grog from a pewter stein.

Later, as the North Star edges its smaller cousins across the sky, my stoicism erupts in youthful energy and swashbuckling derring-do. I climb to the highest rooftop crow's nest so that I can shake my fist closer at God.

"Thar she blows!" breaks the gloom and the deck becomes a beehive of activity. Harpoons, launched into the sea of a city below, take the form of brooms, bottles and boorish houseguests.

Oddly enough, the adventure ends precisely at 4:20AM, a time well noted by the neighbors. It isn't the usual cacophony of screaming laughter, overlit song and

breaking glass that wakes them; they are used to that. It was the unearthly growl that commanded, “Bring me the Great White Whale!”

Several witnesses say I sound just like Gregory Peck.

We were able to close “The Case of the Ahab Obsession” without firing a shot. It seems the odd behavior was caused by PASB (Post Art Show Blues), common among fine artists. It’s that funk that generally follows an art show, when high expectations collide with harsh reality.

I have never met an artist who did not want to make a living off the fruits of their artwork, whose sole responsibility was to create, at will, every day. It is a modest yet highly improbable goal; it is our Moby Dick.



SOUTH OF SURREAL, PART ONE

ADVICE MY FATHER NEVER TOLD ME

“Always drink liquor that they can smell on your breath. That way they won’t think you’re stupid.”

EARLY WARNING SIGN

When the supermarket cashier rings up your purchases and cheerfully remarks, “I hope you have a nice party!”

Confused and embarrassed, you mumble, “Thanks,” rather than correct her. There is no party. You’re just buying staples.

¿QUE COLOR?

If it is a thin blue line between order and anarchy, what is the color of the line between art and commerce?

FOUND

Outside Art LA in Santa Monica, a xeroxed flier was pasted to select lamp posts and electrical boxes. It read "Mormon Artist" and listed a phone number.

THE BOOK, STUPID, NOT THE MOVIE!

A swank cocktail party has once again ignited the friendly fire between literature and film. It seems that novelist Ian Fleming had concocted a martini for his hero James Bond that is very different from the drink recipe of the movies. Fleming didn't care if it was shaken or stirred. Is nothing sacred in Hollywood?!

I remember a swank drink-fest hosted by gallerist Kim Light in her suite at the Chateau Marmont. She served the authentic "James Bond" martini. It packed a greater punch than Odd Job's hat trick.

Despite a hefty room rate, the Chateau Marmont did not allow parties in their rooms. Our hostess had to create an elaborate ruse to get provisions and guests past the evil eye of management. Liquor, glasses, ice and caviar were packed in boxes and gift-wrapped to look like birthday presents. Our hostess also managed to smuggle in a bar, bartender and customized drink menu.

Everyone was given a different M.O. The studio executive and the CEO were given a false name and room number should they be detained and questioned. The

sunglass designer, the Butoh master and the urban novelist were given another. The jewelry designer said she was making a diamond delivery. The cinematographer said he was a gallery assistant and carted a fresh Kim Dingle just to look official. Fearing that I may crack under the pressure of a fierce interrogation, my little petunia and I played it safe and took the Service Elevator.

Only after a coupla “James Bonds” was I able to see straight enough to read the fine type on the cocktail menu. It explained the dancing on the table tops. These babies packed gin and vodka. Smart drinkers know never to mix your liquors, yet these “James Bonds” have proven to speed a party from 33 to 78 RPMs in a hurry.

The JAMES BOND

(Novel, not Film)

3 parts Bombay Sapphire Gin (*)

1 part Blue Ice Vodka (*)

Half part blonde vermouth

Half part dry vermouth

Drown a lemon peel

(*) My recommendation

ETIQUETTE

It’s an easy sin to commit, yet the consequences can be damaging. What do you do when your invitation reads “and guest” but you’re hanging with six?

When attending any hosted function, introduce

your guests to the ringleader when you arrive. It is the only way you can bring your uninvited friends to a party and get away with it.

Whether it is your dealer, your boss or a good friend, this little courtesy goes a long way.

BALANCE AND PERSPECTIVE

Jackson Pollack did his best work when he was sober.

POETRY

“There’s a tear in my beer;
‘Cause I’m crying for you, dear;
You are on my lonely mind;
Into these last nine beers;
I have shed a million tears;
You are on my lonely mind;
I’m gonna keep drinkin’ until I’m petrified;
And then maybe these tears will leave my eyes...”

(From “There’s A Tear In My Beer” by Hank Williams Sr., courtesy of Rightsong Music, Inc.)





WRECKING CREW

TORPEDOES AWAY



SOUTH OF SURREAL, PART TWO

LINGO

“mahi mahi” \ma-hee ma-hee\ *adj., vb.* -mahi mahi-'d, a: describes the fish-like flip-flopping one does when sleep is much desired yet remains frustratingly elusive; b: generally refers to a time period near dawn; c: “*I mahi mahi'd all night.*”

(Courtesy of Stu Gimlet.)

REAL LIFE SLAPSTICK

My pal Michael is an artist. He day-jobs as an instructor for a nonprofit wildlife group. He takes animals to schools and teaches the kids about conservation.

Recently, Michael stood before a junior high science class in South Central Los Angeles with a poodle-

sized opossum cuddled around his arm. He was explaining the nocturnal habits of this long snouted, half blind marsupial to an overcrowded classroom of fresh eager faces. Without provocation, the cute ball of gray fur dug into Michael's forearm with one of its fifty wolf-sized, razor sharp teeth. (Did you know that they bite like a sewing machine?)

The good students, who stood up front, were instantly covered with arterial spray. The teacher, who was counting the minutes to her next cigarette break, screamed, threw her magazine into the air and ran out of the room.

If pandemonium was king, chaos was queen.

The girls shrieked liked girls. The puberty-plagued boys screamed like girls. Stoned since the mid-morning break, the "C and D" students lingering in the back were the first to scatter and make a beeline to the door.

Everybody fanned out. Wide-eyed students backed themselves against the chalkboard and slowly edged their way toward the door. Others flew out the windows.

Anything to escape another quirk of nature.

Michael suddenly found himself standing alone, bleeding profusely, with an opossum dangling from his arm.

Not only did the children learn about nature, they also got a lesson in First Aid. Michael the lionheart went on to teach four more classes.

BLOOD-LETTING

Blood stained your clothing? Did you know that the enzymes in your saliva will eliminate your blood stains from an article of clothing? (Your enzymes will not work on my blood stain and vice versa.)

Take that to the dry cleaners.

FOUND

A bumper sticker: “Jesus Christ, he PAID the price.”

THE ARTIST’S EPILOGUE

Artists labor long and hard against great odds. Our only revenge is to make it all look easy.

IT MEANS SOMETHING TO SOMEONE

“...when surfwear meets snobwear...”

TOO MUCH FUN

There is nothing like that great feeling when everything swings your way. When the sun warms your side of the street. When the wallet is plump. When a hand pats your back. When friends become family. When all cylinders are sparking.

There is no sweeter high.



MIDWAY BLUES

My day job is an artist's dream. The hours are flex, the work leans to the creative and there is always a hopeful whiff of easy money to keep the nose closer to the grindstone. Unfortunately, at Happy Daze Promo, financial security and well-being is a laugh, for I must sing for my supper and this warbler has been off key.

With an emphasis in the film world, Happy Daze Promo makes products that promote your disposable income into the back pocket of Hollywood's wide-waisted pants. You see, it's cheaper to get folks to talk up a movie (word of mouth) than it is to advertise at them. When you see a good-looking gal wearing an Arctic Monkeys tee shirt, you might be inclined to buy the new album... *Now that's promotion!*

I work on commission and since the first of the year, my revenues have tied a white bandanna with a bold Red

Sun on its forehead and kamikaze'd into the deck of the rowboat that is my bank account.

I needed a big-action blockbuster; weepy chick flicks never pay. A friend at Tantamount Studios said that they were banking their summer on "May Day on Midway." I was granted an appointment as long as I got there within the next fifteen minutes.

I had little time to change my shirt, let alone re-search the film. The best part of Hollywood is the wing factor. Winging it is easy; everybody's doing it. The art of the wing is more revered than talent and family ties.

I couldn't fathom the blockbuster potential of "May Day on Midway." Not many people are flocking to see a carnival picture with a collectivist theme. What in the hell was this about? Lindsay Lohan as a blacklisted writer in the '50s? The tender story of a stripper and her May pole? A conservative carny who finds his liberal leanings?

Screaming through traffic, I started to doubt my wing-ability.

The conference table was surrounded by custom-tailored Italian suits. I cleared my throat and launched into my pitch. After several socialist-themed minutes, the confused looks and blank stares told me that I was headed in the wrong direction.

It seemed that 'May Day on Midway' was actually a sacred, big budget World War Two action pic about the big battle with the Japanese. The ensemble piece had a

cast of young lookers whose greatest acting talents lay in their strong jaws and capped teeth.

This was great news. It beat the hell out ‘Spring Song for Stalin’; I’d be rolling in the dough.

Quick on my feet, I rode the momentum. Ideas were firing on all cylinders. I suggested they re-title the picture “Abercrombie and Fitch Goes to War.” Surely the title change would bring in the youngsters and provide a natural clothing tie-in.

No one spoke up. The altimeter of the meeting dipped and went into a slow crash drive, but I kept flying and I kept pitching.

I suggested logo’d chopsticks. The idea was shot down as being racially insensitive to the Japanese. With that comment, I ditched my sushi idea. The red, white and blue condoms that read “Stick it to ‘Em!” did not inspire the patriotic fervor that I had hoped. When I pitched the Hello Kitty World War Two Action Doll, they revoked my gate pass to the studio lot.

Every idea that I presented went down in flames and so followed my income. Ironically, the only thing I can now afford to eat is steamed white rice.



CARL WANTS THE APPROVAL OF STRANGERS BY PURCHASING EXTRA LARGE PANTS

NANNY-NANNY-POO-POO

I'd been looking for the kid for two solid weeks. Actually, I felt like I had been chasing him for a lifetime. He had run away so many times that finding him had become a semi-permanent gig. In my line of work, repeat business is hard to come by. His parents paid well so I'm always available 24/7.

This time I was walking the mean streets of Los Angeles, looking for him, but instead, as usual, he found me.

I was working downtown LA on a hunch, crossing Seventh at Hope Street when the flying brick grazed my shoulder and exploded on the sidewalk in front of me. A week ago, the Newport-Inglewood Fault line, an artery of the San Andreas, had rattled everyone's eyeteeth. The ground was still cutting loose every ten minutes. Flying bricks were not unusual. The city was still shaking off

building parts like a wet dog. An umbrella wouldn't save you from the prevailing rain of mortar, glass and granite.

The flying brick had shredded the shoulder of my trench coat. Fresh blood indicated that the new suit underneath hadn't fared any better. It was too soon for my shoulder to hurt; shock is a lovely painkiller.

If that brick had been three inches to the northwest, my head would look like somebody's carnitas plate.

I looked up, afraid I'd see a gargoyle or a bare-breasted building ornament following the brick. Instead, I saw the kid standing on the forty-fourth floor ledge of a Beaux Arts building. It was hard to see that far up, but it looked like he was winding up with another brick and my head was his bulls-eye. I guess you could say the kid and I have always had an adversarial relationship.

Suddenly something was heading my way and gaining in volume. I danced left as green glass exploded where I had been standing. It was a Heineken forty-ouncer. I reminded myself to tell the kid it wasn't a good habit to drink so early in the day.

Like I said, we have a long relationship and this wasn't the first time the kid had tried to kill me. He goes AWOL, his handlers fret and I get hired to find him. The kid gets around. I've chased him on more than one continent and in countless cities. I don't get thanks; I get bruises. Or another brick aimed at my head.

My landlord is the real problem. He likes his rent on the first of every month. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't bother with the kid or any other notion. Responsibility,

three meals and a warm bed are funny things. They're powerful incentives.

But it's even more than that. My bartender says that if I don't catch the kid, my own well-being will die. If I don't find him, if I don't bring him in, nothing will work out.

There will be no future salvation.

Normally, I wouldn't choose to run up a flight of forty-four floors but the constant aftershocks had me a little willy about construction standards. That and a black-out had rendered the elevator unavailable.

Naturally, the stairwell door on the forty-fourth and the forty-fifth was blocked with more debris than I could heft so I climbed to the roof, figuring I could work my way down.

From a tall building, the Los Angeles horizon is pretty spectacular. The Pacific lies to the West and the South. Mountains border the East and in between, fires dot the suburban sprawl. Below me, downtown is half the metropolis it used to be. The 'tallest building on the West coast' is no longer. With most buildings pancake'd, the record is once again held by the iconic City Hall.

The funny thing about the quake is that Gehry's Disney Concert Hall has been realigned into a series of perfect right angles.

There he was, sitting on the ledge two floors below me, looking out over the smoldering cityscape. His little

legs were swinging lazily as if he had a sing-along song in his head. He was smoking a cigarette. Half of a six-pack sat beside him. He took a sip of beer and never took his eyes off the remixed landscape.

I yelled down to the kid. A tick of his head let me know that I had surprised him. He ignored me nonetheless. He just stared forward but his little legs had stopped swinging. He seemed lost. With an aura of melancholy, he was swimming in his own Sea of Eternal Sadness. His little slumped shoulders hung low, as if bearing the weight of too much insight.

I could sympathize with the little guy.

I shouted to him.

He ignored me again.

Then he stood and stretched, arms wide, as if he were shaking it off. I couldn't see all of his face but he suddenly looked happier, even mischievous. A look of invincibility. Of purpose. Like a man on top of his world.

I didn't feel the building tremble. Or maybe he slipped on a piece of loose concrete, but as he stretched, his foot went out from under him. Hands clawing air, he fell.

Instinctively, I dropped. I hit the ledge hard with my arm pointlessly extended. There's no way I could've reached him.

He rolled to the edge, the upper half of his body swinging over the abyss. He looked up at me, eyes panicked.

Mine were wider.

And then he got up.

Laughing. He pointed at me and cackled “Nanny-nanny-poo-poo” as he danced a jig and dusted himself off.

He was messin’ with me.

I raised myself on a bruised knee and looked for a way down. That little motherfucker.

He was on a narrow ledge, laughing big with overdrawn gestures. Knowing he had my eye, he put his fists on his hips and held a defiant look. The kid flipped me the bird and then stuck the extended finger into his cheek like Shirley Temple.

I don’t rile easily but I like a little more gratitude when I risk my neck.

I ran angry around the balustrade until I found a fire escape—hell, it was more like a flimsy ladder. I swung over it like some idiot action hero.

The screws, which secured the ladder to the building, were loose, just like everything else in my life. The ladder collapsed. My feet landed hard on the ledge below and a lucky grasp on the breast of Halliberta, Goddess of Commerce, kept me from falling. They sure don’t decorate a skyscraper like they used to.

The fire escape collapsed and fell loudly, forty-six floors to the street. Fortunately, the kid was safe on the other side of the building.

Taking swift but small side steps, I rounded the corner to the West face. There was the kid, a floor below, dancing the hula and singing to himself. It was an Arctic Monkeys song, the one I like about 'looking good on the dance floor' or something.

When he saw me, the kid promptly turned around, dropped his drawers and mooned me. This seemed to delight him immensely. As he pulled up his pants, he was laughing so hard that tears were streaming down the two fat cheeks of his freckled little face.

I could find no easy way to get to the floor below. There was nothing to use. I found a piece of industrial electrical cable, but it was not long enough.

I looked down. The kid was making a drawing on a brown paper bag. Engrossed in line work, he was shading the background of a cityscape. A large monster that looked like me loomed at the horizon. It was quite good actually.

If I couldn't get down to the kid, I'd have to pull him up to me. I took my belt, wrapped it around my ankle, and then secured the buckle to a sturdy drainpipe. This would give me a few more feet of dangle room. However audacious or stupid, I thought I could get to him.

I've got to bring him in. I must settle him down. Comfort him. Soothe his pain. Educate him. Tame his outbursts and redirect his powerful energy. I need to help

him age wisely. Let him mature. Then all will be well.

I inched over the edge. The forty-floor view shrank my testicles and knotted my stomach.

I scooted further over and made the drop.

The belt held. Thank God for American Made in China.

Now I was fully and freely hanging upside down. I extended my arm. If he got close enough, I would be able to grab his hand and pull him to safety.

But he stayed just out of reach. The kid had taken the paper bag and was blowing it up like a balloon.

“Give me your hand,” I said with gentle authority, “Give me your hand and we can go home.”

The kid stuck out his tongue and made a ‘Nyah-Nyah’ sound.

“C’mon. Let’s get outta here and get something to eat. Give me your hand.”

He approached on tiptoes, pretending to sneak up on me like a vaudeville comedian. Raising the bag, he clapped his hands. The brown paper balloon burst with a loud ‘bang’. I saw it coming but it scared me nonetheless. I must have twitched; I felt my ankle harness slip a quarter inch toward the street.

“Grab my hand,” I said.

He approached slowly and warily. Each step was deliberate as his eyes flickered between my helping hand

and the long street below. I had never felt such compassion. His baby blues seemed to plead with me for help.

Then, as quick as a sidewinder, he grabbed a hold of my index finger and pulled me along the ledge until he could pull no further.

And then he let go. The action sent me swinging across the western face of the forty-fourth floor. As I swung back, I made a lunge for him but missed.

He gave me a shove, which increased my momentum *and* my trajectory.

Hanging by one leg, I was now spinning and swinging uncontrollably. The kid was squealing with delight.

When I ricocheted back, he gave me another shove, like he was pushing a schoolyard swing.

You couldn't hear the approach, but when the Red Cross helicopter came up from below the ledge and around the corner of the building, the sound was like a physical explosion. The kid fell to his knees and covered his ears. The prop wash sent me swinging even further and spinning more wildly.

The loudspeaker from the rescue chopper echoed, "Do - You - Need - Assistance?"

I assumed that help would be an obvious gesture, since I was hanging from my ankle, swinging forty stories above street level.

The kid stood up and clapped delightedly.

The pilot leaned out and gave us a 'thumbs up.'

The chopper climbed to reveal a dangling rescue sled.

The reverb of the propeller shook the building and chips of concrete rained down upon us. I was spinning faster than ever.

The orange rescue sled inched closer. The kid crouched down as if he was diving into a swimming pool; his little toes curled over the building ledge like piggly-wiggles on a diving board.

When the sled was about six feet away, the kid took a flying leap. The pilot shouted as the kid caught the metal bar around the basket. It looked like he might have smashed his lip on the railing. He then managed to climb up and scramble into the sled.

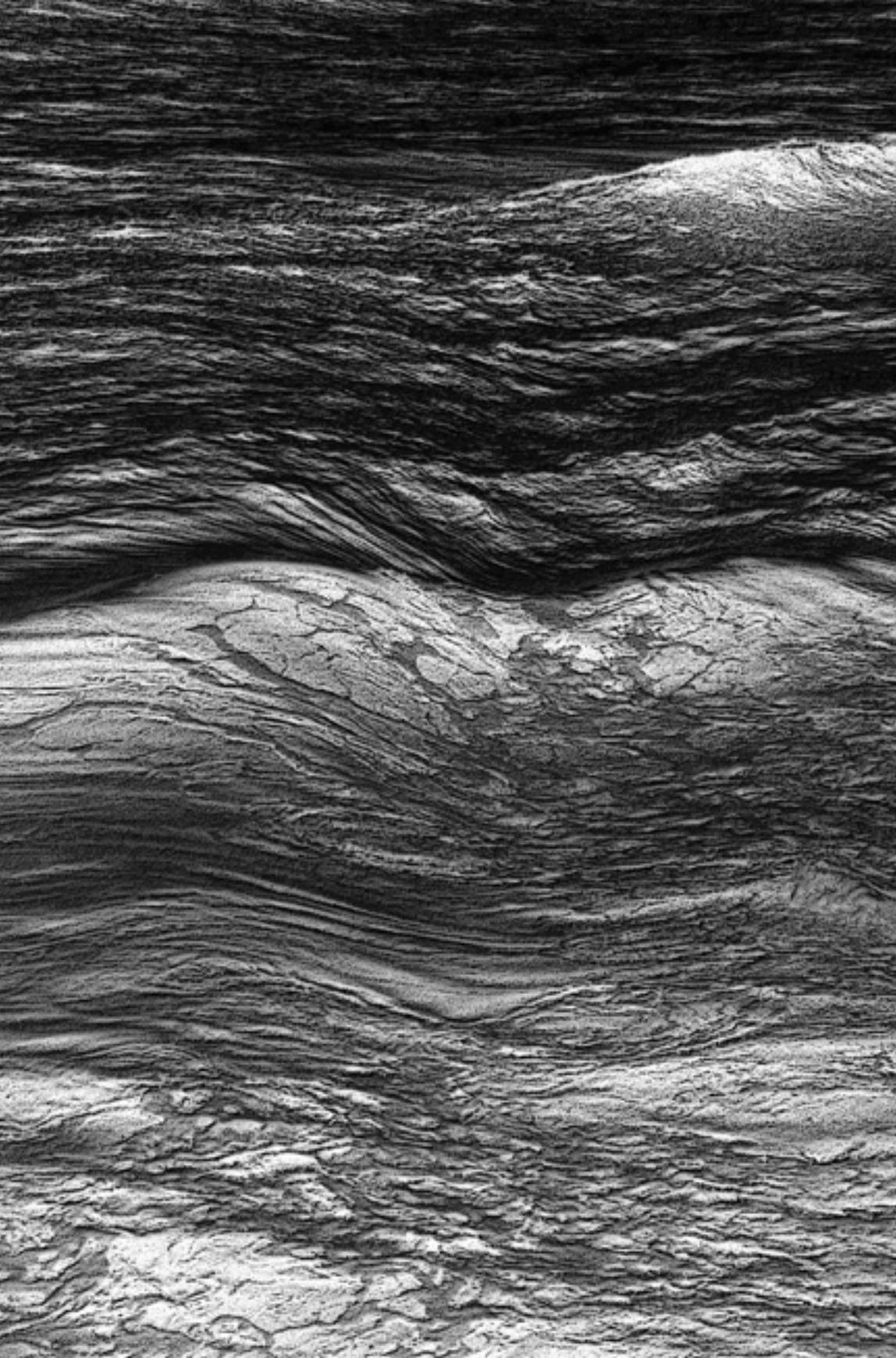
The crewman gave a ‘thumbs up’ and the pilot repeated the gesture to me.

I felt reassured. I gave him an upside-down ‘thumbs up.’

The whomp of the propeller grew louder and faster as the helicopter rose, then banked away into the sunset.

I was still hanging by my ankle, upside down, spinning.

As the Red Cross helicopter became a silhouette against the sunset, I could see my Inner Child sitting in the basket, cross-legged. He was waving at me. I couldn’t tell if he was waving goodbye or flipping me off.



LOOKING FOR MY RELIGION

My index finger recoils at the temperature of the rust colored bath water. It's way too hot. With staggered effort, suspended on wobbly arms, I ease my whole body into it anyway. There are only three pounds of Epsom salts in the tub and I wish there were thirty more.

Every screaming muscle in my body is hushed by the heat. Tendons, frozen into sharp knots, start to melt. Steam moistens the stitches on my forehead and relaxes the brittle skin. The "Lost in Translation" soundtrack plays on the Hi-Fi and eases me along. The pounding in my head and the noise in my body slow to the beat of the drip of the leaky faucet.

Heat heals.

Slowly, I find peace, without pain. If God were to reach down, right now, to lift me from my mortal coil, I would clasp that hand and graciously go.

I am looking for my religion. I don't have one.

These days, it seems like everybody does. Considering all the headlines... I hate to feel left out.

My dad says religion provides discipline and structure. My mom says it offers security, well being and home-made baked goods. A spouse-hunting friend says it's a great way to meet dates. I dunno. With the weekly tithing and emphasis on morality, it seems kind of expensive, financially and fun-wise.

I've been shopping around, trying to find a religion that fits. I'm not sure if I should buy one that wears like a comfy old sweater or one that steels like a finely tailored Kevlar vest.

There are so many to choose from.

The Catholics get high points for their refined sense of showmanship. I like incense, tapestry and Mel Gibson movies. Historically, the Popes have done more for the fine arts than anyone. That's worth something.

The Jews may have started out as only a few wandering tribes, but they sure got around. They're always in the news. I can't find another religion that has a better understanding of the human condition, of life-it's-own-self. It justifies existence. Unfortunately, their holiday menu turns my stomach. Pickled or flavorless, it's a deal killer.

Hinduism was never a consideration. A Hindu and I both agree that cows are sacred but we differ in the approach. I like mine medium-rare.

Buddhism is smart, soulful and quite relaxing. Un-

fortunately, I am destined to fail. In the summer months when ants invade my kitchen, I'll reach for a can of Raid.

Islam certainly is popular but I fear it demands too much time. Praying is good but five times a day seems like overkill. How can I find Mecca when I can't even find my own way home? Muslims seem like an excitable lot. The zealotry might be bad for my blood pressure.

The Protestant sects have a wholesome, Mid-American appeal but if I'm gonna take a Sunday nap, I'd rather do it at home on a sofa than a hardwood pew.

Wiccanism and Paganism have a primitive naturalness that appeals to me. Any kind of nudity is good. The preference for basic black can make a stylish wardrobe easy. Already I'm a fan of Marilyn Manson, Bauhaus and Souixie and The Banshees. There's just no way in Hell I'm gonna paint my nails.

Of course, the modern religions have yet to stand the test of time.

When the aliens land, I'll swing to Scientology. Mormon underwear may be rather restrictive for the libertine in me. And if I'm gonna go door-to-door to Witness for Jehovah, I'll also pitch it for Amway.

I was getting dizzy with all of the choices before me and no sign from above. Every religion has so many pros confounded by a daunting number of cons. Without a clear direction, I didn't know which to pick. You shouldn't get aggressive with the ethereal, so I decided to

wait for a sign.

Then I passed a shaggy homeless guy, standing on the street. He held a crude cardboard sign, which read, "It will find you."

This meant something. Surely, religious choice does not come from rational thought. Religion works best when it's forced upon you. The bearded stranger with the soulful eyes was right. *My* religion will find *me*.

I felt bad when I clipped him with the bumper of my car. I was late for an appointment, so I just kept going. But he made a very valid point; I had to let the religion find me.

Recently, I felt obligated to attend a family birthday party in my honor. When you don't show up at these things, it gives your parents time to reflect upon the Hell they hath borne; an appearance tends to assuage them. Besides, I was looking forward to seeing my sister. Rent was due and I needed to borrow a few bucks.

We were having a lovely and happy time. Then the ice cream cake melted fast.

My little nephew Archie could no longer contain himself. He ran from the room to retrieve my gift. With bright, excited eyes, he presented me with a tropical flower growing out of a hunk of black lava rock. Dancing on his tiny feet, he was so thrilled.

The gift made sense. It was thoughtful, for the day after next, I would be on a plane to Hawai'i for my first vacation in two years.

I did not realize it then, but little Archie had given me my religion.

Of course the child had no idea he had broken a very serious taboo. I quickly threw down the lava rock as if it were still molten. Suddenly I felt nauseous.

Not wanting to disappoint the toddler, I singsong'd a "Thank you Archie!" and pinched his pink cheek. If no one had been looking, I would have wrenched his cheek into a bright red raspberry. Then I would have slapped him upside the head. I don't care if he's six years old; he should have known better.

What was he *thinking*?! Don't they teach ancient Hawai'ian studies in grammar school anymore?

Long before Jesus got lost in the desert or Mohamed wrote his own script, Madame Pele was laughing it up and *holua* racing. As far as Gods go, Hawai'ian Pele is a lively one. She has a penchant for extreme sports. She loves hard. She gets jealous easily. She isn't mean or spiteful; you just shouldn't get in her way. When you do, the Goddess of Lava can be rather fiery and explosive.

One of the things she hates most is some infidel who takes lava rock off her Hawai'ian Island. It is taboo. I can't blame little Archie; he found it in a California supermarket.

Unfortunately, the lava rock was now in *my* possession.

My vacation wasn't planned; it was an emergency.

Two out of three psychiatrists agreed that I needed to get out of town fast. Stress was high and hope was nowhere to be found. Hawai'i always works in a pinch. It's cheap, exotic and a low priority terrorist target.

Within fifty minutes after setting foot on Hawai'ian soil, I was sailing down Kala'kaua Avenue on a motor-bike. Warm Tradewinds caressed my face. Clouds of the purest and most brilliant white dappled an endlessly blue sky. The sea beside me stretched forever in colors that my painter's palette could never capture. I was loving life once again and I was moving fast on two wheels.

The Goddess Pele must have sensed my appreciation for her world and felt the unbounding joy that surged in my heart. She also must have noted that I had arrived in the islands empty-handed.

It had slipped my silly mortal mind to return Archie's gift to its rightful place. This insensitivity to Pele must have made her blood boil. My inconsideration was blatant. My lack of respect was worthy of punishment.

So Pele slammed on the brakes of the SUV that I happened to be speeding behind.

Thus began a chain of events and a series of accidents from which I have yet to recover. The cantaloupe-sized contusion on my hip still blackens and blues. A femur, which had been diagnosed as 'broken,' was downgraded to 'Let's keep an eye on it.' Ten stitches grace my forehead. My nose is missing a few layers of skin and a

dozen freckles. My knee is a perpetual scab. My hands are bruised and my ribs ache with every breath I take. My lip is fat, bloody and un-kissable.

Pele must have sensed I was going to violate my probation. As I was recovering from little Archie's birthday present, Pele unleashed Phase Two of her fury. On the trip, she broke three teeth on three separate occasions, the assailant being a chicken salad, an omelet and asphalt.

Upon my return to the Mainland, I tried to lift the curse that Little Archie had bestowed upon me. I Fed Ex'd the lava rock back to the Hawai'ian Volcano National Park in Hilo. The Park Service receives dozens of similar bad luck packages every day.

My humble action has yet to appease Pele. I think she is withholding her forgiveness until the chunk of Hawai'ian asphalt, still embedded deep in my palm, makes its natural getaway.

Conviction is born with evidence. Should I see water turn to wine, I will become a Sunday Christian. If I see water turn to oak-aged tequila, call me devout. If the horn-blowing statue of Angel Moroni that stands atop a Mormon Temple starts to blow like Tommy Dorsey, I'll take three wives and join the club.

The beauty of a sunrise, the miracles of nature and the physical genius of the human body all point to a higher being, a creator of all things. On the other hand, science and Darwin make a pretty convincing argument

of their own.

For me, Madame Pele has evidenced near absolute proof that the Hawai'ian Gods are the true Gods. I can never be Hawai'ian but I sure can try.

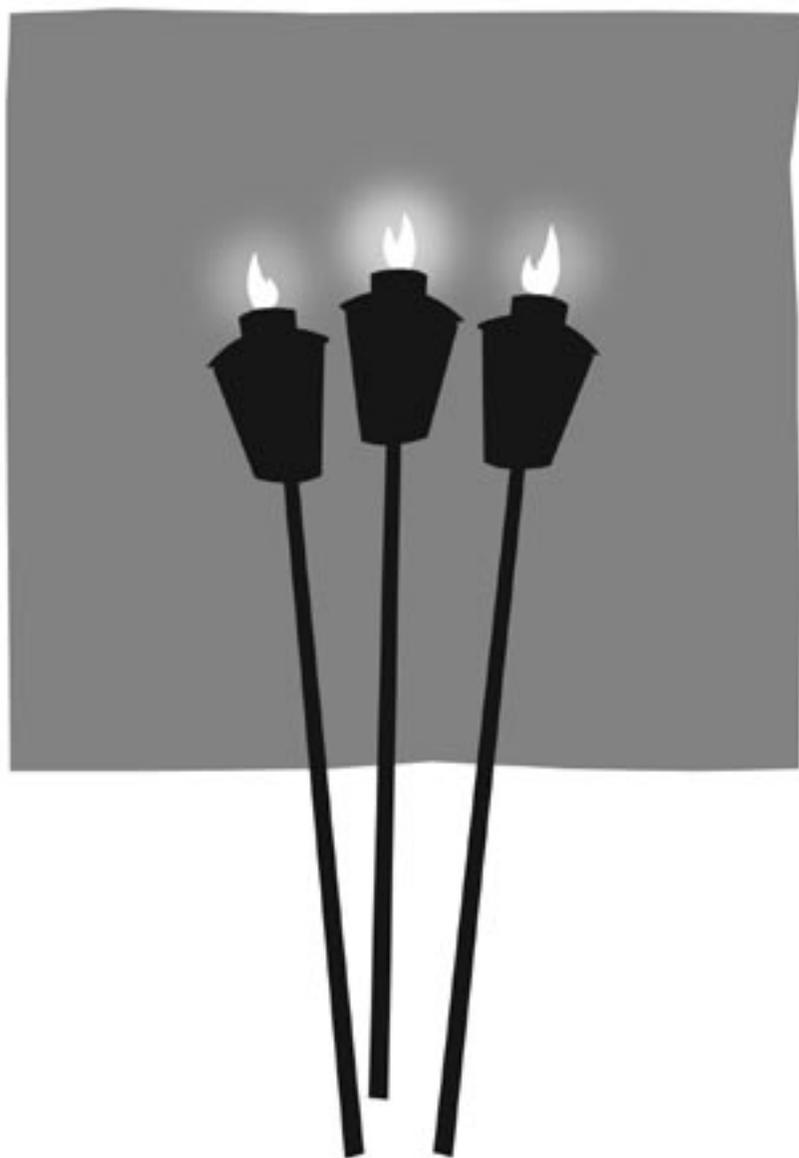
To privately *believe* in a higher power demands a conviction and a calling. To freely *practice* those beliefs is another story.

My landlord is threatening eviction unless I dismantle the *heiau* altar to Kane, Lono, Ku and Kanaloa. It has something to do with building permits and a notice from the City Inspector.

While digging a deep *imu* to bake a pig, a fence collapsed and now the neighbors are threatening legal action.

Last night, a small, aesthetically pleasing ritual for Pele was interrupted by the Fire Department when a small corner of the roof caught fire.

I may have found my religion, but it's gonna be Hell keeping it.





The... in... (The... of...)



'She...
Do he...
to riv...
Arcom...
place...
hers...
Doubt...
Pione...
with q...

BELLA LANGE

...the... of... (The... of...)

...the... of... (The... of...)

...the... of... (The... of...)

SOLID GOLD NAILS

DAMN, THERE REALLY IS NO REST UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD

I like to believe that life is a destination.

It's the only way I can further another step on the hard and dusty road. When the heat is grinding me down into the molten asphalt and the vultures are circling overhead, my mind escapes to the end of the highway, a cool blue Atlantis of my own design.

In Atlantis, you can rest on your laurels, where the jobs come to you, where you pick and choose your labors.

In an interview, Lauren Bacall burst that dream bubble quite quickly. The established actress confessed how hard she had to hustle for work. And how rare it was to get a decent gig. She chafed at the thought of all the

hand shakin' and phone callin' necessary to stay in the race.

In my opinion, Bacall had a great set of laurels to rest upon. It's surprising that she had to duke it out like the rest of us.

Maybe it *is* the journey after all. Maybe there is no Valhalla.

ARE THERE ENOUGH SEATBELTS?

It's June. Forget the Dads; think of the grads.

According to some estimates, there are 40,000 new graduates who are empowered with a Bachelors or a Masters degree in the Fine Arts. That means there are 80,000 disappointed parents wishing their kids had earned a useful degree.

Leaving the warm security blanket of university, they're all chomping at the bit, eager and enthusiastic to enter the glamorous art life. With the rosy optimism of youth, these grads believe they will step through the door of their unknown and waltz onto a plushy red carpet.

Watch your step. The art world is a slippery, frozen tundra. In Los Angeles, there are seven artists to every civilian. Supply far exceeds demand. Some states want to limit the birth rate of artists to one per family. There just isn't enough wall space.

All the art world needs is a scotch more room; so what'll give?

ART FOR ALMS

It's like the fast talkin' hustler who wants you to invest in a company that will import coal to Newcastle. Or a smarmy evangelist that targets welfare mothers for donations. The beach does not need any more sand. And the arts don't need another charity auction.

It's Spring! And spring heralds the season when this particular brand of idiocy is presented to the working artist with impassioned guile.

(After so many auctions, I have developed a hearty constitution, but when the amateurs try to sell me on the "good exposure for the artist" angle, the bile rises and I involuntarily gag. I guess I'm not that tough after all.)

It's a great way to raise dough. Colon cancer, jaundice eye, liver disease, paparazzi rights and every other cause is auctioning art. At such swank affairs, the self-congratulating Gottrocks get a tax deduction *and* a little something to hang on the wall. (The best conscience is a good conscience that thanks you back.)

Most importantly, it presents a fun and thoroughly delightful evening. *"Those artists are such interesting folks. They always liven up a party with their colorful clothes and bohemian banter. What fun. Give them a little liquor and every event is a guaranteed hoot."*

Charity art auctions are a great thing. And easy to organize. Artists are perpetually taking it in the shorts, so when we get hit for a donation, we almost always oblige. After you've been run over by a car so many times, it just

stops hurting after a while. That is to our nobility and to our shame.

Well, my nobility has worn as thin as the frayed silk of my ascot. Time to focus on the shame.

Before I entered a recent auction, a dealer came up to me and said that he admired my painting; he liked “the verticality of it.”

Wonderful. What a great compliment. I was honored by the attention and glad for the mention. I was not quite sure what he meant by “verticality” but he obviously had discovered something and liked it. What a nice feeling.

Later, when I came upon my painting, I understood what the dealer had meant. My horizontal canvas was hanging vertically.

As I re-hung my piece, the security guard freaked and radioed for reinforcements. It’s hard to take advantage of a complimentary cocktail when you’re wearing handcuffs.

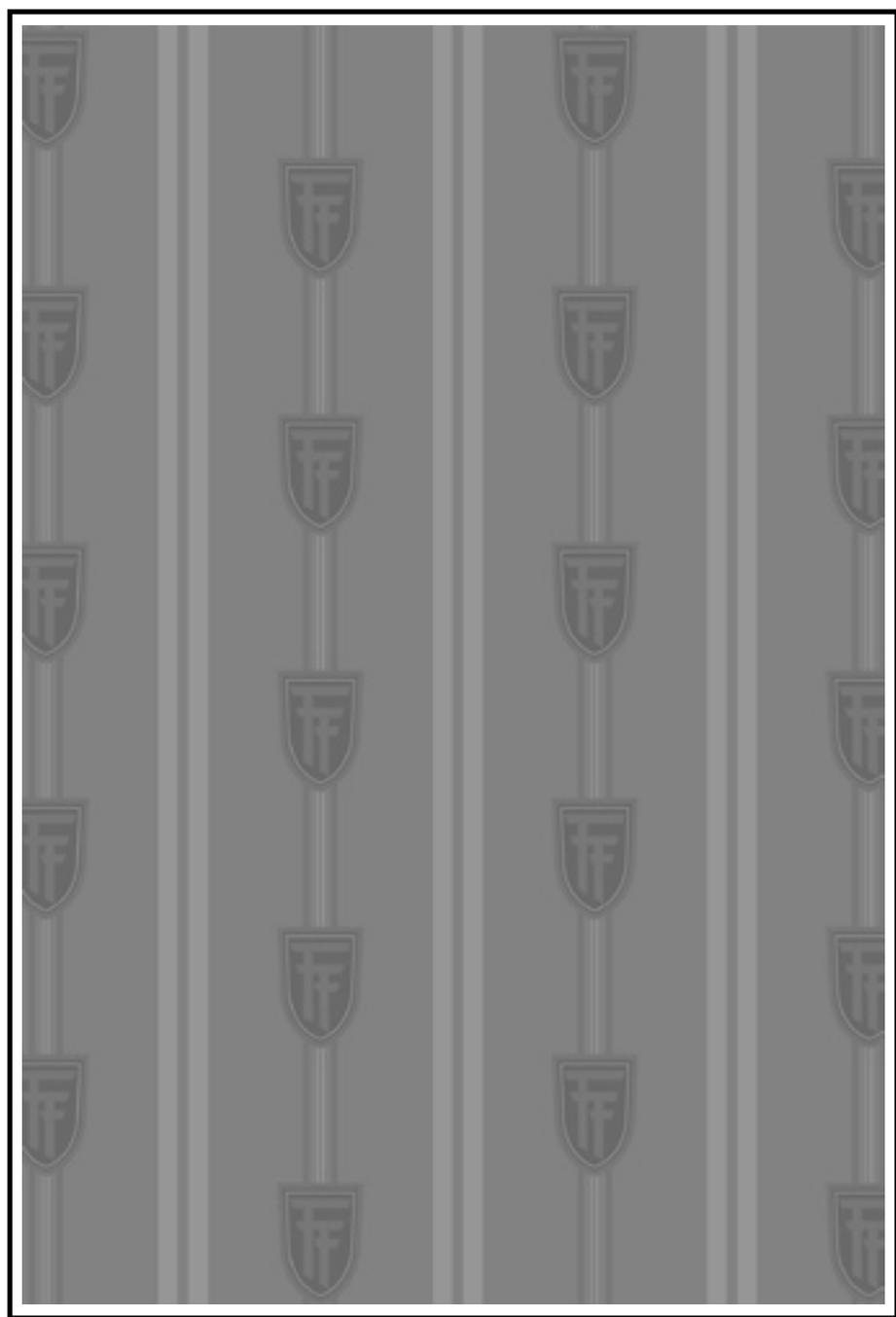
I have a talented friend who will no longer donate to any auction. Her work never sells. She is tired of dropping her piece off and then having to bear the indignity of picking it back up. That Walk of Shame is hard to do more than a dozen times; we’re not superhuman.

And let us not forget the collectors who scout the joint for a steal with which to round out their collections. A penny saved is a penny earned, but these “bargains”

rarely help the artist.

Charity art auctions are great. Artists get a free dinner, a coupla drink tickets, and their name in the program. They may even get a cut of the sale.

Charity art auctions are like a crucifixion with solid gold nails.



THE CHRISTMAS COTTAGE

I have never been treated so rudely in my life. I was in a meeting at Lionsgate Studio, sharing my creativity and insight with a top executive, only to be given the bum's rush by three security guards. If the humiliation of being dragged out of the office, down the hall and through the lobby wasn't enough, I was also thrown, literally tossed, onto the street.

The indignity began when I read that Lionsgate, a major Hollywood player, had bought the film rights to 'The Christmas Cottage.' Not only was opportunity knocking on my Dutch door, it was ringing the bell.

Hollywood, an insatiable beast, has run out of ideas. It is a lowly art form that is rising to its greatest level of incompetence. While most studios are producing re-remakes and re-re-remakes, Lionsgate proves to be an innovator.

'The Christmas Cottage' is a *painting* by Thomas Kinkade. The 'Painter of Light,' as he is affectionately known in America's shopping malls, has composed a warm-hearted tableau featuring a snow-covered cottage nestled in cozy woods. It's full of *snuggles*, but short on plot. I knew this could be the big Tinseltown break that I've been waiting for. I started to sketch out my Oscar acceptance speech.

This new development opens a Pandora's Box in the world of cinema. Why stop with a painting? There are many images and objects that can have a high concept. Sculpture, postcards, oatmeal and traffic signals could also be made into blockbuster entertainment.

I was not sure what Lionsgate had in mind. Why 'The Christmas Cottage'? Wouldn't Picasso's 'Guernica' make a better movie? How about the T&A of any 'Odalisque' by Matisse? Given the current trend for Christian entertainment, would not 'The Garden of Earthly Delights' by Bosch scare a heathen back to God?

Who was I to question the superior intellect and creativity of the Hollywood sensibility?

'The Christmas Cottage' needed a plot. I knew my ideas would wow 'em, but it's hard to get even a Prada shoe into Hollywood's door. Fortunately, a friend of a friend's friend knew a call girl who knew the drug dealer of a psychiatrist who was on friendly terms with Moshe Chen, a development executive. After many phone calls and a threat of extracurricular exposure, I was granted an

appointment.

I ironed my shirt, brushed my teeth and stopped drinking for several hours prior to the meeting. When I walked into the leather-walled suite of Mr. Chen, I was ready. He was sitting in a wingback throne and did not rise to greet me.

Maintaining an air of creative authority, I barreled into the office with my glad-hand outstretched. Unfortunately, I was too excited to notice the shoeshine boy who was working on Chen's brogues. I tripped over the lad and landed in the executive's lap. Moshe shoved me off of him and I sprawled into the shoeshine. Black polish smeared my white shirt like a Franz Kline painting.

I hate those awkward moments.

All you can do is smile wanly, nod and comment on the beautiful weather we have been having.

Once order had been restored, Chen cut to the chase. "Why are *you* here?"

"Well, I'm a painter and an arts writer, and..."

"I'm sorry for your troubles," he interrupted, "But why are you here?"

"I think I have some plot ideas for your Kinkade epic," I stammered. "I think I have some good concepts that..."

"Do you get paid for your ideas?" he challenged.

"Well, no..." I shrugged weakly. Then I fired back boldly, "But I've got matzo!"

"It's *chutzpa*."

“Oy.”

Moshe Chen buried his face in his hand and muttered, “Yeah. Oy.”

The only sound in the room came from the shoe-shine boy who was packing the tools of his trade. The executive looked at his watch with despair. It would be another five minutes before his secretary would buzz in and rescue him from the meeting with the facile excuse of an urgent call.

Resigned, Moshe eyed me through laced fingers and said, “OK. Wow me.”

Hollywood reveres enthusiasm. Passion for the project is far more valuable than the idea. Only (blind) fever produces film. If you want a greenlight, you better be prepared to lie on the train tracks.

I kind of crouched down, feigning a wrestling move. I clapped my hands to ‘up’ the tempo. “OK!” I began. “John Throttlegate, patriarch of the large and loving Throttlegate clan, dies of an apparent heart attack at the Thanksgiving dinner table...”

“It’s a *Christmas* Cottage!” thundered Chen.

“I know. I’m not there yet,” I replied. “The death of the old man, who didn’t leave a will, sets off an inter-family squabble to gain control of the Christmas cottage, a family vacation property which has appreciated considerably in the over-heated real estate market. This family drama...”

“No!” interrupted the executive.

“Uh, screwball comedy?”

“No!”

“Little Mary has polio. It’s a real tear-jerk—”

“No!” Chen kept one hand over his face and slapped his desk with the other. “No!”

I danced back, like a prizefighter. I was enthusiastic, *passionate*. “New idea!” I lowered my voice into a treble of impending evil, “Deep, deep in the dark woods, where—”

“No!”

I skipped to the side like a song and dance man. “New idea! Fresh from the Iraq invasion, ex-Navy Seal Bo Hardware, now an unrepentant alcoho—”

Moshe Chen shouted “No!” but it sounded more like a wail. I interpreted this to mean that he was starting to come around.

The shoeshine technician looked up and said, “What if Bo Hardware helps Lil’ Mary wit her polio and...”

I ignored the suggestion and turned to the executive. I had to give it my best shot. “OK! How about a teen sex comedy? We can re-title the picture ‘The Christmas *Frottage*.’”

Chen, who had placed his head on the table, sat up and said to me, “Do you really think that we would take any of your ideas for something as sweet and endearing as ‘The Christmas Cottage’? Good God man, where is your head at?”

“The lowest common denominator,” I replied.

That must have been the breaking point. Moshe punched a button on his telephone console and barked, "Get me security."

"Wait a minute!" I demanded, "You haven't heard the musical dance idea. It's..."

"Security!" he cried into the receiver.

"Whoa. Whoa. Whoa," I said, trying to save the moment. "I've got an oil painting I did, 24 inches by 36, that would make a *great* movie! The frame on it is incredible, very tasteful!"

Moshe was pushing the button repeatedly, "Security. Hello?" The phone was lighting up and beeping. "Hello? *Get me security.*"

I was persistent because persistent equals passion. "Mr. Chen, Moshe, my pal. Wait a minute. How about a watercolor? It would make a touching and vibrant TV mini-series -- Wait! Wait! A doodle! I've got a pen and ink on a bar napkin that could be a helluva sitcom!"

The shoeshine man, turning to me, said, "I'd like to see that!"

"Call the cops!" Chen was frantic. "Where in the *hell* is security!"

Just then, three uniformed guards burst into the room. The first through the door stumbled and fell to the floor. The other two tripped and landed on top of him. All three quickly popped upright onto their steel-toed boots.

Within seconds, they were on me.





FINE ART CACOPHANY

GREAT MOMENTS IN LOS ANGELES ART HISTORY

Los Angeles never has much of a winter and this night of January thirty-first, 1998, was a shock. The rains had cleaned the air and the asphalt. Smells were sharp and freshly pungent. Collars were pulled tight against the cold. The night sky was a clear and deep violet. In LA, you rarely see the stars, but tonight, you could see them all.

For the fortunate witnesses, this cold and starry evening was titanic.

On the desolate and abandoned 6100 block of Wilshire Boulevard, painters, writers, filmmakers and dancers began to congregate. A new and exciting art complex was opening.

Three much-loved and highly-regarded galleries

were moving into a warren of buildings, thereby creating a new art destination. Marc Foxx, Dan Bernier and ACME were the heroes that night. This move defined a new chapter in Los Angeles contemporary art history.

Each of the three galleries had earned a distinction of their own. Each had been lauded with critical praise. Each had a collector's following. The union and synergy of Marc Foxx, Dan Bernier and ACME put a spotlight on the area, their artists and their advocacy.

On that magical night in late January, one could feel the electricity. A wind from the north teased the fronds of the palm trees overhead like a calming lullaby.

The crowd was ageless and youthful. All were artists. There were very few collectors present. Every face that you passed in the knotted crowd shared a light, a sparkle behind the eye, a glint of awareness and keen intelligence.

Everyone felt it in their bones: This night would not be forgotten.

Today, prestigious 6150 Wilshire is an essential stop for major collectors and art lovers from around the world.

In the next chapter of "Great Moments in Los Angeles Art History," we will tell the tale of two crazy gallerists who turn a dumpy studio town into an arts mecca. On the night of September 4th 2003, Blum & Poe inaugurated their new gallery in Culver City

with a spectacular group show. It created a land grab. Today, Culver City sparkles with over 3,000 art galleries.

FOUND OBJECT: BUMPER STICKER

“New to this country does not have to be rude to this country.” *Baby, after waitin’ around for a green card, I wouldn’t expect too much outta anybody.*

EXCERPT FROM A SPEECH ENTITLED “GENU-FLECT: WHAT AMERICA CAN LEARN FROM THE CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS” PRESENTED TO THE LA OPTIMIST CLUB, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

“... One cannot think of the artist as a craftsman or as a producer of product. We are not an extension of your home furnishings department. We are not your decorator’s plaything. To really understand where the artist is coming from and where we belong, consider this. Categorize the artist with your minister, rabbi, favorite bartender or your psychiatrist. Artists are philosophers in many ways. We are the astronauts of our sociology...”

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED (OR BEEN REMINDED OF) RECENTLY

Good work does get noticed and is rewarded.

Unfortunately, that period of time between the good work and the reward crawls at a goddamn snail’s pace.

I NEARLY DROPPED MY DRINK

The situation always goes badly.

When my kissin' cousin Carrie, a New York painter, is asked what she does, she no longer replies, "artist." She just makes up something else, a profession that is easier to relate to.

In any new conversation, everyone invariably asks what one does. When you answer "painter" or "artist," more often than not, the conversation just dies. Rapport flees and credibility is shot, instantly. You are rendered useless in their world.

The same sentiment was expressed by artist Mike Kelley. At a lecture at MOCA, Kelley talked about artist Richard Prince and his dread of the question. Prince just shrugs and says he's a plumber.

My friend Alan Wayne, an abstract painter, was cornered at a recent Passover dinner. After the meal, the men had retired to the living room while the ladies cleaned up.

Over glasses of Slivovitz, a well-educated doctor and an intelligent accountant gave Alan the intellectual version of a back-alley beating. They just could not understand *why* he does *what* he does.

Compounding their confusion, Alan is a monochromatic painter.

Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting Karin Bacon, an events showman with Studio 54 on her resume. After a warm and enthusiastic conversation, I was asked the question.

I shuffled my feet and stared into my cocktail glass. I feared that my reply would be returned with glazed eyes and a hasty exit. I didn't want another friendship to implode.

Rather than the usual brush-off, Karin Bacon responded with glee. I found a person who likes artists, understands artists and even respects artists and their endeavors.

I was so surprised, I nearly dropped my drink.



THE PERFECT [HUMAN] STORM

I am a Libertine. I'd rather go to a Bacchanalia than to a Basilica. I am a lover, not a fighter. I'd rather dance than walk. I prefer indulgence to restraint. I am Pan.

This is neither a confession nor an apology.

It is a statement, like one might give to a vice detective, a headmaster or a Taliban mutawwa. It is a hard story to tell for I am still unsure how such a simple act, such as a kiss, could have created such utter and complete devastation. A vacation was ruined, lifelong friendships were severed and a tight knit of merrymakers has unraveled.

And I am to blame.

After a month of reflection, I believe the massacre at Villa Bestia Nera was a natural phenomenon. All of the elements were in place for a spark to ignite the Perfect (Human) Storm.

On a recent morning not so long ago, my eyes opened before dawn. The sky outside was still the darkest blue, stars had not yet begun to fade and the crickets still sang.

I woke up suddenly and excitedly because life that early morning was enchanted. After three nights in Rome, I found myself in Tuscany.

Villa Bestia Nera was to be my home for a week, along with a group of sixteen others, all close friends who had socialized weekly over a decade. Julie, the cruise director of the group, had organized the trip. We were going to celebrate her birthday at a thousand year-old Tuscan villa. The Villa Bestia Nera, with its classic stone tower and broad terraces, was once a way station for the Crusaders. This holiday week, we would be crusading for fun.

The day was about to dawn and I wanted to experience every second of it. I'd never seen the sun rise in Italy. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stay in bed.

Travel gives one a heady thrill of invincibility. Discovery and freedom breed high spirits. I was still lost in the spell of Roman nights under a wide full moon. Memories of the tall cowgirl from Marin or the curly haired Spaniard with the three-day stubble cockled my soul and warmed my heart.

I carried an old wooden chair from the kitchen and placed it facing East in the middle of the wide front yard of the Villa Bestia Nera.

The edge of the horizon began to pale, revealing

a ridgeline of far away mountaintops. Clouds suddenly flared in pink and orange while the stars melted away. Villas dotted the landscape and tall cypress trees were rendered in deep purple. Roosters began to herald the great arrival.

The sun rose over the hills and valleys of my Tuscany. With every degree of the sun's rise, the light and my world changed. Canyons would appear and then vanish. Colors transformed. Every second brought a new revelation. The most loving of gods was giving me a spectacular show.

I was in awe. When I closed my eyes, I could hear every sound of the world awakening. In my reverie, I could hear the movement of the earth and feel the revolution of the planets. I was humbled by the monumental grandeur and liberated by the sense of discovery that new light brings.

During an intermission, I entered the kitchen. The night before had been a wild one; I didn't expect to see a soul. So I was surprised to see anyone, let alone Chloris, at this early hour.

Chloris, who rarely rises before ten, is an old comrade, a libertine and a lover of beauty. Recently, she has been driving a rough road. It's been bumpy with a dying marriage and the unexpected passing of her mother.

Excitedly, I told her about the new world outside and all I had seen and felt over the last ninety minutes.

With glee, she accepted my invitation to view the second act.

Faster than you can correctly spell Bacchus, we agreed that a little libation with the Blood Orange juice would enhance our appreciation of the performance.

Outdoors, my friend and I shared many beauties. Hummingbirds, the size of a child's thumb, darted through the lavender. Orange-red poppies opened their petals. Nested in the eaves of the villa tower, the swallows loudly welcomed the new day. The females, snuggling their young in the roof tiles, whistled and twittered; the males flew like dancing acrobats. A beautifully iridescent scarab lumbered through the patchy grass. A falcon made lazy circles.

The day made a spectacular debut and we applauded.

As the temperature rose, we retreated to the cooler climate of the ping-pong room with its wide couches, arched ceilings and bad contemporary art.

There, I kissed Chloris in honor of the moment. It really wasn't kissing. We were makin' out, laughing like a coupla teens.

In this ugly world that we live in, there should be more of it. It's a lovely thing, as lovely as Life should be.

The thick oak and iron door thundered open. When my old friend Mercury came crashing into the room, our lips unlocked fast.

Mercury and I met in college and have been best friends ever since. Like the Roman god, he is cunning and wily in the arts of commerce. He doesn't have winged feet but he is light in the loafers. He is eloquent as all messengers should be.

Mercury found something horrific in the (fully clothed) tableaux upon which he had stumbled. Chloris and I stopped mackin' when Mercury let out a yelp. We sat up.

Without a word, Mercury turned and ran from the room.

Slowly, Chloris and I turned from the door and looked at each other. We decided this was an excellent time for a dip in the pool.

The quick change in location was motivated by fun as well as the slightest tinge of guilt. While our kiss had not broken any laws of morality or decency, nor bonds of friendship or matrimony, we knew its revelation could be uncomfortable to the hostess Julie, with whom I had once been in a deeply felt and long-termed relationship.

But the crime was minor, silly even. Besides, who'd find out? Mercury and I were the oldest of friends. Both being male, I had the utmost confidence in the Vow of Silence, a rule that is as old as humanity itself.

Men, especially men who are friends, do not rat each other out. It is the first law in the *Battle Between the Sexes*.

With no worries, the sun on high and a fresh pitcher of Blood Orange juice cocktails, Chloris and I ran to higher ground.

The swimming pool at Villa Bestia Nera is filled with salt water that feels like silk against the skin. The chaise lounges offer pillows, embroidered with fanciful designs, that position your head for the best possible view of the green valley and blue lake below. Lavender and Scotch Broom share their heady perfume. Wasp-like butterflies with bright orange spots on black wings work in the flowers and then land to rest on your tanned shoulder.

Chloris was first in the pool.

Not having my suit with me, I dropped trou and swam naked.

Some of our fellow travelers arrived and made their camp. Curly-haired Versace ditched her top for a thorough tan. Big Reeves tootled hello. His goatee made him look like a B actor in a Sixties gladiator epic and the chaise lounge creaked under his muscle. Kimiko perched herself under a white oak tree and started dialing her cell phone, continuing her futile quest for the cocaine she had FedEx'd from the States.

Chloris was drifting lazily on an inflatable and I was floating nearby.

There was not a care in the world. It was a beautiful day.

Julie marched up to the pool at a fast clip. Her jaw

was set and nostrils flared. With her hands on her hips, she eagle-eyed Chloris and me. I guess she saw all she needed to see. Shaking her head, Julie turned around and stormed down the hill.

Clearly, this was a place I did not want to go.

Heck, maybe she was just uncomfortable with nudity. Who was I to offend? A man of discretion, I wasn't swimming the backstroke or doing the splits. God didn't push me out of the womb wearing a pair of surfer's shorts. Had I been in rural Pennsylvania at an Amish spa, I would have behaved differently. This was Tuscany.

Or was the messenger to blame? Did Mercury spill the beans? Could he have betrayed the Vow of Silence?! He *has* been sullen and sulky lately... Nah.

The sun was warm on my shoulders. A soft breeze perfumed the air with lavender. I didn't want to think about anything else. My world was perfect and unspoiled.

Later, we were snoozing on soft mats, shaded under an arbor laced with wisteria.

I was oblivious to the dark clouds that were forming. A confluence of currents had built a wave of monstrous proportions that was about to crash down upon the Villa Bestia Nera.

Zephyrus, the god of the west wind, must have sent a chilly gust over Chloris, for she rose up on her elbows and asked, "Are we in trouble?"

Throughout the afternoon and evening, the bonhomie stayed buoyant but a dark undercurrent had begun to stain the smiles and mute the laughter. Conversations were whispered rather than spoken. Looks were averted. The humor became sarcastic and pointed. I had no desire to guess what the rumor mill was dishing up. I chose the bliss of ignorance.

The next day, the group dynamic began to lose focus and cohesion. Screws began to loosen.

A fine lunch was planned. Puck knew of a hidden locals-only hot spot. I was optimistic; I thought a happy group activity and a little wine might dull the daggers. Instead, the lunch just sharpened the blades.

Puck led the sixteen through Florence. We zig-zagged through piazzas, crowded with July tourists. It's hard to keep an eye on the leader when you're goose-necking ancient architecture.

Versace asked where the Duomo was. When I turned to answer, the raven-haired vixen had transformed into cigar-chompin' red neck with a fanny pack and a stetson.

With a church on every corner, Mary, a devout Catholic, was as high as a kite on spiritual ecstasy. When I turned back to her, she had vanished like the Holy Ghost. Suddenly I found myself next to Kimiko, who was on the phone, hoping to find ecstasy of another kind.

Panic set in.

Within three blocks, we'd all lost each other. Everyone realized too late that only Puck knew the location of

the restaurant.

After frantically searching the crowds, I ended up with morbid Miriam and loopy Lucinda. Instead of an authentic Tuscan feast, we got stuck with Pizza-in-a-Cup from a tourist joint. I couldn't help but notice that Lucinda's state of mind was increasingly fragile. Even though it was only the three of us, we sat at a table for ten; we needed more elbow room for Lucinda's many developing personalities. It's always nice to meet new people.

Back at the villa that night, the tension of the lunch disaster led to fevered accusations that some were trying to ditch the clan. Wild ideas and bizarre notions were contagious. Endearing personality quirks were becoming intolerable. Little conceits flared into annoyances.

"J'accuse!" formed on many lips, and I was the target of each pointed finger. A bull's-eye was painted onto my forehead.

The storm was gathering and building offshore.

With gossip and innuendo as the group's guiding light, I wasn't exactly sure what I was most guilty of. Was it nudity? A cocktail? A kiss? With Mercury behaving imperiously, I chose Door Number Three.

You always hurt the one you love; I took Julie aside and apologized for my rudeness and lack of discretion. (Actually, I should have apologized for *Mercury's* fucking lack of it.) Given the soured climate, I suggested that I vote myself off the island thereby removing the bad apple

that was poisoning the barrel. It would have honestly alleviated the pressure and given it a name.

She called me a coward and badly dramatic. (Frankly, I was quietly hoping to get the hell out of there. The heat was unbearable and I would have had more fun alone back in Rome where the wild ones roam.) The conversation ended when fury rendered her speechless.

The schedule of events kept grinding on. A trip to the Uffizi Gallery was diplomatically tense and a picnic at the Pitti Palace put ants in our pants. An exquisite tour of a private winery fell like flat champagne.

Groups were forming and distances widening. Mercury and I, like Cain and Abel or Romulus and Remus, could not even exchange a false pleasantry.

Julie, true to her sweet nature, was struggling to mask her hostility.

Ostensibly in search of the perfect scarf, Chloris kept wandering off alone. In truth, she was merely escaping the heat of a cold shoulder; the other girls were giving her a united snub. Chloris took it on the chin.

Like laughing too hard at a bad joke, we were trying to make it work.

The storm, which had been lingering out at sea while it generated its terror, hit the coast hard, grew in force and sped inland.

Everyone on the trip ran out of their glass houses and started throwing rocks.

On our last night in Tuscany, as I was busy grilling the evening meal, I swear I heard the melancholy vibrato of a flute. It scared the hell out of me.

Maybe it was Pan who haunted the villa. Throughout the Ages, his devilish looks have caused irrational fears in humans, hence the term *panic*.

Everyone seemed to be coping with the tension in their own way. Liquor was the only relief we had in common. Sitting at the long table, beneath the lanterns and the stars, people either conspired quietly or laughed too loudly.

In a crucial moment at the grill (the precipice between rare and medium-rare), Chip and Dale gleefully strong-armed me across the patio and into the kitchen. Snickering, they beat a hasty retreat.

In the kitchen, Chloris was hanging her head low and sobbing. Mercury hovered over her, fuming. Julie stood nearby with her arms crossed.

It appeared that Chloris had received a severe tounge-lashing. The scene looked like a brochure photo for a five star interrogation room. I was grateful for the large kitchen table between us. A bloodthirsty peanut gallery had formed outside the windows.

Julie pointed a finger at me. “You’re out of control!”

Before she could continue, Mercury lit into me with the fury and righteousness of Torquemada. “*HOW DARE YOU ACT LIKE THIS AT YOUR AGE! GROW UP! SET-*

TLE DOWN! STOP FUCKING AROUND!P”

His forefinger punched the air but it would have preferred my chest. His speech was bold, loud, shrill and short. Then he ran from the room.

I was slack-jawed.

Had I a chance to rebut, I would've said that I hope to act like this throughout my forties, sixties and eighties.

For the Last Supper, we gathered at the long candle-lit table. Hanging lanterns cast a soft glow. Bottles were uncorked and glasses refilled. Plates of antipasto, platters of grilled meats and bowls of gnocchi were passed from hand to hand. It was a feast fit for a Medici.

Then Big Reeves got whacked in the eye with a piece of flying pasta. I don't know why Chloris threw it. Lobbing for an apology, he was ricocheted with an insult. Reeves spiraled into despair.

After five days of unbearable foreshocks, the long rolling earthquake hit the Villa Bestia Nera and did not stop. Everyone was affected and no one was left standing. The turmoil was excruciating. We all hit the bottle harder than before.

Versace cornered me in the Grand Salon. Gesturing wildly with her wine glass, she screamed that if I had any balls—*any honor*—I would make a statement to the entire group.

Honor?! Versace was best remembered for fucking

her best friend's husband. I didn't know what kind of statement to make. I replied that I had apologized to the only one that I had wronged.

Chloris broke down sobbing and couldn't stop crying. The kitchen lashing had burst the dam of her grief. Overwhelmed, she was finally able to mourn the loss of her beloved mother and painful marriage.

Puck, who has *always* been off-color and sexually minded, was admonished for being off-color and sexually minded. Everyone was hitting below the belt. He sank into despair.

Drinking until she was reduced to a mumble, Lucinda started to scream and ran to her room. The mournful cry of Pan's flute made her see ghosts. An hour later, she emerged with red lipstick smeared across her face.

Mercury muscled Big Reeves into the billiards room and screamed at him for being absent and highly irresponsible. A finger in the face punctuated every point. The night before, Reeves broke protocol when he went nightclubbing in Florence. Mercury gave him hell and then stomped away.

Dumbfounded by the surprise attack, Reeves didn't know what had hit him. When he came to, he was seething with anger.

Continuing his rampage, Mercury trapped Puck in

a corner. He screamed at him for sullen behavior, poor hygiene, and missing a group rendezvous. The finger kept poking like a pneumatic drill.

Mercury stomped away.

Bloodied and enraged, Puck had only a wall to punch.

Miriam decided to leave her boyfriend, abort her baby and move to a kibbutz.

A soft-spoken man of great wit, Charlie was always ready with a smile and a laugh. The psychological violence of the vacation had caused him to retreat into himself. Two days ago he had stopped talking. Now he was physically disappearing.

Sweet Mary, the gentle loving soul, had never spoken a word of derision in her life. Now she curled her lip and swore like a sailor. She cut loose; no one was left unscathed.

Scandal mongers Chip and Dale enjoyed the Tuscan apocalypse immensely. They had even encouraged it. Now, with the Villa in flames, their devilish glee suddenly lost its laughter. They looked at each other with wide eyes and slowly backed out of the nearest door.

The group was smoldering before the trip began. Maybe the break up was inevitable. Maybe it was finally time for a storm in these particular lives. Maybe familiarity really does breed contempt.

Friendships are like cultures in a Petri dish. Add moisture, heat and let it cook. Sometimes it creates penicillin. Sometimes it creates the Atom Bomb.

They say you shouldn't travel with friends.

Needless to say, I only painted one small watercolor on the trip. I had brought plenty of supplies and good intentions. *Hell, this artist was goin' to Italy!* My poor output was not from a lack of inspiration. Frankly, I was afraid someone would take the sharp end of a brush and stab me in the neck.

When you travel that far and spend that kind of dough on a vacation, there is a great need to say, "I had a swell time."

The co-workers slap you on the back and ask, "How was Italia?!" "Lemme tell ya."

I don't bother to say that the vacation was like being trapped in the twisted metal of a burning car wreck while waiting for the Jaws of Life to arrive from another state.

The credit card bills have arrived and now it is time to pay for my swell time, literally and figuratively.

In the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, I spent some time in front of 'Primavera', a masterpiece by Sandro Botticelli. While the large painting speaks of many things, it is an allegory for spring, rebirth and renewal.

Lately, I think of it often.



SCREEN SAVER

Easter Sunday.

He is risen.

Trying to resurrect myself, but having a hard time waking up.

Do a Systems Check. Toes and fingers wiggle. Lungs operate. Limbs feel perfectly attached. So far so good. Error Reading on Hydration, but what's new?

Looks gray and foggy outside. Easter sunrise services never saw the main attraction.

Quick scan indicates I am home, alone and safe. It's always a relief to wake up in an uncompromising position.

ENTER > GO. I intend to leap out of bed and start the day running but the directive doesn't download. Right leg countermands the left and I fall down.

This action highlights a curiosity. Oddly, I am not in my usual sleeping attire. I'm wearing pants that are gathered around my ankles. Tuxedo shirt and jacket add to the mystery. Save query on Desktop to solve later.

I lie on the floor, overdressed. Memories of the recent past fall all over themselves as I reboot my brain. Thoughts scramble to find their Folders and Documents. Like a downloading image, notions begin to form, clarify and sharpen, but a server cannot be found. Desktop fills up fast.

POP UP MESSAGE > Tonight is the memorial for Billy Dwyer at Ed Moses'. I didn't know him well but liked his work a great deal. William Dwyer was a minimalist. Work I knew was well-crafted, delicate and precious. Funny work for a big barrel-chested guy.

People look like their dogs but artists never really look like their work.

DOG > DYING. Yeah, the heaviness that hangs in my heart. A storm on my Sea of Eternal Sadness. My dog is living his final days. Din, sweet Dobie, lives with my ex-wife. We are steeling for the worst and the inevitable. I have loved Din over thirteen years; feelings go deep. I want him to be comfortable. He's moving in with me.

I guess it's a good thing he isn't here right now; Would've landed on him when I fell out of bed...

I NO LONGER THINK > I DOWNLOAD. All I wanted was DSL but Technical Advisor in New Delhi

led me to upgrade everything. All is chaos. Money burns. Logging too many hours on hold for support. So weary, so beaten.

AGGRESSIVE AMERICANISM > OVERLY DESIGNED. NuComputer tries to think for me and finish my sentences. Take five steps back. Trying to understand new operating system, so I'm trying to think like it, talk like it.

DEATH > TAXES. Taxes due in four days.

DEATH > HELL > ELECTION YEAR.

DEATH > DAILY > OBITUARIES > WAR DEAD. Every day, I try to read obits of our fallen comrades. Least I can do.

Yesterday at lunch, had to whip out the shades indoors and cough-away a sob, reading soldier's last letter to seven year-old son. The stories. The lives. Serving so honorably with purest of intentions. I need to *believe* my leaders act accordingly.

ESCAPE > POP UP MENU > HAPPINESS. Song on new mix by DJ Krakatoa can halt all of world's aggressions. Infectious, toe-tappin' disco ditty "Ménage a Trois" (Alcazar) chimes, "Twice is nice but three is divine; What's yours is hers and hers is mine; If you're in the middle then just hold on tight." Doubt anyone with that notion in their head would ever blow up a train.

TRAIN > SPAIN. Bombing rattled me. I have loved ones in Madrid.

DEATH > EASTER > 'PASSION' BIG B.O.

MEL GIBSON > DEATH > NEW YORKER. Most poignant article read in last year was New Yorker piece about Mel Gibson. Told of a great personal struggle, crisis of conscience and philosophical battle deep within his soul. Dark place he found, scared the hell out of him.

I related; know it well: Where the search for meaning and value becomes desperate. When old answers prove hollow and false.

Grateful for Mel's candor; it made me realize I had turned a corner. Though I may be ensconced in a pitched battle with my demons, lost in the Labyrinth of Meaning, I realized the Fears would not consume me.

Mel found his God and made a movie. I found a secular, philosophically minimalist path with no plans for cinema.

DEATH > ENVELOPES. Helping friend Tara stuff invitations to a memorial. Her mother died quietly and unexpectedly, leaving many lives with sudden, empty void.

Vital, successful, beautiful, her mother was dancing on top of the world. Had a loving husband and tight, close family. (They even *liked* to hang out with each other.) New car. New house. Thriving business. Great health. At this time in her life, everything was well-placed and sunny.

Gone.

I pray I go like that. With a smile.

FAMILY > TIES THAT BIND > GROWTH. Nephew Archie gets first adult tooth. Godson Duke kissing first girlfriend. The tank-sized football hero gets a new nickname: *'The Cuddler'*.

ON THE MONITOR > Just noticing, when lying on the floor, the perspective is vertical, always up.

Just noticing, at eye level, the carpet is disgusting and needs to be vacuumed. Little synthetic fibers tickle my nose and are annoying the hell out of me every time I breathe. Jesus, wonder what I'm inhaling. I should get up—Why be hasty?

Suddenly, a golden snowflake drifts into view. A shiny little gold star. Odd. It catches the lamplight and flares as it saunters to the nylon-pile earth.

Then another one sails in, this time larger. Soon, it's joined by a sparkling companion. Flecks of gold are snowing in my bedroom. This does not strike me as unusual.

After all, maybe magic really *does* exist...

ERROR READING > RE-BOOT. No magic. Studio door is ajar; Gold escaping.

GOLD > STUDIO > REBIRTH AND RESSURECTION. Gotta get up. Got work to do. Have to restore public piece from 1997. It's a behemoth and deadline is

now. Using metal gilding and hidden text, series is about surface, philosophy and value. Over time, the bright, polished gold will patina and copper compounds will oxidize, slowly turning the work from dazzling hope to earthen beauty.

Now back to the dazzle.

In the studio, fans are blowing to speed drying time; it's a wind tunnel. Thousands of gold flakes are caught in the tornado and the room flares and dances with explosions of flying light.

Some Gods give; some take away. No matter how severe the damage, the power and force of Life cannot be destroyed. Death is inevitable and regrowth is innate. Old Man River just keeps on rolling along.

And I better roll off this carpet. Resurrection begins one nail at a time.



AYN RAND

THE FOUNTAINHEAD

FROM HE

OSCAR WILDE

THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

IT'S A MAN'S WORLD

KLINT

IMPER

THE GARDEN

SUNDAY

APRIL 15

TWO YEAR ANNIVERSARY BASH
THIS SUNDAY, MAY 27TH

OPEN
MIC
AT THE LITTLE
JOY

1477 SUNSET BLVD. ECHO PRK

FOOD, WORDS, MUSIC,
BALLOONS, DJS, BOOKS

IT SOUNDS LIKE THE OCEAN

My old college friend Stu Gimlet recently blew out his knee and had major microsurgery. His lifestyle has been devastated. With a cast on his right leg, he can no longer drink and drive. He can't chase girls. Hoping like a pogo stick, he can't bust a move on the dance floor. His whole life is ruined.

I tried to console the unlucky bastard. Over bong hits, I said, "Stu, it sounds like the ocean."

He nodded in agreement. Five minutes later he asked, "What sounds like the ocean?"

"Your knee," I answered. "Your knee sounds like the ocean."

Stu smiled and gave me a thumbs up.

Ten minutes later, Stu asked, "What ocean?"

"The ocean of choice," I replied. "Do you remember Salty Sally?"

Our old pal Sally fell madly in love with a house and wanted me to see it. The place was great. It was big, beautiful, and had its own on-ramp. It was located on the Hollywood Freeway. You had to scream to be heard. I asked her how she could possibly live with the roar. Sally shrugged her shoulders and replied, "It sounds just like the ocean."

Bad things happen to good people. Fortuna, the Goddess of Chance, teaches us that the pendulum always swings. Sometimes we ride it high and sometimes we ride it low. When misfortunate clocks us in the head, the only thing you can do is close your eyes, inhale deeply, and listen to the gentle roar of the waves.

No matter how bad it gets, life gives us a choice of perspective. You can choose a traffic jam or the sound of the sea.





SOD-BUSTERS, TRUE LOVE AND ARTS ACTIVISM

LINGO

“sod-buster” \ n : l : a derogatory term for one who will not find a value in art; 2 : a condescending term for one who does not find a value in art; 3 : an charitable term for one who cannot comprehend any value in art; 4: “*Only a sod-buster would touch a painting.*”

(Courtesy of abstract painter Alan Wayne, Los Angeles, California)

BRING ON THE NEW YEAR!

The failure rate of a New Years resolution is extremely high. Often the goals are too far-reaching, not sincere or just damn impractical.

Yet the Holiday is earmarked for renewal. *Change is good.*

When a New Year is in its infancy, there is no better way to honor it than to mimic it. Take your lead from hard-livin' Father Time. The old fart ends each year with a death rattle and, upon the stroke of midnight, resurrects himself into a kicking, cooing babe. Now, you can too!

January is a substance free month. No excessive behaviors here. Renewal brings balance and becomes a fresh test of character. A rehab respite is a kind way to say thanks to our minds and bodies for all of the hard work and overtime of the previous year.

(There has been some discussion to shift this effort to February. While a shorter month offers ease and convenience, it lacks poetry and symbolism.)

Conversely, for those of you who spend most of the year in the gym, I recommend that January be a month of wanton debauchery. Substitute a nightclub for the health spa and a cocktail for the wheat grass juice.

If you come home before sunrise, then you are not working hard enough.

Change is good. Pick your poison.

EARLY WARNING SIGN

When the soundtrack to your life is composed by Portishead.

TRUE LOVE

Every year Los Angelenos Jeff P. and his wife Susan choose to observe their wedding anniversary in a very special way. They honor it with art. And by doing so, they celebrate their love, passion and strength of union.

The act of buying art mimics the vagaries of a relationship. Each year, Jeff and Susan make a series of dates to visit their favorite galleries and explore several new ones. Over candle-lit dinners, they discuss and argue their favorites. The couple find their commonality when they select a piece.

The art becomes their anniversary gift to each other, a symbol of the physical, emotional and the romantic.

Art is the milestone. I can think of no greater achievement than to fill a house with anniversary art where over the years one can look at each piece and remember the era and the love that it represents.

YOU CAN BE AN ARTS ACTIVIST—KILL THE MESSENGER!

An urban myth is entertaining; unfortunately the notion is often perceived as fact. I have been told the following sordid tale several times over the years and just last week I was introduced to a contemporary version. It is always told in the same manner.

The story:

“My friend, who is a lawyer, was recently in New York on business. With some time to kill, he visits the studio of an old school chum who is now a famous artist. As they are about to leave for lunch, the artist says, ‘Hang on a sec, wanna see me make twenty grand?’

The attorney nods gleefully. The artist takes a can of paint and throws it across the canvas.

“There,” said the artist, “I just made twenty grand. Let’s eat.”

The story always follows with a derogatory comment about the arts.

Such stories defile the integrity of the heroic fine artist. It provides fuel for the sod-busters. It is the wrong education from which others will form an opinion and scandalize.

There *is* such a thing as bad publicity. Should anyone ever tell you such a tale, kill the messenger.



GAMBINO
NO SE PERMITE APOSTAR

NO LAST POCKET
NO JUGAR A LA ULTIMA

NO VOOO OOO



BLOOD [NOT SO] SIMPLE

I have never felt like a fifteen year-old girl who is pregnant, confused and has nowhere to turn. Not until recently.

I needed blood. For an artwork, I needed blood to soak into a linen handkerchief.

Some suggested cow's blood or pig's blood or whatever you can find in the carniceria down the street. I wanted human blood in case there was a difference in coagulation.

And naturally, it had to be my blood.

I just wasn't sure how to get it out of the wrapper.

The hyper-elegant piece was to be the crown jewel of my solo show 'Fortuna' at Sala Diaz in San Antonio. In one simple wry work, I wanted to communicate the

horror of all the lives that have been lost in the name of religion. The piece was titled “Blood Spilled in the Name of Fortuna (Lotus Bar, June 2006).” I liked the idea of equating a religious war to a bar fight.

To accomplish this, all I needed was a little blood.

Quite handy with tools, I am generally always bleeding. Unfortunately, I’m never bleeding enough to fill a small Tupperware.

I could always stab around until I got enough going, but how do you stop it? What if I hit an artery? How do I keep it fresh? There were just too many variables to home bloodletting. I had to look outside.

Believing blood removal to be rather simple, I called my doctor’s lab and said I wanted to swing by for a couple test tubes. They told me this was illegal and that they could not accommodate my wishes.

I explained that the blood was for an art show. (In my mind, there is no greater joy; doors should spring open.)

Of course, that’s when it got ugly.

“Are you going to throw it?” the nurse asked.

“No!” I replied indignantly.

“Well, what if you threw it? We’d be liable,” said the nurse.

“Well, I’m not throwing it.” I said, “Besides, what’s wrong with my blood? It’s my blood. I can do whatever I want with it.”

“Well, we’re not taking it outta ya... Understand?”

Realizing this situation could be cleared up with a simple call, I phoned my doctor. I don’t see him very often but he is my doctor. We have that friendly patter of uneasy confidence and forced bonhomie. I would never dare press him for a prescription of Quaaludes, but I felt I could ask for a little blood removal on the QT.

He replied, “What if you throw it?”

Yes, I understand now. That’s when I started to feel like a fifteen year old girl, pregnant, alone, ditched and with nowhere to turn... A dark alley. A nurse in a greasy vest. A gin-soaked doctor. A rusty coat hanger. I was alone. The deadline had me scared.

I entertained the do-it-yourself concept once again. What do I use? An exacto blade? A chain saw? And what if I found out I liked it? I really don’t have the time or the energy right now to discover a fetish or fall into a new obsession. Why open a Pandora’s box?

I asked several friends for help. “Will you bleed me?” Everyone answered, “No!” When a new acquaintance answered “Yes!” a little too quickly and salaciously, I said “No.”

I put the question out to Craig’s List on the internet for any ideas. All I got was sympathy or disgust. Several people suggested pig’s blood, but a pig lacks a certain dignity, which the piece most definitely required.

In this land of the free, blood is like Social Security. You have it but you just can't get to it. Our government wants our blood to stay where it's supposed to.

My only option was the underground. Scoring drugs is easy but bloodletting is not. I thought a heroin addict would know his way around a needle.

I was just about to head to the LA River when my friend Lucy saved me. Through a friend of a friend's friend, she found a registered nurse, a supporter of the arts, who might be persuaded to bend her Hippocratic Oath and perform the illegal act.

I really didn't see the problem with it. Sure, if I were trying to extract *your* blood, we'd have an issue. But I was merely trying to get at my *own*. Second, blood is edgy all by itself. When you add 'artist' to 'blood' you get questions like "Are you gonna throw it?"

That was the first thing the renegade nurse asked me. "No," I replied, "But I'm starting to think about it."

Tawny, the rebel nurse, and I got off to a slow start. First, her phone machine answered, "Mutt Rescue. You ditching, dumping or donating?" This threw me off for several days since she didn't return my repeated calls; I thought I had a wrong number and a dead end.

I started to panic about my deadline. This woman was my last resort. The show was opening soon and much work had to be done. I had to have her help; there was no one to turn to. I needed her bloodletting bad.

Second, as an artist, I have a hard time knowing when to shut up. Every time an artist talks about their own work, my eyes glaze over. Suddenly, in mid-monologue, I realized I was doing it to her! As I was excitedly explaining what the work was about, I could sense that I was losing her. Usually, folks just meander away with the vague excuse of refreshing a full drink. But this was no cocktail party; we were on the phone.

Brassy Tawny interrupted my convolution and asked, “So, are you gonna throw it?”

In brief, Tawny agreed to help and we became pals. The red head stuck her neck out for me. We’ve now shared a few funny, memorable moments and even a bonfire. It doesn’t get any better than that.

If you worship Luck as I do, you know that Fortuna gives us the good and the bad. As Luck would have it, the piece, the crown jewel of my show, was preciously framed and completed on time. I couldn’t have been happier.

That joy ended when the bloody piece was stolen or inconceivably misplaced. Either way, I’ll never know. All I know is that it never made it to the show in Texas. It has vanished.

No worries. All things are best left to Fortuna.



PROFIT AND LOSS

I want to profit from a friend's death.

Young Ian Hartman just lost a lengthy battle with an inoperable brain tumor and I want to learn from his courage and attitude. A long, hard year after his first seizure, I asked him if his perspective on life had changed.

“Do you see life differently? Do you appreciate the small things? Is every minute more precious?”

He thought about it and then replied, “No. You still have to do the dishes.”

That was not the happy Hallmark answer I was hoping for, but it was meaningful.

Immediately after the tumor was discovered, Ian married his girlfriend Louise. They began a journey that embraced life.

I am a little confused by that. How can one maintain

such a pure, even breezy attitude when Death is forever staring you down?

Sure, Death is glancing at all of us, but he was glaring at Ian.

The Hartmans did not ignore it; rather they made a choice. I guess it was a matter of profit and loss. On the ledger sheet, the tumor was a big liability in red ink. They had to balance that against something more substantial. They had to generate revenue and fill the opposite column with assets. They made a choice in attitude and perspective.

It served them well. Their life together was incredibly rich.

How can we, those with lesser considerations, apply such a choice in our own lives?

I don't know. Maybe you need the constant reminder of the Great Inevitability in order to appreciate what we have.

Seems rather morbid. Next time I am grouching about the drudgery of it all, I should remind myself that the other option is death. Anything is better than nothingness. That's the bottom line.

You would think that Ian and Louise would have been bruised by the Great Inevitability, but they weren't. They lived very well with the bottom line.

I do not know the secret of their success but there may be a clue in a quote of Ian's featured at his memorial, "Be aware of wonder and take a nap every afternoon."

Wake me gently in an hour.



Fortunato



LAUGHTER

OXYGENATES YOUR SOUL

CHEEKY

LAUGH RIOT

Just last weekend, Friday night, I was at the Skylight Bookstore in East Hollywood, lollygagging, killing time before the movie started next door. Meandering. Browsing. There was so much to look at. All of it made me happy. My sweet soul was singing. Life was good.

The *New Yorker* logo caught my eye. It was a big book. I like the *New Yorker* magazine. It's art-friendly. I have a subscription.

The book was thick, a collection titled 'The New Yorker Book of Art Cartoons.' I like cartoons. I leisurely thumbed through several pages, looking to laugh. I like to laugh.

Suddenly, I didn't feel very well, as if my stomach

had filled with cement. I began slapping through the pages rather than turning them. My eyes darting across each. Panic rising.

An icy, cold hand grabbed my heart and yanked it from my chest. These cartoons aren't funny! They are *making fun* of artists. Humiliating people like me!

What felt like a lion's roar tearing through my throat sounded more like a distressed falsetto. Had the agony and torment not been so great, I'd have been embarrassed. People were looking.

Crazed, I was! Senseless. Uncontrollable. The blasphemy! The *New Yorker*!

Like Charlton Heston and his Ten Commandments, I raised the book above my head, so as to smite it down mightily upon the Bargain Books table.

But the heavy tome caught me off balance and I fell backward, hard against a freestanding bookcase of Women's Literature.

I heard the sound of snapping wood and the bookcase fell, smashing into another.

As I ran from the store, with the 'Book Of Art Cartoons' still held above my head, I could hear the synchronized explosions of each bookcase colliding into the next, like dominoes in swift succession. Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! ...BAM!

Later, the TV news reported there were no injuries except for a couple buried under the Human Sexuality section.

Outside the bookstore, a large crowd had gathered, waiting to buy tickets to the triple feature. The neon marquee promised ‘Basquiat,’ ‘Modigliani’ and ‘Pollock.’

Wild-eyed, red-eyed and yelling, I burst from the store. The masses parted. A woman screamed. All eyes met mine.

I looked up at the heavens, beyond the thick book still held high above my head, and I howled with all of the pain that was searing my soul.

A hand touched my chest. Ink-stained fingers smoothed my shirt, wrinkled with sweat. The gentle caress belonged to Laura, a printmaker I know. Her sweet caring face was angled up at mine. Those deep water eyes were filled with compassion. So clear. So tender. Of any artist I know, she is one of the purest. One of the most devoted. ONE OF THE MOST—Fire and blood rushed to my head. ART CARTOONS! The blasphemy! *The indignity!* I screamed. I roared.

Like a Grizzly mauling a camper, I began to tear the glossy pages from the weak spine of the mirthless cartoon book. The pages flew skyward. Curious moviegoers leapt at the line art obscenities. As each cartoon was digested, another soul was blackened.

Exclamations rose throughout the fevered crowd.

“My God!”

“*That’s not funny!*”

“What’s this caption mean? ‘*It’s not her oeuvre!*’ I don’t get it.”

The crowd began to surge and spark. The din, a welter of discordant agony, flared into an irate cacophony. To the right, glass broke and a car alarm hollered.

Three guys, I recognized them as downtown Ab-Ex painters, wrenched a newspaper rack from its mooring. I stepped aside just in time as they heaved it through the bookstore window.

People started screaming, then chanting. The liquor store, two doors down, was emptied out by a bucket brigade passing cases of beer.

Half a dozen Conceptualists (Culver City hopefuls) had flipped a car onto its roof. They were trying to jam an uprooted ficus tree into the undercarriage.

A chorus of car alarms started to sound like the drone of locusts.

Whomever yelled “Fucking artists!” was answered by a flurry of fists.

As I turned to grab a friend, I got clipped on the forehead by a flying bottle. The guy who tossed it had a funny hat on his head. He might have been a DADA-ist or maybe a Muslim. The streetlights began to solarize and my knees started to buckle.

Just before I lost consciousness, I saw a palm tree go up in flames.

CONSCIOUSNESS REDUX

I really shouldn't feel as bad as I do for inciting the riot. Mullahs and their Muslims have a hard time with

cartoons as well. I mean, it's one thing to attack your God or your dog, but the *New Yorker* was humiliating my reason for living.

How personal can you get?

I thought my skin was a bit thicker. The Fine Arts does that to you. It tans our oh-so-sensitive hide. Indignity and blasphemy are as much a part of the Artist's Life as creating, producing and exhibiting.

The artwork that you consider to be unbelievably lame gets the front-page review. The museum show goes to the graphic artist who paints. It's your own mother who suggests you should try to sell work at the art faire in the park. The 'new idea' is always the one you dismissed long, long ago. It's the educated arts patron who smears a greasy finger across the surface of your painting. Ad nauseam.

Of course, insult is always added to injury. The art world, as a society, reacts very much like a sorority. When value and worth can be easily debated, the only armor is attitude. Understandably, it is hard to build a foundation on the uneven earth of subjectivity.

A movement tends to be less about the idea and more about the security in numbers. That's why you get the comrade who chats you up in the supermarket but gives the cold shoulder at an opening.

I know an established painter who wants nothing more than the esteem of his peers. He has it, but he will never realize it.

Whether inside art or out, we are forever the outsiders.

At the very moment when you devote your life to the Arts, a knife is run deep into your midsection. Even though you may learn how to live with the blade, the hilt remains forever exposed. This is our vulnerability; it is easy to twist.

An indignity is far more pungent than a compliment. By our nature, we have a tendency to slight the goodwill and deeply bury a criticism. Sadly, congratulations never fester; insult and insecurity do.

HOW CHEEKY CAN YOU GET?

How personal does it have to be? Jesus teaches us to 'turn the other cheek.' Then again, Jesus was the mad cat who busted up the check cashing service in the temple. When should we fight? When should we flee? When should we shrug it off, laugh and move on? What makes the difference?

I was recently charged but not convicted of a crime I didn't commit. Since there is no such thing as scot-free, I'm pissed at the resulting demands on my time. I'm angry. I want revenge. Just to think of it flushes my face and clenches my fist.

What will a counterattack do for me? Will revenge taste like a fine wine? Will I be justified? Sated?

Retaliation takes effort. To castigate is a direction

that doesn't go 'onward and upward.' If there is a karmic scoreboard, revenge won't win the game.

I could turn the other cheek, but that action demands that I accept the circumstance.

I don't know what I'm gonna do yet.

My Lord and savior, Fortuna the Roman Goddess of Chance, teaches us to "Look up. Look up and leave this world behind." I interpret this wisdom as a question of priority. I believe She is asking, "What is really important? What's it gonna get you?" And then there is the kicker, the last question she always demands, "Will it evolve the (human) species?"

I guess a caveman would seek an eye for an eye. A Universal Man (or Woman) would try to look beyond our human limitations and mimic a greater glory.

I believe that's what they call Grace.



LIVING IN WARTIME, PART TWO

SIZE TWELVE IN GALVANIZED

This is rather embarrassing to write about, so publicly, but I have little choice. It's hard to hide. You see, I stepped in a bucket.

And I can't get my foot out. Neither can the experts.

So I am learning to live with this bucket.

I thought I was doing the right thing, just walking along, on my sunny side of the street. When suddenly, I stepped into this pail I didn't see coming. A black leather, size eleven and a half, Lucchese cowboy boot is now stuck in a medium-sized galvanized bucket.

The emergency crew didn't want to cut it off for fear of damaging something. The doctors agreed that it needs X-rays and tests before they attempt a removal. It

has to do with angle and pressure.

My foot is stuck.

I have to learn to live with the bucket boot for a while. My pants are cut open along the side. Fifteen safety pins are keeping it together but it's still breezy. I need pants with a full zipper up the right leg. I have a pair on order, so I now wear a sarong. I look like a Tahitian cowboy, with a bucket on one boot.

It's a good thing I'm not a private detective or a spy because there is nothing subtle about my approach. I am rather loud and slow. Step. CLANK. Step. KLUNK.

Rather than shame the deformity, I am embracing it.

Two nights ago, I filled the bucket with white sand before I went to a party. My smoker friends found my ash-tray handy and convenient.

Today, I have the bucket filled with water and nine little Feng Shui goldfish. I figure I need all the luck I can get.

You could say that I've *really stepped in it this time*. I have a bucket on my right foot and all I can do is make the very best of it.

I can't get it off; I have to live with it. I have a choice and I will make this a good experience. Somehow.

WORLD ORDER

My friend Marsh explains himself with his hands, gesturing as if he were rocking a salad bowl or a globe from side to side.

He says that the political flavor leans a little to the left and then it shifts a little to the right. And vice-a-versa.

It is this motion, the flow and the pull, that keeps the equilibrium of a democracy.

EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE

The world has truly never been smaller.

Right now, for some people, life is a searing physical pain. For others, their heart aches to touch a loved one. Some people are angry and half-mad. Others are anticipating a financial windfall. Most are fretting. Somewhere in the world, two people are falling in love. Some are spooning, holding one another and feeling intense comfort. Some people are so stinkin' dirty that they can't even remember how good a hot shower once felt. Some are scoffing at ideas and some are passionate about them. Some are easily convinced and others are thinkers. For some, life is no longer worth living. Some know that they have a friend. Right now, somewhere in the world, two people are laughing and giddy. Others are humorless.

It happens to everyone, everywhere, right now.

MY BARBARIANS

Now that we are in the thick of it, I feel an obligation to make the best of it.

I want to welcome this new influence, this Arabian culture. It may not have been my *first* choice, but there are many beautiful things about it that interest me. As a matter of fact, we *better* embrace it, because we're gonna be spending a lot of time with it.

We have to make room for another culture. Make space for one more. Where are we going to find the time?

It takes a while to stir and mix a melting pot. How are we going to mend the hardcore riff between Shiites and Sunni Muslims in Iraq when our very own Baptists and Catholics can't get along?

Minimalists hate the Conceptualists. Blondes versus brunettes. Jews and Palestinians. Cocoa Puffs or Lucky Charms.

We better get our deck of race cards into some kind of solitaire before we start to export our democracy. One leads by example.

As with our stepsister state of Puerto Rico, I welcome and embrace the influences that the new commonwealth of Iraq will bring. Hawaii for the waters and Iraq for the deserts. I forget, do we winter in Iraq or do we summer there?

To get a jump-start on the game, I've been looking all over town for a good Iraqi restaurant. I look forward

to a good kebob.

The hip-hop station on my radio dial is starting to bounce to a Gulf Coast beat. Pimp out the East Coast--West Coast. Da action is in da Gulf.

Night before last, rather than throw a punch in a bar fight, I merely tossed my shoes. In the Arab culture, it's a huge insult.

Unfortunately for me, the guy who ran off with my shoes wasn't Arab.

Gold leaf is in. Gold veined mirror. Gold striped wallpaper. Gold toilet seats. Sixties redux.

Soon Home Depot will announce their new Dubai Décor line. Ethan Allen will give us the Las Vegas version of overblown high French furniture, antique'd white with gold pinstriping. Arab camp. Desert sheik chic.

I remember the Arab prince in Beverly Hills who painted a fence of life-size nude statues in life-like tones.

I refuse to wear a caftan, although I bet it'd be comfortable. I don't wear underwear and a caftan would be a little too much air.

You can rest assured that the fashion houses will react fast and go Gulf Coast. It's a wide-open slate. Fashion is limited in the Middle East; there's only so much you can do with a burka.

'Harem' is not a bad influence. A harem is an interesting notion. Harem is the new black.

Unrest in the Mid-East? You bet. The Arab male is uneasy. The men are shuffling their feet and laughing nervously but they don't know why. They can feel it coming. They just don't realize how powerful it will be. That oncoming wave of WomanPower is gonna knock 'em off their feet. The mullahs will be working overtime to keep the ladies *down*, but now *the burka is off*.

I haven't seen any photos of good-looking Arabian beauties yet, but I'm sure *Vanity Fair* will beefcake the men and *Sports Illustrated* will swimsuit the girls.

Thank god for the infidels.

Exotic is in, which is very excellent. To look into the loving, alluring eyes of a barbarian, well, it's like an instant vacation to another world.

TOO MUCH IN A BLINK

I really think my nerves are pushing their seams. My timing is off. The synapses are misfiring. Veins in my eyes glow red like lava. My neurology has been acting up again.

There is too much comin' at me. Every time I hear a car backfire, I think the terrorists are attacking Los Angeles. I know they're dying to. I am compelled to check on world events every ten minutes or so. Where's Paris right *now*? How much of MySpace is mine? Do I have the hottest ring tones?

I can't sleep. I can't eat. Thankfully, I can still

drink.

The *LA Times* says that folks are exhausted from watching the Battle for World Order on TV.

I'll say. I sure am. And I don't even own a TV.

My psychiatrist, the esteemed Doctor Emile Von Burstebagge, spoke at length on the subject. As usual, I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. My main man, Doc Von, speaks in such a heavy Austrian accent that I rarely know what the fuck he is saying.

At first, I thought he was recommending that I "carjack an old lady for the spring harvest renewal." Later I realized he was saying something completely different. "The stress of advanced technology on a newly evolving brain creates a conflict in the neurological system."

The technology of communication has evolved faster than our brains have. When we process too much too fast, we blow a fuse in our Emotionalism. I believe that's what my psychiatrist meant.

Each bit of information we get has a corresponding emotional reaction of some duration and priority. So if your dog dies, you will feel *real* bad for three weeks and less bad for thirty more. If you get a nickel-an-hour raise, you will feel real proud and elated for about twenty-five minutes.

As your bean gets info, it has to process that bit emotionally as well as conceptually and objectively. The more info your noggin gets, your Emotionalism gets swamped

with more than your noggin can handle. We start skipping or shortchanging stuff. We start living less well. And therefore we stop living.

“Neva has zee human rr-race, as a schh-pecies, been mo’ shallenged! Yah!” sputtered Burstebagge. He took a swig of coffee that smelled an awful lot like schnapps. He slowly cleared his throat and shrugged his shoulders.

“Zat’s da problem off leeving een wartime.”

NATIONAL EMPOWERMENT IS PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

I got rid of my mullet; I now have a blow-dry freedom cut.

Right after the first ‘Decapitator’ hit Baghdad, I had my stomach surgically stapled. I lost eighty pounds and I look great. I feel great.

The polyethylene pec implants have given me a physique that even Tarzan would admire. Steroids have given me new, vein-popping biceps.

Viagra has put a tiger in my trunk. I smile with pearly capped whites.

My jaw line, once concave, now juts forward like Ben Affleck. My chin implant is made of glass. I better be careful where I swing it.



**WALK
IN
DANCE
OUT.**



Mocambo



**SHE DANCED
WITH THE
PASSION OF
A VOODOO
PRIESTESS.**



**TRYST
AND
SHOU**



ARTIST'S PANTS

A certain, unnamed, national retailer that sounds a lot like Saks Fifth Avenue has been quietly contracting with a handful of U.S. artists to provide high-end apparel manufacturing services. Rent is almost due and, thankfully, I am one of them.

I got the job when I clipped the phone number from a flier on a telephone pole just outside my local coffeehouse.

Soon to debut in the Fall are colorful 'Artist's Pants,' the next big push in fashion.

In these hurly burly days of Living in Wartime, John and Jane Q. Public have little time to devote to their own expression. That Manhattan bond trader may have the soul of an artist, but not the dedication. A Pacific Palisades housewife knows what she likes, but hates to get her

nails dirty.

How can you express your creativity and individuality? How can you bulls-eye a first impression? Artist's Pants.

The unnamed retailer has been shipping fresh, clean khaki pants, in a variety of sizes, to a number of painters across the country, myself included. I am saving a fortune on rags for I am getting paid to clean my hands and wipe my brushes on my pants.

My "patron of the arts"—that's what Miguel, the factory foreman, wants us to call him—my *patron* offers very simple instructions: "Wipe like the wind, amigos!"

The more colorful the better. And the more colorful, the more profitable. The unnamed and tight-fisted retailer is paying approximately \$12.50 per pair of finished 'Artist's Pants.' Sadly, Monochromatic painters get only half that.

You can earn more. If you have an MFA, expect an additional \$2 per pair. Cigarette burns bring in an additional 35 cents per hole. A small landscape or doodle adds \$3 to \$4 per pair.

There are penalties. Liquor, blood and vomit stains can result in a deduction of \$3 to \$5 per stain.

Naturally, the more pants I can produce in a week, the more money I can make.

Luckily, I have always been very quick and skilled at putting on my pants. You never know when a spouse, away on a business trip, will return unexpectedly.

This training has aided my productivity enormously.

We've heard rumors that these unique and stylish pants will retail at \$975 per pair.

They anticipate a huge demand, with a focus on urban centers, where artists are truly appreciated.

Market research indicates that 'Artist's Pants' are a big bomb in rural areas, where consumers were confusing them with plumber's pants and (house) painter's pants.

This is the bold, new urban look.

Parents will finally be relieved that their high schoolers will no longer be dressing like crack dealers and ghetto gangstas. Now their kids will want to emulate the clean cut, hard-working American artist.

Unfortunately, wait till Mom and Dad get a load of the price tag of art school. They may want to rethink the Role Model.

The fashion world publicity machine is gearing up. I'm told that Kate Moss will wear 'Artist's Pants' on the November cover of *Vogue*.

In June, the cover story of *Bride* will be titled "Oil Paint and Lace."

All of the contestants on *American Idol* will receive a bar of Ivory Soap, Travel Yahtzee, and a pair of 'Artist's

Pants.'

Which senatorial candidate will be the first to court the artist vote, wearing a new pair? We shall see.

It is also rumored that several couturiers are rushing to cash in on the trend.

I have heard that Armani and BCBG are competing to attract Blue Chip galleries for their Blue Chip Artists.

Say, how much for those David Hockney-Marc Jacobs pants?

The real sharks are smelling the blood; I've heard that Damien Hirst is coming out with an entire, paint splattered, lifestyle line.

Unfortunately, now that the word is out, my art dealer is demanding half of my pant earnings.

To me, the real value is in the promotion. Like the Beanie Babies, each pair of Artist's Pants will feature a small hang tag, which lists the name and bio of each artist.

Mine will read, "If you like the pants, you'll love the paintings."

Predictably, dark clouds are gathering on my economic horizon. For every falling piano, there is an artist below it.

Despite my productivity and cheerfulness, the unnamed money-grubbing retailer has been slowing down

the volume.

They are going overseas. Haitian children will paint for 35 cents a pant.

Red Chinese prisoners produce a pair at 72 cents. And Latin Countries are offering \$1.25 with brighter colors and a faster turn around.

Goddamn NAFTA.



**ECONOMIC CYCLES OF
THE FINE ARTIST**

Figure 23.1

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FINE ARTIST

Every artist who is not supported by tenure or a trust fund must keep an entrepreneurial eye on the financial horizon. Our axiom, “Making Art Takes Time and Time is Money,” demands that the ol’ Day Job must offer the most drachmas in the least amount of time.

I have begun to look at various Business Opportunities in hopes of finding my golden cash cow. The effort has revealed three investment goldmines. I hope to sink my shovel into one of them and shout, “Eureka!”

I) Munitions continues to be a growth industry. Like food, medicine and DSL, munitions can be considered one of those staples that we just can’t do without.

The profit margins are huge.

Best of all, the defense business seems to do a lotta

entertaining on yachts in the Mediterranean, which suits me just swell.

Unfortunately, three reasons prevent me from attaining great success in this field.

First, you need a lotta capital to make bombs and I can't afford a firework stand.

Second, I am a Lover not a Fighter. This attitude lacks the necessary instinct that might make success in this field more assured.

Third, I would rather Create than Destroy, which again is a recipe for defeat. I knew I had to look beyond my limitations.

II) With tensions high and climbing, wartime provides a steady market for inebriants and their detractors.

In times of great stress, folks like to dance it off and the devil may care. Drug dealers, liquor distributors, tobacco growers, recovery centers, faith-based initiatives and televangelists are popping corks over their wartime success.

While society is waiting for the other shoe to drop and the Alert Level to leap, Bacchus-based initiatives are on the rise.

I had an idea, a new concept in Better Living, that I called Vice Transference Recovery Systems (VTRS). The concept is simple. Rather than trying to eliminate the habit, we will help you transfer the object of your passion.

Sex addicts are refocused to become stoners.

Dragon Chasers are told to follow a pair of dice.
Wanna quit smoking? Have a drink instead.
I just hate to see someone give up something they
love.

Unfortunately, the VTRS Concept failed. In self-testing, it was actually *adding* vices rather than transferring them. Another dream bubble had burst. And I was looking forward to having celebrity clients...

III) Sometimes the most obvious is the hardest to see, which makes the third opportunity so brilliant.

I went back to the basics, to the tried and true, to one of the oldest professions.

Throughout the ages, *religion* has been one of the world's greatest moneymakers. You say 'Fervent' and I say 'Customer.'

I took a gander at various beliefs, thinking that joining an existing institution would be like buying a successful franchise. Due Diligence took a look at all aspects of various faiths.

Unfortunately, every religion known to man was scratched off my list for either logical, dietary or libertarian purposes.

If I couldn't buy into a church, I'd have to start my own.

Having recently discovered and concluded the true

Meaning of Life, I am well qualified to establish such a spiritual venture. As a Los Angeleno, my environment is endowed with a long tradition of health fads, twisted cults and evangelical start-ups.

It felt like a fit.

There is a deep and meaningful philosophical core to the Fellowship of Fortuna. Due to space limitations and the imminent start of Happy Hour, we will gloss over the Glory and focus on the sizzle.

In brief, the Fellowship of Fortuna celebrates those things that unite every human being, the first and foremost trait being Chance. Sometimes good and sometimes bad, we all have Luck. While most call her Lady Luck, we know her as Fortuna. Every church needs an icon and the Roman Goddess is the inspiration for ours.

As a figurehead, Fortuna stands tall, swinging a down-turned sword back and forth like a pendulum. With it, she dispenses Luck, both fair and foul. She does not wear a blindfold, for her impartiality is her integrity. She has a beautiful, intriguing face with a quirky smile, like the Statue of Liberty or Angelina Jolie. Or Amy Winehouse. Her steady gaze can both comfort the misfortunate with tender empathy and wink gaily at a winner. Fortuna is a vixen.

The members of the Fellowship of Fortuna, known as the 'Fortunates,' are an active and involved bunch. Collectively, they have several things in common. All tend to

be quite bright. All have a keen interest in learning. All strive for experience.

A collective of engineers and marketing types who call themselves ‘The Continuum’ are dedicated to the swing of Fortuna’s sword. With physics, probability and statistics, they are trying to quantify Chance.

The ‘Flaming Fortune,’ our car club, is aptly named. Restoring a car costs a fortune and all of the vehicles have the ability to shoot flames from their tail pipes. This is dangerous and illegal, so we try and turn a blind eye.

Our sports teams win most titles in their leagues. These men and women, the ‘Falcons of Fortuna,’ are scoring trophies in volleyball, skateboarding, boxing, basketball, billiards, dragstrip racing and water polo. There is talk of a sailing team.

We have a surf squad, ‘SurFortuna,’ but they’ve never turned in any paperwork.

Our cheerleading squad, the ‘Frisky Fortunettes,’ are so compelling that a network wants to devote an *entire* cable channel to their reality show.

Unlike most other religious institutions, the Fellowship of Fortuna has a high threshold for joy, fun and frivolity. Laughter figures prominently into the doctrine as well as the services.

Our ‘Big Sunday’ is rather entertaining and fast

moving. An organ and choir have been replaced with DJ Valihi and the 'Fly-Fortunes,' a dance team. Music, skit comedy and rousing sing-alongs are a part of the program.

As they say in Fortuna slang, it's "*Hey-Fortunato!*"

'The Skulls of Fortuna,' a Mod-Goth-Punk styled support group, generates most of our customs and rituals. We're not sure what we think about it yet, but they have given Communion a makeover. The 'Body of Christ' is no longer represented by a thin wafer but with a bold petit filet breakfast steak served with two ranch eggs. The ridiculous notion that grape juice can signify 'The Blood of Christ' has been redeemed with a spicy Bloody Mary.

Currently in the planning stages, the cathedral La Sagrada Fortuna features a design inspired by Gaudi and the Pacific Dining Car steakhouse. Pews will be replaced with red leather booths.

Whereas the Catholic Church has the honorable Knights of Malta as their premiere service group, we have the 'High Flyin' Libertines.' The HFL travel a lot. Lavish, first class trips feature brilliant speakers and a gourmet taste bud. Despite the rumors and tawdry tales, it really *is* a study group.

On the deeper issues of Life, the Fellowship of Fortuna has a doctrine, "The Massive Missive," which is currently being written by the Plumes of Fortuna, a for-

ward-thinking bunch of radical intellectuals who can't agree on anything except how to have a good time.

The Massive Missive (or in church slang, the Double M) is heavily footnoted with references to the work of Umberto Eco and Jean Beaudrillard.

Art-centric, church influences can be found in Minimalism, the Hyper-Realities and an aggressive freedom that can be won only through our trademarked brand of Neo-Nihilism.

The FoF is open to all and discriminates against none. Tithing is strongly suggested at thirty-five percent (35%) of gross income before taxes.

“May Fortuna Swing Favorably With You!”



SURVIVAL SKILLS, STRATEGIES AND GUERRILLA TACTICS FOR THE FINE ARTIST

I can't imagine why anyone would want to become an artist.

The hours are long, the benefits are few and the pay is lousy. Even worse, it's a lonely place; most folks cannot fathom our what and why of it. 'Success' in the arts cannot be quantified nor is the pursuit easily explained.

I don't know why I make art, but every day I'm trying to figure out how to make more. In a true American style, I have sought to find a system of survival that will allow more time and greater resources to do what I do best. My Design for Living is constantly being amended and it shall never be perfected, but I believe the basic structure shall benefit my fellow artists everywhere.

Following is a list of survival skills and guerrilla tactics in order of greatest importance:

I) MORAL SUPPORT

Find a bartender with an MFA. If everyone needs a shoulder to cry on, then you might as well make it an empathetic and educated one. I highly suggest that you conscript several. Should you ever get 86'd, it's good to have a back-up.

II) LEGAL SUPPORT

Find a good criminal attorney. I am not suggesting that you keep one on retainer, but I do advocate a relationship that you can count on. Plug that phone number into Speed Dial. The hair on your chinny chin-chin is rather thin and easily plucked. Your lives are limited to nine. The American penal system does not provide art supplies. Natch.

III) FINANCIAL INDEMNIFICATION

Money, or rather the lack of it, may be one of the greatest and most vexing roadblocks to the free-flowing life force of an artist.

The following Flow Chart is a simple one: Art demands time. Time is money. Money is earned through time spent anywhere but in your studio.

As you can see, it is a vicious and endless cycle that does not offer many opportunities for relief. I shall endeavor to list several venues of escape.

In order of greatest convenience and benefit:

III: A) The ultimate fantasy is an aggressive, dynamic and global gallerist who pays the artist at fifty-fifty,

net fifteen. Their devotion to you and your aesthetic is absolute and held more dearly than their own life.

As previously stated, this is the fantasy. The reality is generally so ugly that I prefer to wear blinders. Attaining a gallerist engenders a descent into an eighth and ninth level of Hell that Dante never imagined. Unconditionally trusting a dealer would test the compassion of Christ and the intellect of Forrest Gump.

This road is fraught with much grief and is not conducive to making art. Move on.

III: B) An adequate trust fund is not as suitable as a bountiful one, but I would refuse neither. An inheritance is, by far, the most preferable financial opportunity for an artist. You are beholden to no one except the dead. The demands of time and effort are limited to endorsing a check once a month.

Unfortunately, *my* prospects of a trust fund are nil. This unforgivable and cruel fact has often driven me to shake my fist at the moon and loudly curse the Gods, much to the dismay of my neighbors.

III: C) Marry well. Many suggest that marriage is a wise and valuable option. I like the idea that sex is included in the package but I have my reservations.

Often times, 'to marry well' can demand more emotional grief and time at hard labor than a counter job at McDonalds.

III: D) Go Third World. The coffee is better and

the rent is cheaper.

III: E) A favorable day job. This is easier hoped for than found. If time is money, then you want to make the most money in the least amount of time. (See Figure 23.1)

Unfortunately, a law degree yields a higher hourly wage than an art degree. Fortunately, most states offer a minimum wage, which unfortunately does not buy spit.

Ideally, you will be lucky to serve your time under a sympathetic boss who has a love, appreciation and a support for the fine arts. He or she will be inspired (or at least amused) by your singular passion and lend assistance and resources in every way.

This is the exception to the rule. Most employers will view your artistry with suspicion, sneer at your 'misguided' values and do everything they can to thwart your quest. "I don't care if you're debuting in Belgium--sweep the f***ing floor!"

IV) THE MINDSET OF THE ARTIST

From Aristotle to Anthony Robbins, every smart mind concludes, "Attitude is everything." That cup can be sadly half empty or gleefully *half full!* Unfortunately, artists tend to dig a bit deeper and ask, "Full of *what?*"

The cranial synapses of an artist are not wired like that of a civilian. There are quirks and contradictions to most of us that make life as carefree as dancing on a minefield. The world is marching one way and we are blithely skipping in another. How do we endure?

Attitude. The artist must foster and nurture a mindset to survive.

IV: A) NO ABSOLUTES: FAD AND FASHION

I like to think there is a Valhalla of Beauty, an absolute in Art. I prefer to believe that there will be an epiphany or a revelation, a destination to any artistic journey. Such a glory does not exist.

The art world that I want to believe in is merely a concoction of a fantastic mind and my preference for the HyperReal. The actual art world has as much resolve as next season's wallpaper. It is a victim *and* a proponent of fad and fashion.

When I first realized this, I felt like a Believer who suddenly learns that the parish priest is a pederast. My devastation has since mellowed and aged into a steadfast resolve: *Stay the course, lads. Stay true to your aesthetic. This is our integrity. This is our power and our strength. The dedication and perseverance to our Form becomes our ultimate joy.*

IV: B) TRUE REWARD

As artists, we seek recognition for our work, yet this is a slippery slope to climb. It demands an investment into a judicial authority whose demeanor can only be described as capricious.

The work of Jackson Pollack was hailed as genius and slaughtered as stale, all within a very short period of time. A gnawing hunger for external recognition can never be fed. It is an emotional hole than will never be filled because the appetite grows larger and demands more.

A gaggle of psychologists will tell you that self-worth is the only panacea and they are right. The reward is in the work. As much as I bitch and moan about the storage, maintenance and preservation of my inventory, I am damn proud of that pile.

This private joy is our pay dirt.

IV: C) RECOGNITION

Your efforts are not wasted. Your time will come. You will be recognized. Your dedication guarantees it.

As fad and fashion gallop and leap like horses on a slow moving merry-go-round, your turn to snatch a brass ring will come.

We must show graciousness for any attention that is thrown our way. We must be humble before every gesture. You may never show your work at MOMA, but you can be damn sure you'll have a retrospective at a community center gallery before you turn seventy-five. That will be a glorious honor.

IV: D) PATIENCE AND LONGEVITY

Like aging hookers and old buildings, artists become respectable over time. Great success in the arts comes from the courage and single-mindedness of your durability.

The true reward is in your daily journey and the daring, impractical belief in your quest. Given the high attrition rate of artists, you will be ultimately honored for your longevity. Keep making art.

IV: E) BALANCE

A sailor's legs are the greatest survival skill an artist can possess and the most difficult to acquire. We need to keep both feet on a pitching deck.

Artists are a species of anxious and warring contradictions. We are giants and we are dwarves. We are Ying and we are Yang. We are sorely selfish and genuinely generous. No one can beat their chest and roar in triumph as loud as we. Conversely, no one can lock themselves into a closet as black, insular and deep as ours. In the mind's own eye, no light shines as bright and there is no darker hell. We are invincible and we are worthless. We see the sadness in beauty and the genius in madness.

Long ago I proffered that 'artists are the astronauts of our sociology.' Test pilot Chuck Yeager may have nicked the sound barrier, but artists push the frontiers of human experience. We laugh more and we cry more. We feel more and we see more; I believe that is what motivates us to make the choices that we make and the actions that we take.

We seem to embody *all* of the contradictions of humanity. This is the gasoline of our fire. The trick and the skill is to singe ourselves without self-immolating. To triumph with humility. To fade with dignity. To lose graciously and congratulate whole-heartedly. To pursue our own individual aesthetic with a plausible and steadfast integrity.

This is the balance. This is our self-worth. This is our life.

V:) BE PRACTICAL

Don't drink and drive. Plein aire painters should use a good sunscreen. Try to find a cold water flat with a water heater.





