



## Some Art Business

Peter had to let his place go due to lack of work. He had an old brown slant-six Dodge van that he lived in.

I still saw him often around the warehouse. We'd go over to the Berkeley Flea Market at the Ashby BART. He told me: "I landed a job working out in one of the satellite cities east of the bay: Walnut Creek. Man, I was ready to give up. I mean I was tired. And I was discouraged. I was starting to refer to myself as Mr. Unemployed." He did a little lumbering shuffle like Mr. Unemployed. He said: "I hadn't had a job in nine months and I was scared. Walnut Creek is no place to be when you want to quit."

One day he showed up with some new paintings, big ones on canvas, loose, unstretched. He laid three of them out right on the ground of the parking lot, late one evening. Everyone was gone.

He indicated a set-up on the side of his van. It looked like something to hold an awning. "I made a little money," he said, "and got the idea to put together this rig on the roof of my van. I made it out of two ski racks that I bought at the Berkeley flea market. I bought a roll of canvas, and had it so that I could easily pull down and stretch enough to make a large painting, about 4' by 6'. I would use the whole side of my van as my easel. And paint what I saw."

I was impressed.

He continued: "In Walnut Creek, I ate lunch at this coffee shop/drive-in. All the young kids would hang out there. It was Summer and it was hot, and there was absolutely nothing for them to do."

He told me about how the punks were tired of being treated like children all their lives, and feeling their anger, loudly protested the fact with amplified noise, brawling and carousing and listening to their giant boom boxes and thrashing their skate boards in the parking lot. He told me these are suburban punks, kind of soft wave, not into the stupendous filth of the hard-core Haight and Telegraph Avenue punks who manifested their youthful vigor by more lively activities like screaming, fighting, urinating, breaking glass and revolting out-of-tune singing.

"After I ate at this restaurant a couple of times," he said, "I struck up a conversation with one of the young chicks. She seemed

approachable. Most of them looked at me like I was totally lacking in good taste not to have died before the age of 30! But Donna didn't quite buy the punk aesthetic for woman, which sought to always challenge what traditional beauty was, by being into horror. She wore a white miniskirt and horrendous white panty hose. A pink sweater! Long hair in a single braid went over her shoulder almost down to her young breasts. She had quick intelligent moves. She is going to be a courageous woman some day. She is fun. We'd be hanging out, leaning against a wall, talking about the other people in the room.

“I'd ask her, ‘Look at that guy there. What is his attitude? Dejection?’”

“And she said, ‘Nah, I think it is more like Contempt and / or Reproach.’”

He was definitely looking-sullen-off-into-the-distance.

So I started sketching them.

Some of the younger ones really were good at it. They were still kids. They could show Charity on their angelic faces. Also Shame and Fear, which everybody shows most of the time.

I helped her see some of them and I think she liked the power that this level of abstraction gave her.

I guess I identified with them, felt a lot like them. At least I had my art to keep me from flipping out completely.

We talked a few times. I told her I was a painter, and I could tell she was intelligent and interested in art and I was explaining to her about models and asked her if she might pose for me sometime.

‘Sometime,’ she said. And she was cool with it.”

I was pleased that my older friend was finding some love and sympathy in his hard life.

He continued: “So I painted her outside in the parking lot. I stretched a canvas.

Donna is wearing a beret, and a black guinea-T. She had on leather wrist bands and black leather belt, hung around her hips. She copped a very strange pose, her body arching up in an S curve, hands outstretched and above her head in a Y, configuration, knees bent as though she were about to spring into a long dive.

And there it was. Drawn from life in the moment. Quickly sketched to capture the moment in a moment, an ordinary young woman, not a model but to me extraordinary, the presence of her face emerging from the forces that shaped it.

I looked at the girl's face and her beauty blew me away. Ah, inspiration. Enchantment struck as real as lightening.”



I was enjoying my friend's happiness.

He continued. "While I was painting her she said, 'It's OK if I make you blush, isn't it?'

'Sure.' I said. It is just the blood that percolates through the body, perpetuates the spirit and penetrates the soul."

Later he said, "The most important thing is the figure. The painting exists for the figure.

I was asking myself: What is it that women want?

And the answer comes to me. Not to fly, but to dive down into deeper water, to that secret cave, to swim in it. To go deeper and deeper into the water. The cave is dark, but there is a pink light glowing deep inside. The water is blue. The Fish are shiny, slippery, silver. Figure comes out of ground, comes out of the landscape. Like de Kooning's Woman. That is what the landscapes do, they percolate out the strokes, they fulminate the figure, they gestalt the figure — the person. Just as in reality, morphogenetic fields carry us in space.

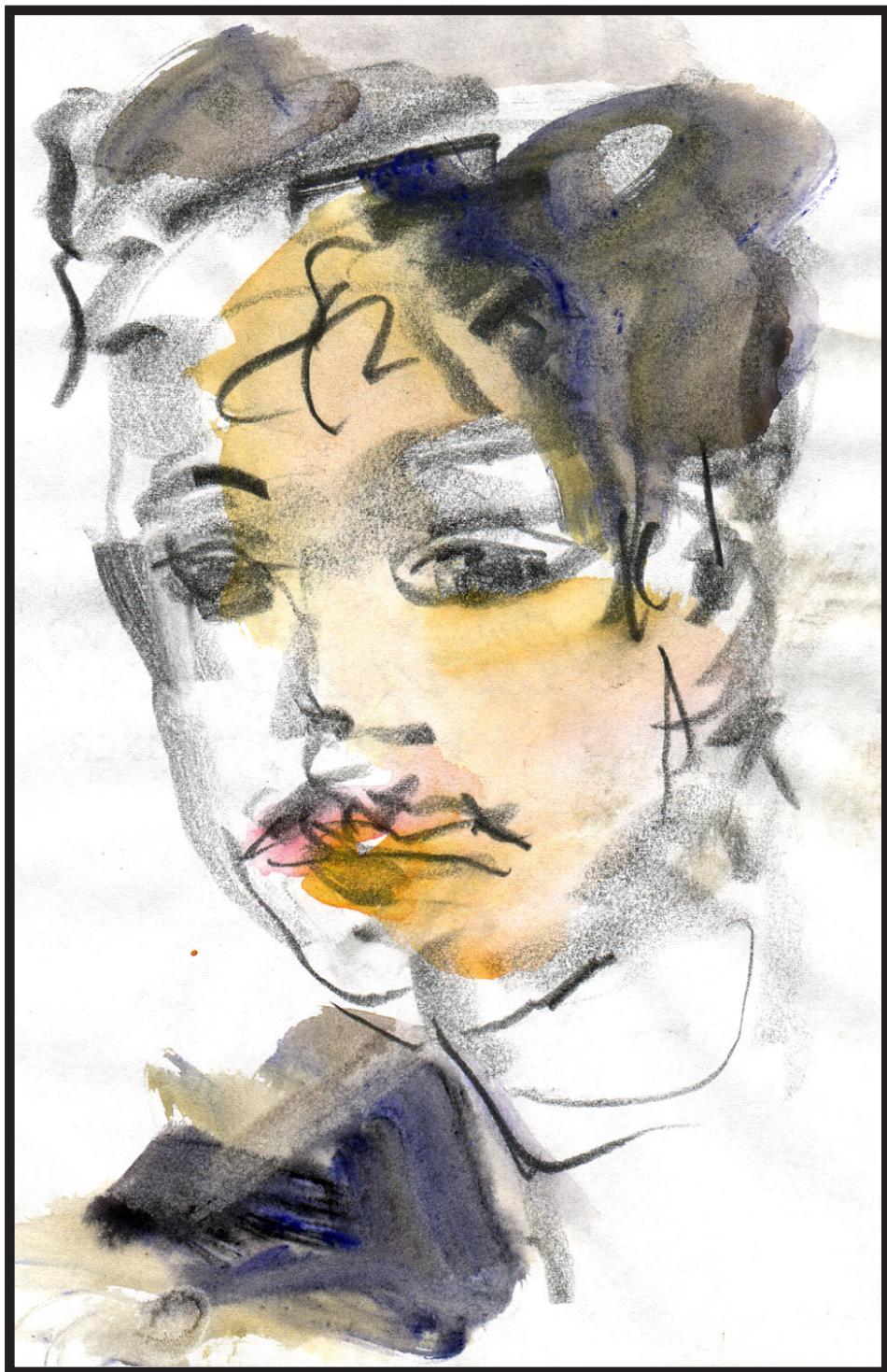
I showed much of the drive-in, and the push-pull energy of the punks, who wandered over and admired the work. They really liked it! They are in it, sitting around, in their black and leather and their eye shadow, and their spikes and studs.

Then after a few weeks — later, I show it to a friend who I had done some work for out in Martinez and he likes it. Holy Smoke! A 4' by 6' high punk icon!

They are smashed on some good grass and they offer me \$100 for it. A sale! I have entered the realm of professionalism! Well, you can imagine my excitement! This was a big day in my life."

Peter was really proud of himself. He loved the work he was doing, trying to capture Being, the manifold potentiality. No brush had depicted it, no concept had outwitted it . . . Until Peter the wild man, bay wolf comes from Berkeley. He felt superior to commercial artists posturing and simpering in the coffee houses and art galleries. He was the outsider artist, the bay wolf howling at the heals of the zeitgeist, moving like a mirage across the landscape of our time. He captures the beast with tubes of paint applied directly to canvas and smeared with his bare hands! At last . . . he cuts a painting off the large roll of canvas and stretches it on a canvass and nails lit up to a wall!

Peter lamented: "Now I have to go over to my friend's house in Martinez to look at her. I no longer see the real girl. I've got her number but don't ever see her.



But there in the painting, she arches and points out and away into her generation. Yet there really isn't anybody else. Just you and her. And she'll point at you out in your world. Where the wind is blowing. She'll be the Queen of the Punks. She understands. She's forever hanging out in summer, where the kids are sitting close to each other with their rats nest hair blowing into the trees, and the punks gyrate and stare at you. Her girlish skittishness provoking love and protections, the love and protection you felt for the mousey-haired girl back when you were you—in the hippie days.

The painting has that fresh acrylic wetness. You'll see the wetness swimming around her, her figure in an alive world, dewy as an early spring morning."

