

REX HAUSMANN's
BUSINESS IS GOOD and EVERYONE IS BUYING:
THE INCREDIBLY PUBLIC PRIVATE LIFE OF REX HAUSMANN

2010

**This is for my brother, my mom and dad, and all those who have helped me
along the way.**

**To Phil for sticking it out through the entire process, and to Suzanne, for
supporting him. Buon Provencio!**

*This is a story
from a guy who can't spell, a guy who can't write.
All I can say is,
"They were wrong!"*

—Rex Hausmann

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Preface

In this book you will be introduced to a number of different caricatures with fictional jobs. They are based on what I imagine real friends of mine might do in a metropolis of my own imagination. The inspiration for the setting of this community evolved from my day to day life in New York City, a commodity itself that has become a parallel universe to my San Antonio home. The fictional businesses weave together to embrace the individual personalities of the people I have come to know over the years. These idyllic moments form a bridge as real as the Manhattan or Brooklyn bridges I frequently cross to get from one part of New York to another. This metaphysical bridge links New York to my hometown of San Antonio.

Whether in fact or in fiction, my story is about sharing the American Dream with those closest to me; it is a place that I have immortalized with the metaphors of my own mind. I create, fabricate, imagine, love, and admire. The best explanation of what motivates me comes from an instillation that I completed in early 2008 called "Re-visitation" exhibited at Blue Star Contemporary Art Center in my hometown of San Antonio, Texas.

"At times these relationships are strained, at times they are celebrated, and at times, they drift apart only to be brought back together again."

In this expression of words, paintings, photographs, and collages you will find the New York I have come to know and love. From staying on the couches of friends to

eventually getting a place of my own in sublets (and searching for an affordable studio, if the word "affordable" even exists in New York City), I have created fictional businesses that embrace the ever changing nature of New York City. As put by one of my close friends, "New York City is not a physical place. New York is a place which you discover with the people that surround you."

– Rex Hausmann (July 15 2010)

The Muse: Bookstore and Gift Shop

(Boerne, Texas, after getting back from Berlin)

Some say it is God, others science, and still others simply could care less. Some say "Go Nietzsche!" I must admit, I'm not a fan—too depressing. Well, we are not about to tackle the origins of man in this book. People have been trying to figure out where "We" come from for as long as we have been around to ask the question. Adam and Eve probably thought that by biting into that apple (on a good word from a snake. A SNAKE? Come on, really! Well, stranger things have happened.) they would find out where God came from, and you see how that turned out. We are just curious creatures. Can you blame us?

No, this chapter will focus on the Muse, my muse, the muse that has come in and out of my life so many times I begin to question the very nature of her origins. Her name is M*. I started writing her letters, long ones. One in particular was an 18-page handwritten letter with historical references and the like. I wrote it out of desperation to explain something. Yeah, it didn't go over too well. Nonetheless, it meant a lot to her, in time, which is a relative term for us. We may not talk for long stretches, but we are forever linked as artist and muse. Writing her came from a need to explain things as best as I could. And then from writing her, I started to write other friends, and then...this book.

M* has been around ever since I can remember, or at least as long as I have cared to remember. We have often joked about her being my inspiration. She has said to me ever since the 10th grade, "Remember, I'm your inspiration!" The only thing

that has changed is that now she says, "Remember, I found you first," a topic she will have to take up with Felicia Matthews, my big sister (not by blood but by wonderful circumstance and by time). Felicia has been my biggest collector since I was 15 years old. In fact, Felicia bought the first painting I ever sold. For the better part of 10 years, her mother, Gail Smith, was my teacher, and I still eat dinner with the both of them.

To describe the nature of my muse is to try to describe creativity itself. Where does it come from? The Greeks thought we came from the entrance of a river, an historic motif symbolized by a pot with a stream trickling from its lip or from a cave. The symbolic image was rendered in the art movement of the 1800's—romanticism. Andy Warhol had Ultra Violet. Dali had a number of muses: Gala his wife, his dreams, and his terror of physical intimacy. Pollock, when he was off the sauce (alcohol), looked to Native American kachinas. And Picasso? Well, that little Spaniard went through a lot of them. Lord help the women involved in that man's life. There is a reason for the title of the book *Surviving Picasso*. Piet Mondrian had his meditation, his trees and his cityscapes; Rothko his "sublime"; Michelangelo his brooding melancholy. As of late, Julian Schnabel has Jabreal (in the most recent issue of *Vogue*). Every artist has his or her thing. Whatever it may be, I often reference my brother and my faith, my family and my relationships, symbolized by something as commonplace as a cupcake or a shoe in place of the iconic streaming pot.

Yes, the muse is ever changing. But for the sake of another chapter in a book (or a

nook if your reading this on a computer book or iPad), that's titled *The Incredibly Public Private Life of Rex Hausmann*, here is some more ink, or pixels, spilled. Ink spilled on a wonderfully lovely friend. M*

M* has been in and out of my life for years. She doesn't like to be the center of attention, something which I find fascinating. She was at my 27th birthday party, and hardly anyone knew who she was, and some people didn't even know she was there, a fact I respond with "How can you miss a super model? You obviously weren't looking!" (She was wearing a green dress that I sent her from New York.) But, she does like fashion, something I have come to love and embrace, as well. She looks great in a dress by the way! Wow! M* has a peculiar smile, it stretches from ear to ear, and her whole face lights up when she laughs. Her eyes twinkle and it's wonderful.

You might ask if she and I are together, going steady, dating, BFFs (best friends forever) or just buds. Many people have. Arturo, a man I truly admire, said once to me after M* came to a private upscale party at my gallery, "Rex, who was that? I can tell you two really know each other, like you have been very close friends for a very long time. The both of you just fit. Who is she?"

The funny thing is, at this point we are no more and no less than what we have always been: We are just "The painter and his muse." We have tried to define what we are, but whenever we do, it blows up in our faces, so through many conversations, not all easy ones, we are still...well, us.

We always say, "It's complicated" and it is. It is simple when we are together, but the time apart makes things strange. Sometimes this time apart lasts for years, sometimes months on end, and at other times it is only days, hours or minutes. Neither of us knows what we are, so for now she is a mythic spark in a book that has its own destiny.

The Muse Gift Shop. Be careful what you wish for. We have it in stock, but it may not be what you are expecting. Nonetheless, you will love it anyway. It will inspire. We specialize in the "greater than commonplace things" category of life, which can be a bit tricky. We call that one "Pandora's Box." Yeah, you've heard of the story. Pretty good, right? Who do you think thought that one up? Yep, that's an original. The Midas Touch? We like that one, too. The genie and his lamp? Where do you think the lamp came from?

Like the twinkle in M*'s eye, she is a mystic spark, my muse. That is her job, at whatever capacity that may be.

:) *

Chelsea and a Text from My Brother

Driving back from Dallas on the way to Houston shortly before leaving for New York is not an uncommon labyrinth of traveling for me. I was thinking about what my new inspiration would be after having nearly completed my "Ithica" series. When driving across Texas, one thing you have plenty of is time to think, especially in the dark deserted nights. As I passed through highways of tiny little towns, *Peterbilt* semi trucks and Love's Truck Stops, a thought hit me: "How could I combine the fanciful world of Mark Twain, the humor of movies, the ideas of the American Dream, and the love of family and friends?" My search had begun and I would exhaust every moment for a solution.

A week after my long drive through Texas I was in New York, still searching for an answer as I walked passed people on my left and right in place of the little towns and trucks in Texas. My brother sent me a text: "Rex, why don't you do something based on your ambitions in New York, and you trying to move up there?" As I read this text I was walking past 11th Ave and 23rd (Chelsea), and the lyrics from Jay Z's song "Young Forever" stuck in my head: "...with a little ambition, just what we can become here...yeah,...you let me know, baby...."

Dannon Art Supply: New York, The Midwest, and the Beginnings of this Book

(Boerne Texas, October: just getting back from Berlin.)

The typical New York Veneer is often misunderstood. New Yorkers are not jerks, as everyone who has not been exposed to NYC may first suppose. They are actually very nice. They just have to get to work, so cut them some slack. New Yorkers are also paying exorbitant living costs. You would be short in temper too if you had to pay the rent New Yorkers do—and deal with all the people and all the smells and all the tickets and bills and marketers and subways not running on time and overpopulation and noise and cost of everyday things—all to say, you kind of live in your own little world in New York. And you can! There are so many different people. You can find anything you want there, good or bad.

When I say New Yorker, I mean Manhattan (no offense to Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx or Harlem). I'm just talking about the parts, I personally know. I mainly stay in Brooklyn and Manhattan, with one exception. There is a lady named Rosita who is from Puerto Rico. She lives in The Bronx and has a chicken named Coco who lives with her. Coco does pretty much whatever he wants. The scene is hilarious. All I can say is that Rosita yells all over the house, "Chick-chick" or "Coco, come hear..." all the while serving up yaka and plantains with some of the best chicken I have ever had. It's safe to say I have never had pumpkin in black beans before eating at Rosita's house (her personal specialty). Now I can say I have, and it's really good. Rosita is 70 years old and 4 feet tall, but has the spark of a 30-year-old woman. The woman has Moxy! I played chess with her and she almost kicked my butt.

Almost! She actually got distracted with a phone call, and well, I called it a day from there. We need a rematch!

Brooklyn is very different from Manhattan as I have come to find. Most people living in Brooklyn call themselves "Brooklyners," where as people from Manhattan call themselves "New Yorkers." Most people from Brooklyn, or at least what I have found, grew up in Brooklyn. They work in Brooklyn (with the exception of DUMBO and Williamsburg), they shop in Brooklyn, and they live their lives in Brooklyn. This may be a gross overgeneralization, but it is what I have found. People from Manhattan, on the other hand, are from all over the world, with the exception of Chinatown (obviously given a name for a reason, it is heavily populated with people of Eastern decent) and Washington Highest (heavily populated with people from South America, like the Dominican Republic). Very rarely do I find a person who is from New York City, born and raised. However, I must confess, I hang around a very specific group, the art crowd, which is a great part, a very transient crowd in the first place. Even so, even in my day to day interactions, I find people in Manhattan are generally from somewhere else.

In New York, most people choose where to associate themselves with. If you say "I live in Williamsburg," this statement will usually be accompanied by one of two responses: "How cool. That must be fun. You must like music and nightlife. Let's go to a party." Or, inversely (even through a person may not say it, but will think it): "God Damn hipster. Get the hell out of my life. You and your overpriced rent for substandard living. Did you go to Yale and are pretending to be poor? What's with

that?" (I am, of course, taking no side on this matter. I have friends in Williamsburg and frequent the bookstore Spoonbill and Sugertown. Though I must confess, I enjoy the quieter sides of Brooklyn, like Prospect Heights, Cobble Hill, or even Red Hook has it's industrial charm. Williamsburg is too loud for me, at all hours. And I lived in Midtown Atlanta! On Peachtree Street, you want to talk about Urban soundscape.? Williamsburg is just too "on" all the time for my taste. I often say to my friend Burcu from Turkey when I enter into Williamsburg off that Bedford Stop, "I'm entering as the lamest kid in Williamsburg," to which she usually laughs and says "Or, the coolest." Thank you, Burco, for your vote of confidence.

If you say to a person living in Manhattan, "I live in Brooklyn...let's say Cobble Hill," they will most likely respond in one of two ways: "How is your family? Do you have kids? What are their ages?" or "You married? Cause married people live in Brooklyn." Now, these two answers may seem the same, but they are in fact very different in tone. One is of joy, "Oh... kids, great! You have a life that is stable and I know that you have other priorities. Very nice, nice to meet you." This is speaking of the first response, of course. Then there is the second, which in essence says, "You're lame. It's as simple as that," to borrow the words of Kid Cudi.

In speaking of Manhattan, let's not get into gross overgeneralization, but I will give it a shot for posterity's sake (this is coming from a Texan, who has traveled in NYC for 6 years. As my friend Marsha Giggily King, a resident of SoHo (that's South of Houston Street) of 30 years, told me, "Rex, you actually know New York pretty well. You may be mistaken for a New Yorker. Okay, here's giving it a shot:

Upper West Side: Yuppy; has a day job; doing pretty well; single or if married safe to say, "two kids"; probably has a masters degree from a good university.

The West Village: "well to do" college kid going to NYU, or if you are a single man, gay or eccentric family-type who likes to be hip. Intellectual.

East Side of the Park: Loaded, or trying to appear to be, (there is a reason the Guggenheim and The Metropolitan, and arguably MoMA are on the East side of Manhattan rather than the West. Read into it all you want. City planning is what it is because of tax brackets. All I can say is The East Side of the Park stands for a very particular something. In a city where even your area code is viewed with speculation whether it's 212, while there were still enough numbers, or 917, after they ran out of numbers, everything, and I do mean everything, comes into question.

Chinatown/Lower East Side: the name says enough, or artist, because rent is still cheep, you can afford groceries... but namely no one in their right mind can stand the smell on hot day in summer... yeah, you think that Whole Foods is in China town.... NOPE, you're hitting closer to the Lower East Side or SoHo.

Little Italy: tourist attraction, because no one of Italian decent lives there anymore. It's a tourist trap. Today it is more of an extension of Chinatown, and all the Italians that used to live there moved to Brooklyn a generation ago. P.S. they live

on Smith Street in Brooklyn. GREAT food! It's good for sales and gives New York something to say still exists, but in reality it doesn't. Go Francis Ford Coppola. The Godfather may have once lived there, but now he lives in Queens or Brooklyn, far away from Manhattan. You can actually find some Italians in The West Village, but they are few and far between.

SoHo: old artists that got in while it was still a heroin junkie hang out or fashionista who wants to pay exorbitant rent prices.

Tribeca: old, old artists, businessmen, rap super star (Jay Z), eccentric, well to do business man, or any number of things.

Are you getting the point? There is a social strata on every level. By saying I'm on Park Ave or Madison Ave, 5th Ave, 181st Street, 42nd St, Canal Street is all code. It's all a language, and it does matter.

Back to Dannon, the store, not social structures.

I met Darin and Shannon White in 2008 while I was attending a conference in Colorado where I also gave a lecture on contemporary art and its place in society. Darin came to my lecture and we had a dispute (publicly, in front of 40 people, including the guy paying me to be there) over whether "contemporary art" was just misunderstood, asinine, snobbish, cool, uncool or just a load of it. We could both laugh and still hold a conversation. Later, when our conversation continued after many drinks, him with his hard cider and me with my mineral water (I'm perpetually lame. Every once in a while I will enjoy a scotch or a port, but rarely.)

We still laughed, and he smiled and said, "You really are an art snob, but not in a bad way, but a "You know what it is you like" kind of way and can back it up.

If making me an art snob means I can look at a pile of rocks (Robert Smithson) or a big crumpled up piece of metal (A Chamberlain) or a mess of human forms resembling a scene from a campy movie in a bedroom (a Cicily Brown) or a hunk of wood with roots all painted black or rusty (Leonardo Drew), or I can look at some black speakers formed in the shape of Bernet Newman's "Broken Obelisk" that are pumping base so deep it could almost rattle my friend out of her dress, which it nearly did, (I'm speaking of Louise Gespert) and say it is beautiful without casting a value judgment, then I guess I am an art snob.

What I will not stand for is someone telling me something is "not pretty" or it "wouldn't look good over my couch, therefore it is not art!" In reality it may actually look kind of good over your couch, you never know. It also may become somewhat of an insurance liability in terms of a Leonardo Drew.

What I cannot stand for is an undereducated opinion, in terms of art. In my case, I may not like the performance work of Chris Burden, the things everyone knows him for in a survey of contemporary art. But I do very much like his machines like "Sampson" or his paper airplane machine exhibited at the Tate in London, or when he unearthed the foundations of the museum, or when he tried to bankrupt a museum by reallocating I don't know how much gold bullion to their exhibition floor which boosted the payroll, necessitating security guards on post and extending the

museum's insurance coverage for a month, all almost breaking the bank, both literally and figuratively in the name of art. Last I heard the Gagosian Gallery was trying to move the show to Los Angeles. But at least I say this from an educated opinion, one from actually sitting through his videos. The same holds for Paul McCarthy. Not the Beatle, but the artist. I absolutely will not watch the man's videos, like "Rumpus Room" or "Painter," but I do like his early work, the work where he was painting with his body, by dumping a whole five gallon bucket of paint over his head and dragging himself across the floor to paint a line. I like that. It was really cool when Paul spun around a gallery with a towel soaked in black paint until the whole gallery was painters black. If you want to go more obscure, look at the work of James Lee Byers where he put his family on display and the home he grew up in as his thesis. The guy was a genius, I tell you. He took Yeves Klein to a whole new level, especially when he was asked to propose a show to the Guggenheim, something that took his gallerist years to arrange. Then when he finally got the chance, the opportunity, quite literally, of a lifetime, he said "For starters, let's paint the whole building black, inside and out." The museum curator at the time said, "To paint the whole building would be to harm my building, a building that is under my direction and trust, something I am not be willing to do. I will, however, give James Lee Buyers a show when he is dead." Chilling! Yet, true. That is exactly the case. A museum in Europe, I believe, did do the proposal. Just chalk it up to eccentricity. That's art for ya. If it's art lingo muscles you want to flex, I think I can hold my own, but really, who cares? What good does it do? Really, I just love art, and love talking about it and finding what it truly is about. What's the big deal about a square on the floor that a docent will not stop you from

stomping on Carl Andre or a big text on the wall that says "Thing places here and there" a Lawrence Weiner. The big deal is it's really cool, it's like a big Easter egg hunt!

So it is in this way that I guess I am an art snob, and it is in this way that Darin and I have been friends for the better part of three years. Darin lives in Lawrence, Kansas, in a "bedroom community" as he calls it, with his wife Shannon and their two children. I call their company "Dannon" because when you talk about Darin, you must never forget Shannon. They are a team, one exists with the other. Even though they are very different, they are very much the same. They run a company that manufactures art pieces for other artists, as well as displays for companies. If you are walking on Maddison Avenue and happen to see the store front of BCBG, the fashion label, chances are you are looking at the handy work of Darin and Shannon. Yep, that's Dannon for ya!

Darin is a sculptor and print maker, and Shannon his wife is a painter. The both of them make an interesting team. My friendship (first) and business relationship (second) with Dannon (both Darin and Shannon) became sealed when the White show, a show consisting of over 50 artists from all over the world, came to Hausmann Millworks, the studio program I help run. As if they didn't have enough to do, both Darin and Shannon run a non-profit art initiative that is gaining some real attention. The organization: The Beauty Art and Life Movement or B.A.L.M. for short. Pretty catchy huh?!

If you look at the name of the organization, it is actually an extension of Darin and Shannon themselves. I say this because upon visiting Darin and Shannon's house in Lawrence, Kansas, for the first time, I witnessed a house that has creativity sticking out of every nook and cranny, only second to the home of Lester Marks (a massive art collector in Houston, Texas). Darin and Shannon breath the artist's life. It spills from every corner of their home, their business and their interests.

Darin focuses on the heart in a lot of his work. Although I personally stay away from references to the heart in my own work, Darin embraces it. If you get to know Darin, you will see why. The man is full of Chutzpah! He keeps on going. Darin is very much a planner, but also embodies the capability of a nonchalant.

The Monk of Washington Heights, and Grilled Cheese Sandwiches.

I was up in Washington Heights staying on a couch that I can always count on. My rent for a night at John Cowen's is cheap Chinese food from around the corner and a good Dominican Cigar.

John Cowen is a monk. The tools of his monastic ritual include an industrial strength glue gun, cross stitch, and yarn. He and I have been friends for 7-plus years. We met when John worked at a local art supply store, "Asel's Art Supply" in San Antonio, Texas. He said that the first time he met me I came into the store proclaiming, "Isn't this the greatest drawing you have ever seen?" to which he smiled and said, "It's very nice." All the while he's told me that he was thinking, "Well, no, whoever you are. Sure, it's a good drawing, and I'm glad you're enthusiastic about it, but it isn't the greatest thing I've ever seen." Since then John and I have become very good friends. We worked on a project together that was affiliated with the Venice Biennale, during my installation phase (that was how I met Michelle Carollo).

John and I work in very different veins and have very different ideas on art and its aesthetics. I am like Robert Rauschenberg, and he is Jasper Johns. *We have a mutual friend who is a curator in The Village, Samuel Kho, who aspires to be a young Leo Castelli.*

John is a hermit, an artistic genius. He goes out rarely and is always working. I call him the Monk of Washington Heights, namely because he is a wealth of knowledge

on contemporary art, but even more staggering is how much work he produces. His apartment is always full with the fruits of his artistic ritual. Vanessa, his wife, loves and supports his work. John's art is that of a true purist.

John is about as Anglo American as you can get, but he lives in a heavily Dominican-Puerto Rican neighborhood. He refuses to live where most artists live—in Brooklyn or nearer to the Lower East Side—and he genuinely loves where he lives. He and I have taken many a walk after enjoying our 5 dollar Chinese and 12 dollar Dominican cigar to The Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park. We sit in the park, or on his fire escape, and debate for hours on art, life, relationships and any number of philosophical topics. Some of our best conversations have been on that fire escape, and every once in a while Vanessa joins us in a way that only adds to our already dynamic conversations.

Where John lives is very much like his work, which all comes together in the mantra of his state of mind: "I am near the art world and care enough to make good work and I give a damn just enough to show my work every once in a while but I refuse to be part of the social scene because I like what I do and making it is validation enough." This is why I love John so much. He has a simple unflappable integrity that I have strangely enough distilled into a grilled cheese sandwich.

John made me a grilled cheese sandwich once, and it was glorious. It had to be the best grilled cheese I have ever had, so I decided to make John an owner of a small sandwich shop in Washington Heights (or The Heights as everyone refers to it).

It's this attention to the simple integrity of the everyday that reminded me of a little art piece of John's that depicted the actions of him smoking a cigarette. No big deal, right? Wrong! This video is single-handedly one of the most influential video art pieces I have ever seen (maybe not the MOST influential, but definitely up there). It's like a Bruce Newman, but in a "Fuck you! I'm not going to let go of anything for you," kind of way. Newman is loud. In contrast, Cowen is soft spoken, yet he still finds a way to kick the shit out of you in his visuals. He has that "Hit you in the gut" kind of work.

In this video filmed in what looks like Super-8 film, John is smoking a cigarette into a camera. He is wearing a ski mask, half cocked on his face, and simply smokes into the camera. The result: silent, creepy unpredictability. The guy is about to throw a brick through your window, take everything you have—or maybe not. Maybe he'll just stand there and look creepy. He's a psycho maniac that lives down the block from you who chooses to "prune the roses" rather than kick in your door. We all have one in our neighborhood, or invent one for urban legend's sake. That's who John Cowen is in this video.

So I said to myself, "John owns a grilled cheese sandwich shop. He wears a slightly soiled apron, has Crocs on his feet, and smokes a cigarette as he makes his patent grilled cheese sandwiches; all with the attitude, "If you like it, eat it. If not, get the hell out of my kitchen because this is the best grilled cheese you will ever have. I don't give a good, god hell if you like it. I LOVE MY GRILLED CHEESE!"

Pedro Lujan's Fuschian Noodles (SoHo)

From Chelsea I hopped a train to meet Pedro Lujan at the Spring St. stop in SoHo where he lives. We then began our autopilot walk to the Hand-pulled Fuschian Noodle shop. I still have no idea where it is. Pedro makes a beeline, and I just follow. While walking and enjoying the summer day, we talked about French cuisine, pit BBQ and all manner of wonderful food topics. Pedro is a food fanatic extraordinaire, not to mention a very interesting person and a great painter. As we walked, the phrase "Pedro Lujan's Fuschian" popped into my head. It rhymed, and I liked it. I jotted this down on my little iPad (which I love) not to let the idea escape, and we went back to talking.

No one at this restaurant spoke English, and nearly no one...No, I correct that, EVERYONE there was of Asian descent, and we were the only non-Asians within a 20 block radius. This place is legit! I ordered the duck soup (big mistake), and Pedro got the eye round (his was the winner). I found the duck meat fatty tasting. I asked Pedro if he liked duck. He explained, "Well, duck prepared properly is quite good. Duck prepared poorly is the experience you just had. Never pay 5 bucks for duck. It's suspicious!" He then erupted into his usual, almost sinister-like, chuckling hiss and musing grin, as his shoulders bounced up and down. I could then see why my friends spoke his name with such awe.

After lunch we wound our way through Chinatown, smelling all kinds of things, seeing even more, and I had no idea where we were. I never do with Pedro, I just follow along. It's more fun that way. We walked from Chinatown back to SoHo

where we met Michelle Carollo for coffee. I met Michelle through a much esteemed Residency Program called "Artist to Artist" that is run by The Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation. I first thought Michelle's work was a man's, and then was surprised to find that she had created it. She's a woman who is, for lack of a better word, a Cherry Bomb—small but what a kick! This is a normal day in New York: meeting people, talking, trying different foods, and having coffee. It's wonderful—when I can afford it. Gotta sell more paintings!

Cooper Union, Dinner with Michelle Carollo, and a Park Bench.

After lunch with Pedro, I bumped around the Lower East Side, or LES as everyone calls it. Franklyn Evans was showing one hell of a show called "Lush Life." It had to be one of the best shows I had seen in a long time, one that had to be written about in the New York Times—you could count on it.

I decided to give Michelle Carollo a call, and we met at Cooper Union where she was doing her residency. On a side note, if you have not spent any time in New York City, I will tell you that the city is a grid of small parks: Manmade, as is everything in NYC, but nonetheless, essential pauses in the song that is New York. If the city did not have these little parks, I am certain it would implode due to human unrest. The parks carry with them an identity.

In the park outside of Cooper Union called "Cooper Square" there dwells a small group of homeless people all vying to stake their claim in the park. Apparently, even the homeless have real estate ambitions. If it's in New York and it's visible, someone will lay claim to it, whether it's theirs or not. The park is only around 30 feet across and 50 feet in length. As I waited for a call from Michelle, a short gangly fellow with a massive attitude began boasting, "I may be small, but I DO OWN THIS PARK!" He then said to his friends, "My name will be above that guy's name!" Pointing at the statue of the namesake of the tiny island, he continued his tirade, "This is MY park...!" Two kids were smoking a pipe (I guess NYU Kids trying to look artsy), and I just sat there as this little drama unfolded. The little man even yelled

at the pigeons. I guess we all need some kind of a claim in this world.

After waiting awhile longer, I got a text from Michelle. She asked me to meet her up in the building across the park. The new Cooper Union building is a massive structure that looks as though it was bent in 30 different angles, like a rubrics cube gone wrong, but in a good way. Instead of multi-colors, it's a mishmash of chrome excellence. After not being let in by the security guard, even with Michelle's consent, I waited in the lobby.

New York City is a fortress of closed doors that do not want to let you in. I have been to some really elaborately secured places. The most remarkable came in a visit to see a friend who lives in an apartment at Central Park. She works for an organization called Creative Capitol. I had to go through four security guards just to get to her door—safety I guess. Really impressive is what it was, an experience I will never forget. So I waited while Michelle finished up on a motion animation she was working on (the point of the residency) until she eventually came down to the lobby and escorted me beyond the security holding area.

After meeting up with Michelle, we went to get a Falafel, it's like a Greek taco. I said to Michelle, "What would you think about owning a diesel mechanics shop?" She said, "What are you talking about? I don't know anything about diesel engines!" I continued to explain to her that it was not a real business she would be opening, but a fictional one, one that I thought suited her personality. Michelle is a 5-foot 5-inch Italian woman with a larger than life personality. She is a one of a

kind petite Wonder Woman (with the exception of my mom) if there ever was one, an Italian Rosie the Riveter with a French Barrett. She could be mistaken for Audrey Hepburn in a cute powder keg type of way. All I can say is "Punk Rock Chick with a Yale Degree. On scholarship! With drive!" Michelle is opinionated in life and in art. She is a dogmatic installation artist whom everyone associates with the West Coast because she went to grad school there, but the fact is that she grew up in Brooklyn. That's just New York for you. Her work is expressive, larger than life, very colorful, and stubborn. It is...well, Italian!

I said, "Michelle, remember when you had the studio visit with P.S.1? Remember when I asked you 'Where is that big Michelle Carollo smile?' I was referring to your *tough* look. You said, 'I gotta look tough!' Thus, now you own a diesel mechanic shop!" Michelle laughed and said that the series sounded unique and might be fun. The moment only added flavor to her new business undertaking; she was clad all in black, topped off with a sleeveless Guns 'n Roses T-shirt. You have to understand that Michelle could be a model for Urban Outfitters but would refuse to based on the soul fact that she hates hipsters, as do most artists. So as I sketched Michelle into her new business, I threw a black Peterbilt into the digital sketch study for good measure. I think it fit. The skull and cross bones made an authentic Carollo, the diesel mechanic!

H-meister and His Hair!

A friend named Hidenori Ishi, or Hide (Hē-Dey), and I met on a rooftop where I saw the strangest art I have ever seen. As my friend Rolando Briseño says when he attempts to convey a polite criticism, "Never Mind!"

When I was first getting to know Michelle Carollo, she invited me to this event on the roof of a flat in Lower Manhattan. Apparently, if you are lucky enough to get a tip from someone in-the-know, the thing to go to are these private one-night-event-only house parties. At this particular one-nighter I encountered some of the most bizarre sculptures I have ever seen: chairs made from prosthetics, male and female lamps and flowers made of... Well, let's not go there quite yet. Actually, one particular sculpture was really interesting. There was a stack of florescent light ballasts (probably 20 of them) that formed a mound in a corner, a corner hidden from the main floor space of the rooftop party. The viewer could see this eerie glow, like Dan Flavin and James Turrell had a baby and his or her nickname is Pinky. Anyway, it was in this crowd of unfamiliar people that I met Hide.

Although very quiet and introverted, Hide is an all-round great individual and very well versed in "Art Speak." He knows what he likes and enjoys holding a good conversation. A humble painting master, Hide worked for the well known artist, Takashi Murakami, but then like many artists could no longer work for someone else and continue to grow.

Hide bought a plane ticket to New York City, left his family in Japan, and like so

many others chose to risk living in the unknown, only knowing that he needed to be in New York. If he hadn't, I would not be writing about him. You see, that is why you move to New York, to meet people, shake things up and try to create something of your own. You don't really know what you will find, but you take the chance anyway. Hide chose to break off on his own. He came and set up a studio. Many young artists like Hide and me flock to The City to validate our work, create a market, and mingle and mix in "The New York Art World." There is no other place like it. You continually chase after that next "Bigger" show. You never stop working towards something you don't quite understand. You critique art, look at your own work, pitch another show, create your own magic, your own American Dream.

Within the art world there are many "cliques," very much like this book. You are reading about the posse I've chosen to hang with. Hide moves with a crowd that gathers around a gallery called Sloan Fine Art. A mid-level gallery, Sloan shows very interesting work, painters mostly. The work that I have viewed there is always good and high in quality—very focused painting. You often read about shows from Sloan in magazines like Art News. Hide has been involved in many shows at this space.

When you meet Hide, you notice his fashion. Although Hide will never admit it, he definitely has a bend toward coordinating and matching what he wears. Every time I have had the pleasure of meeting with Hide, or H-meister as I've been calling him, it always surprises me how fashionable he dresses in his own style, not trendy. His clothes are James Dean meets New York grit in flannel patterns. He is

cool, but not an untouchable.

I will put Hide in charge of a Lower East Side barbershop, mainly because of his hair cut: faux hawk meets a Mohawk with a Japanese haiyaaaaa thrown into it. Barbershops are an essential part of any community. If you have ever been to a barbershop, a real barbershop, they are Meccas of culture. Barbershops endorse daily news, security, community, gossip, in a gathering of all round human interaction. In the art world, barbershops become galleries and alternative spaces. For instance, artists like Jimmy Greenfield (A local gallery owner in the Flat Bush area of Brooklyn) fiercely supports the community. Michelle Carollo loves her studio between Harlem and Brooklyn, so much so that she has a five year lease. Franklyn Evans has been operating in The Lower Eastside for years, way before The New Museum popped up in the Bowery. People identify with where they associate and live. Jeff Koons worked as a stock broker on Wall Street for Pete's sake! I have been into his studio twice, and let me tell you, the stock broker has an art business operation!

People in the art world care about where they hang, and the same for their art. Geographic location matters. So Hide owns the central hub of all news, The Barbershop, "Clip-clip-clip..."

Jimmy Green's Bagel Box

(Brooklyn, New York, and Berlin, Germany)

It was a cold Brooklyn morning when I woke up on a yoga mat between me and a foam brick that the day before had served as the base of a sculpture. I used a beach towel as a make-shift comforter, a towel stuffed in a T-shirt for a pillow, and a packing blanket that had previously covered a sculpture that I had finished months before with Jon Cowen. The sculpture was affiliated with a Project for the Venice Biennale. I had just finished a two month tour (Texas, Los Angeles, back to San Antonio for three days to give a lecture at Blue Star Contemporary Art, then on to Manhattan and Brooklyn). In the words of Jay Z "Can't knock the hustle."

Brooklyn was the last stop. I had the e-mail address and referral from a close friend of the art critic Robert Storr, and he and I were chatting over the e-mail, me with my ghetto Sprint phone that was the first katakana phone. I had been using it as my lap top. If anything, we artists know how to survive.

Jimmy and I met at the opening for the Venice Biennale piece. He told me that I needed to come see his space "Soap Box Gallery" in Brooklyn. I'm glad I did because that visit to Brooklyn's controversial Atlantic Yard started a great friendship. Up until that time I had never really spent much time in Brooklyn. All I knew was Williamsburg, and all I can say is "No thanks."

With Jimmy I first came to know the Brooklyn I have come to love. Located on Dean Street, the Soap Box Gallery is a small front-space consisting of an area no larger than twelve feet by ten feet. It is well lit and looks great in a photo. This, I

have changed to "Jimmy Green's Bagel Shop."

When you look at a salt bagel and a cup of high octane NYC dollar coffee after sleeping in a 30-degree studio and taking a shower out of a utility sink usually reserved to retrieve water to mix plaster, there is nothing better in the world. As artists, there is a strange brotherhood of "Hard Knocks" that takes some initiation. I consider myself initiated. Let's just say, I've put in my time walking through Lord knows how many big cities all over the world in an attempt to figure out how to validate not only myself and my ideas, but to sell work to keep moving dreams that simply won't stay in my own hometown. I've been there, done that. I've got my T-shirt and my traveler's voucher. Jimmy does too.

In New York City, the bagel is not a food. It is a religion. Much like the perfect slice of pizza (which I think is at the corner of Bleeker and Carmine Street, at John's Pizza), the bagel is more than a meal, it's an idea, an experience—a cheap, fast form of exceptional goodness. Each person has a chosen place of worship that they visit regularly. Mine is Bergen Bagels, the best salt bagel in Brooklyn.

John Cowan and I were busy folding over 2500 multi-colored paper airplanes that were going to fill a nine by seven by ten foot sheetrock sculpture that resembled a Brooklyn water tower. We planned to smash it one night with crow bars in front of an on-looking crowd. Then there was Jimmy Green, with his big smile coming in with that cup of coffee and that bagel. OMG! or "Oh My God" for all of you non-texters. I was here to worship at the altar of hot coffee and amazingly fresh bagels,

partaking of the morning communion of so many. As a matter of fact, the show at Jimmy's was called "This is my body, this is my blood." Coincidentally, Jay Z had just come out with his song "Empire State of Mind," and all the radio played was his Blue Print 3 album. That is when I got hooked on Brooklyn, and its music.

While I was listening to my new found love of Jay Z (I had never before listened to rap other than less mainstream names like MF Doom) and building this sculpture that I didn't know would even stand long enough to get smashed to pieces, I saw this little pile of plastic, multi-colored and odd-shaped. I had never seen anything like it. It stood out to me. It took me a couple of minutes, but as I pieced things together, I noticed that this little pile of multi-colored plastic started to look like an orb. Jimmy walked in with his usual casual grin, and as we talked he looked over on the desk. His smile cracked open when he saw the little orb, and he asked "How long did it take you?"

Delighted to answer, I looked up from folding paper airplanes, and said "Oh that little thing? A couple minutes. At first I didn't know what it was, but then I saw that some pieces fit and thought, 'Oh good, it's a puzzle.'" I asked where he bought it.

He gave out a big laugh and said, "I made it!"

As a chess player, I immediately thought, "Now I want to know this dude."

Jimmy knows everyone on his street, from the people above him and beside him, to

the people walking on the street and the people driving by. When you get to know Jimmy, you quickly find out that he knows people in all different circles.

Much like the owner of a small bakery in Brooklyn, Jimmy knows all who come to buy. He makes work to make work. Much like Joseph, Jimmy loves people and shares art with people for no other reason than to give them something to look at and something to think about. Jimmy, on the other hand, is no outsider. He went to Princeton, knows the New York art world pretty well, and has lived in Brooklyn all of his life. If you have met his wife, she is like Millie, a real pistol!

While Joseph and Jimmy are very similar, they stand alone, one in Brooklyn the other in San Antonio. To close with a line from Jay Z, "I'm so Brooklyn..."

Joseph's House of Many Colors (Brooklyn, Red Hook) or Casa de Tres

Colores (Berlin, Germany)

Located in a back street that runs parallel to the Hudson, far far away from Fifth Avenue and Madison is a little shop that has not one, but two very large personalities—Millie and Joseph.

Seeing this as fictional yet based on a real place, I will tell you of Joseph's Flower Shop. Joseph Almendariz is one of the most sincere people you will ever meet. Quiet and soft spoken, Joseph wears T-shirts and a Fedora with flowers protruding from most any visage of his brimmed pompadour.

Joseph's Flower Shop is a fragment of an idea. The real flower shop that I am speaking of is located in the newly gentrified area of Red Hook in Brooklyn, if you can call it that. Gentrified in New York is not like gentrified elsewhere. If you are talking about Skyrises and new apartments with pools, you're not far from the mark. You may see this in areas where there is actually green space, like Houston or Atlanta, but in a place that has been built on more than Rome in terms of the changing of the guard or father time, New York is second to none. To the viewer this may look like old buildings, but take a hint and look at the Bentley parked on the street. If this were a rough area, that Bentley would be on cinder blocks in less than you can count a New York minute. So this particular gentrified area of Red Hook on Ol' Van Brunt Street is far from trendy. A strand of old warehouses, the leftover relics of a not so long industrial manufacturing past, has a faded "for sale" sign for no one interested in buying, at least not for a profitable margin. This

ghostly portrayal is a sign of the times, in fact a great reason for the ironic title of this book "Business is Good and Everyone is Buying."

The words of Jay Z's song Brooklyn Go Hard come to mind when thinking of Van Brunt Street, a street that's taken a beating, but hardened with its concrete scars. Brooklyn has a rough aesthetic charm, as Jay Z describes it, "This is black hoodie rap, there's no fear in my eyes where they're looking at..."

Very much like Joseph, Brooklyn is proud of its history. Jimmy Greenfield will tell you that Brooklyn is in fact older than Manhattan, by a long shot. Jimmy, who owns Jimmy Green's Bagel Box, will tell you a lot of things about Brooklyn. He is an interesting individual. Joseph's shop is just a stone's through from Jimmy. Hop from the 7th Ave stop where "Happy Panda Chinese Take-out" is and you get off at the Bergen Street stop in Carroll Gardens. Walk down to Van Brunt, past the historic Fernando's on Union Street (a real place where movie stars frequent), take a left on Van Brunt, and you will see it: Joseph's House of Many Colors, three colors to be exact.

As an artist Joseph is an Outsider. I say outsider as a matter of categorization in that he has never received any real training in the academic sense. He will not accept this as a label because he will say he is an insider. I am telling you, Joseph should be on the front cover of a magazine called Raw Vision. He is a far cry from Henry Darger in that he is not crazy. (Darger was. Yes, he was anyone that makes hermaphroditic frays fighting the academic institution with guns and bombs based

on children's coloring books, creating years of history in books that are all hand made with over 50 chapters in each volume is a little, well, let's just say "blessed" to use a polite term.) Joseph is different from Darger in that he talks to a lot of people and is in fact a social being. Darger was not.

Joseph has the ambition and raw tenacity to express himself. He is willing to put it out there as he does with his city bank shows. I don't know if anyone actually looks at the stuff, but hey, better in their lobby than in his closet.

Joseph paints without a care in the world as to whether anyone thinks his work is valid or not, that is except his girlfriend, Millie, whom I believe is soon to become his fiancée. In Joseph's own words "I am creating a visual language."

Joseph is "the real deal" as an artist in that he has no ulterior motives other than to create. Yes, Joseph does want to succeed as an artist, but as he has told me "Rex, it is kind of hard to call yourself an artist when you have only sold 4 paintings in 6 years." That is a very true statement. Sales do matter to an artist. If anyone tells you otherwise, they are lying. Don't even think of bringing up Van Gough on this one. Van Gough had a brother who forwarded him cash all the time. And yes, his family was involved in the art world of the time, and yes he did want to sell paintings, he just never did. And yes, Van Gough was a preacher!

I see Joseph as somewhat of a Van Gough figure. Joseph is highly emotional, he is a trustworthy friend, and I saw him smash a painting I happened to actually like

very much. He slammed it over a sculpture that he had been working on for a year or so (the sculpture was a stack of bricks that resembled a ziggurat) in a state of what is, for lack of a better term, "in fretta e furia," or as my dad says, "fret of fury." Now I don't think that Joseph would go as far as to cut off his ear, but I do know he would cut a flower to give to Millie. The smashing of the painting that I liked was right next to his 12 feet by 12 feet corn field (Joseph was trying to cultivate corn as a metaphor for relationships, and yes, as a matter of fact, he did grow corn. But to our chagrin, the crop died). This is also caddy corner to Joseph's bee hive residence located in an old tree with a sign that says "Beware of the Bees (but they are our friends)" because he has people visit all the time, especially at his shows that he has every once in a while.

Joseph's Flower Shop (or in reality his dad's architectural office/ Joseph's galleria), might look like an organized disaster, or neighborhood associations nightmare, with various items and projects: flowers, bees, animals, sculptures, a corn field, a red bull can mosaic, a stack of pavement stones that is supposed to be a sculpture, an invention for catching light in the "fourth dimension," as Joseph would call it, a painting sitting outside for months to gather the right "sun patina," stack of rocks, an old shirt sitting to fade. I'm not sure if the shirt is there on purpose or just forgotten; for now, I'll pretend that it's art.... You get the point. Joseph's Flower Shop would resemble something like Frank Oppenheimers "Exploratorium" located in San Francisco, minus the fact that Joseph did not assist in creating the atomic bomb. He resembles the childlike genius in exploring and the willingness to fail in art, to create something new and exciting for other people to enjoy.

Joseph's Flower Shop is somewhat of a menagerie of wonderful experiments. If you want to buy a Van Gough sunflower, go for it. They are for sale, but if you just want to sit and enjoy, Joseph is just as happy to see you enjoying as he is to see you shopping.

Millie is not far behind. Actually, she is probably in front of Joseph. She talks a million miles an hour, and she does care if you buy a flower. She would say you need to, to support Joseph's vision. All the while, you can't help but notice that Millie is a knock out. I think Millie would smile if she heard me say that because it is true. Millie is all of 5 foot 4 inches, if that. She has a massive smile and resembles the women in those "Visit Mexico" calendars from the 50s. Millie is a real pistol and the apple of Joseph's eye, the way it should be. Millie is the Yang to Joseph's Ying, one of those unquestionably interesting relationships you can witness, the ones that just fit. In the words of Forrest Gump, they are like "Peas and Carrots" along with some corn, flowers, hats, paintings, bees, and strange stick sculptures.

Welcome to Joseph's house of many colors. Feel free to stop by any time. The door's always open as is Joseph, tinkering on something with Millie not far behind. There is a joke I once heard that says, "When Adam first met Eve, did Adam say 'This is good!' or did he say, 'Finally, someone who can point out all my shortcomings'?" I say this in jest because of the soul fact that at least a person is there to point out the shortcomings, only because of love.

Brooklyn, Burcu and Taco Trucks. (which became a Turkish coffee stand)

Burcu and I met while at an Artist Space opening. I said, "Nice Shoe's," commenting on these really cool green suede shoes she was wearing, and we've been friends ever since.

On the other side of the world from Washington Heights is Burcu, a 4 foot 9 inch Turkish graphic designer. Burcu lives in Williamsburg. Big B, as we all call her, is one of the sweetest people you will ever meet and is absolutely adorable. I don't know how anyone could not like Big B, it's simply not possible.

Burcu (or Bur-jew as you pronounce her name), is incredibly well spoken. "She can drink like a man," Michelle Carollo once told me. And I witnessed for myself that she smokes constantly, which reminds me of my grandmother, and anything that reminds me of my grandmother is a wonderful thing. Burcu is an amazing friend with whom it is always a treat to share coffee. She is one hell of a designer in an old-school design kind of way. Big B can hand draw a map that looks as if it were drawn by a plotter. No joke! I have seen it!

Michelle Carollo's opening for a space down in Brooklyn was one of the best show cards I have ever seen. It was so impressive! There is a reason she has a solo show at Pratt for Graphic Design! This is a side note, but one that must be said when talking about Williamsburg.

When talking about Williamsburg one thing will inevitably come up. The Hipster artists, which Big B is not, do not get along. It's like oil and water. One dresses poorly because they are poor, hipsters dress poorly but pay \$175 for an undershirt that looks like it hasn't been washed in 2 days, yet it smells like Downey. Blah! Nonetheless, Williamsburg is the home of Big B, the coolest person in the territory who is as far away from hipster as you can get.

My review on Williamsburg is that it is young, hip, and well— loud at all hours. When you think of Williamsburg, think of that scene from "This is Spinal Tap" when the guy demands that his amp goes up to 11 (10 being the maximum). That's Williamsburg, all the time! It goes to 11, and my own disposition resembles that of a retiree, so let's just say that as soon as I get into Williamsburg, I can't wait to make my way out again.

Williamsburg has two saving graces: One is a bookstore called Spoonbill and Sugartown, and the other is the food trucks. In New York two bucks might as well be a penny, but in Williamsburg this "New York Penny" can buy you some of the best pulled pork tacos you will ever have. I've sampled pulled pork everywhere from Los Angeles, Mexico City, to my hometown, San Antonio. My brother and I practically consider pulled pork tacos to be a major religious sacrament, our standards are that high. We have even found occasion to exercise our critical standards in questionable places, such as Granada where we toured a Nutmeg factory. It was a judgment call based on the fact that the biggest upgrade at the factory in the last 20 years was an automatic shell crusher which resembled a

World War II era ghetto rigged industrial strength cheese grater with a boat engine attached to it for good measure. The leather belt running the thing looked so old, it could have joined the ranks of The Pirates of the Caribbean. Needless to say, pulled pork tacos in Granada would not pass the Pedro Lujan standard: "It's suspicious!" And forget about any sort of sanitation department. It's a moot point!

Anyway, back to Williamsburg, Burcu, and her Turkish food stand. I tell you what, those pork tacos in Hipsterville are the salvation of Williamsburg. I really only need one, find myself ordering two, and end up with a stuffed belly. Inevitably, I swear that I will remember to order only one next time, but coming from San Antonio, you can never have JUST ONE TACO. It's communion! You can't have the wine without the bread, and vice versa. It's just not right!

So, when I think of Burcu's personality, I see a street vendor truck, mostly because of a phrase from one of my writer friends: "Rex, you can tell these tacos were made with love." Adam Tyson, or Tyzee as I call him, can be a little ethereal at times, but this time he was right on! When I thought of Big B's design, her personality and a fitting business, I decided, "Yes, Turkish food made with love. NOT TACOS, but Turkish food which can't be that far off from good tacos, especially when Big B is involved.

(Let me introduce this chapter. it was an early one... so it may be a little rough at first. But, like winding through the gears of a 1960's Boss Mustang, expect a little hiccup upon ignition... but get through those low gears, and onto the highway... and

man, does that engine run! This chapter is very much the same.)

Faberge Eggs & Aenon's Bike Shop

(Berlin, Germany)

Relationships are like Faberge eggs, intricately woven and very fragile. At the same time, the egg is said to be one of the most stable and strongest designs in nature. And what makes Faberge eggs so lovely is all the detail. Now think back to all those past relationships with the people you have known since you were kids. How many of those people do you still speak to? I can tell you of a few, namely a guy named Dave and another named Mikey, and three girls (now women): one named Michelle, one named Felicia, and Felicia's mother, Gail. These friends make up some of the details in my life, almost like family. I say "almost" only because nothing can take the place of family for an Italian. Sorry, just the way it is. But in the end, every single relationship along the way shapes who you are today.

One of the most fascinating shapes I have ever seen in my life is a structure resembling an egg: a big, red-bricked dome in Italy located in one of my favorite cities in the world, Florence. If you look at the center of this city in the middle of Tuscany, you'll see the towering structure that nearly every place and everything in the city refers to. A guy by the name of Brunelleschi, or "Pipo" as everyone lovingly referred to him, solved a 200-year-old problem. This was during one of the most fascinating times of European history, the Renaissance.

For the center of Florence, an artist had conceptualized a structure to be the crown jewel of Tuscany. The problem with this crown jewel is that it had no crown! The logistics of finishing this jewel had not been taken into consideration. In this time

period there was no delineation between artists, architects, sculptors, and craftsmen. Yes, there were the guilds, but in the eyes of people, artists were just tradesmen. Not much has changed. In America, whenever I say I am a painter, people ask me whether I paint interior or exterior and if I do sheetrock. Most of the time I just play along and say, "Sometimes I do." So when someone wanted a structure designed during the Renaissance, they asked an artist because "sometimes" they designed buildings.

This artist would make a model, give it to a builder and say, "Build this. Goodbye, I'll take my pay now." Then it was up to the builder to figure out how to make the thing stand. This was a problem. The design of the crown jewel was so large that after finishing the bulk of the church, no structure or knowledge within Italy could solve the problem of sustaining the load of the roof. The weight of the structure would quite literally break the bank and the church. It just couldn't be built. So for 200 years the church of the little flower sat exposed, which for a Catholic, much less an Italian, was quite a big deal. It was in the shadow of this problem that a peculiar rivalry started between two Florentines, Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti. They both were trained goldsmiths, both very talented, and both very ambitious. Needless to say, their paths would cross more than once in the span of both of their lives.

As I put it in a letter to a friend:

Relationships are important. They are nothing and they are everything. Give them time, they will grow. Stop calling, writing, and thinking about someone, and they

will fade. It's just that simple. The funny thing about these relationships in life is that some of them become rock solid. They become the thing that I have come to treasure more than anything. A full life is full of people, and guess what? That is a double-edged sword. It is also full of all the drama it brings. But you know what? All the drama is worth it because these relationships can challenge you to accomplish more than you ever imagined. Reality is more complicated than fiction.

So "Pipo" Brunelleschi was an architect. He ran off to Rome, legend has it, with Donatello (who was young at the time) and spent quite some time studying the remains of ancient Rome. There Pipo undoubtedly saw the oculus in the pantheon. Upon returning home, the church he grew up around still had a problem; not only was there no roof, no one from his era was even close to solving the puzzle. Many tried, but nonetheless, nothing had been accomplished. Finally comes the part with the egg.

I'm going to paint a picture of a business lunch for you, to make a long story short and to get to the point of the Faberge egg reference. Brunelleschi, upon returning to Florence, set up a meeting with the local officials. He brought his lunch with him—let's call it a brown bag lunch. There he is, chatting up the stories he has brought back from Rome, along with an egg in his lunch bag. Most everyone in that meeting was probably thinking this lunch was a bad idea. They had tomatoes to tend to, and other more important meetings. I can just hear the murmurs, "We spent how much on this church? My dad was dealing with this problem 30 years ago. Shoot, over how many decades have we been talking about this? Do we really

have to talk about this again? Let's just stretch a tarp out and call it a day. I need to be re-elected, and I have a Bocce match to catch on the other side of town with the Medici's..." Then, at the low point of the meeting, when jokes are done, Brunelleschi brings up an old riddle, "How do you make an egg stand up?"

Everyone in the room looks at him and thinks, "This really was a waste of my time. This nut job really is crazy. Those Romans and their bad weather got to him. He's lost it!" Then Brunelleschi cracks a smile as he grabs his egg from his lunch bag. He slams the egg down on the table, and it stands—on its end!

Now, take that hard boiled Easter egg, and look at about two-thirds of it. Imagine it is cut almost in half, with the pointy end sticking up. Paint it brick red, add a little gold hat on it, and you have the dome of Brunelleschi, the crown jewel of the city of Florence. Needless to say, it took Brunelleschi all of his life to make sure the dome was done, a project that would end after his death. I don't believe he ever saw the dome completed, and when the dome was finished, to add insult to injury, guess who got to put the lantern on the crown jewel? His old buddy, Lorenzo Ghiberti!

The rivalry between Brunelleschi and Ghiberti began way back when they competed for the commission to do the baptistery doors. Brunelleschi was rumored to be so sore from losing the commission that he took off to Rome for almost 10 years. Nonetheless, Ghiberti's profile is brandished on a doorknob to the front of the doors' baptistery, but he is not part of the foundation, parked for eternity in the floor of the cathedral. Brunelleschi's body lies beneath the floor under the dome he

spent his entire life building, a place usually reserved for popes and royalty, not for old artists!

Back to the metaphor for Faberge eggs and intricacy. The Florentine dome is the center of a city just as relationships are the center of life. As you gauge everything from the dome in Florence, so you should gauge much of your life based on relationships. Coming from a person with Italian blood in his veins, I will tell you that relationships are what make life worth living. Inversely, they are some of the hardest things in one's life to keep together and on good terms.

Speaking of relationships and old friends, I must talk about my old New York friends with whom I started this "artists' life journey." We rode the same subways, went to the same conferences, and complained about the same things. I think John Cowen has a permanent indentation in his couch from my head! Thanks Vanessa and John for all those nights on that couch, and the cigars and cigarettes we smoked on your fire escape, some great memories.

In essence there were five of us: Sam from Los Angeles, Aenon from Hong Kong, John from San Antonio, and Adam from Philly; you include me and that is the five fingered hand. John still lives in Washington Heights and is still making great work. Sam now lives in the Bronx and runs his church space in the village. Aenon runs a gallery in Hong Kong, and Adam still goes to every party in New York, invited or not, and he has, I believe, 5 books under his belt now.

To look at Aenon is to gaze at an unusually large Asian man. His laugh is absolutely massive; it makes you want to laugh. It's this whole-hearted deep from the belly laugh. He is quite possibly one of the strangest people I have ever met. He runs a gallery, yet holds a PhD from Columbia in Atonal Music. The all-time highpoint of this crew took place when we were all in John's apt up on 168th street; John's wife, Vanessa, was still at Columbia studying medicine. There we were, "the five" along with a number of other people, busy being entertained by John's pet turtle, Jasper (Yes, named after Jasper Johns the artist). We were about to see a performance that was, for lack of a better word, Eclectic. I was about to witness one of the oddest songs I have ever heard in my life.

John Cowen plays his toy squeezebox (also known as an accordion); Aenon wrinkles a sheet of paper; Jonathan Atchley from California punches the keys on his cell phone; and Adam Tyson spins the background sound by the techno band, the Chemical Brothers. Everyone gets quiet, and then there it is. The song begins. Aenon's ruffling paper introduces a sound of distant thunder rumbling into a five minute voyage into an expressionist emancipation of music. Atchley (only moments before crawls on the floor commando style, biting people's ankles and calling himself a human shark with his hand on his head for a fin) is on his cell phone pressing buttons to add a beeping percussion accompanied by his rhythmic coughs. John Cowen pensively pushes and pulls on his squeezebox as he turns and gives Atchley a telepathic smile. This goes on for like four minutes. Then Aenon, after having his eyes closed for the better part of those four minutes, ruffles the vellum plastic paper again and lets out this Shhhhhrrrrrrraaaaaihhhh! It resembles

something between a Buddhist monk's chant and a little girl's scream. And this is the song.

This very well could have been a scene out of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The only difference is that I assure you there were no drugs involved. This is the New York I love. In no other place are this many people allowed to act in such a manner, while claiming to be seeking higher degrees! I'm telling you, reality is more fun than fiction. I only wish I could make this stuff up. It's that I roll with an eccentric crowd! It's great.

One day over lunch Aenon was busy describing to me how his classmates were discussing the interest of a piece that was composed, where in essence a bale of hay was placed in front of a piano, and the piano was used as a metaphor for a cow. The piano is eating (metaphorically speaking), and that is the song. This takes John Cage to another level! I have no idea where this is coming from, other than the fact that every time I see a discarded stack of shipping cardboard leaning against a wall, I'll say "How beautiful." I know, it's just strange. Can't explain it.

Why, you ask does Aenon own a bike shop? Well, go into the chapter on Bleaker Street Bakery and Base and you'll find out. Just as this book cannot be read one chapter here and one chapter there, the connections in our lives come together as they are linked one strand at a time. At times these connections are strained, at other times celebrated, and still at other times they find an end, like the center of a city where a problem once arose and needed to be fixed. Much like any city, there

must be a center. I hope at the center of all our lives we keep in mind it is the relationships that we share with people, however long or short, that make life worth living.

Aenon's Bike Shop is where you can come in and fix a flat, repair a gear, or fix a chain. Remember to maintain the relationships in life, like a well-assembled bike. It is the thing that will take you places. Now where would you like to go?

Happy Panda Chinese Take-out and Happy Taco

(San Antonio, Texas, before going to Art Forum Berlin)

After finishing any opening event, an artist will more often than not have an "after party," mainly to celebrate and vent with ones closest friends after a job well done. Believe me, you live for those after parties, for it is not the end when one has an opening reception... It is only the beginning. If a show is up for a month, that means after the initial opening there is one month to get as much press, sales, prospects and people seeing what it is you just did as possible. If you think a month is a long time, I assure you it is not. It might as well be a day.

I had just finished "This is My Body, This is My Blood" at Soap Box (Jimmy Green's space in Brooklyn on Dean Street), and I had just met Big B and her friend Aardon from Turkey (both artists) and there was a whole gaggle of New York Art Kids. There was Eric from Atlanta who was living in his studio and borrowing his friends shower for the time being. Sam Kho was from Los Angeles. Hide and Michelle Carollo came together, and John Cowen had just finished helping me disembowel the sheetrock sculpture which gave birth to over 2000 multi colored air plains. Jimmy and his wife were there with Jimmy's brother. There was Tyzee (Adam Tyson) who lived in the Village, but is originally from upstate. Carolina and her good friend Tomosino (Corrolina is a famous Italian horror film actress and Tommisino is also a film director); there was Pat, a photographer for Pace Wildenstean Gallery who had one of the largest tripods I have ever seen, as well as a number of other people who were in the know as to the whereabouts of our little opening. Robert

Storr had said he was going to try to make it by the space to see the work, so all in all, this was a good opening. People were seeing the work and more importantly enjoying each others company.

I can't tell you how wonderful these little openings are. As an artist you really live for them. You are surrounded by your peers, there is nothing more satisfactory than a project well executed, and an opening where people show up. One must understand that the career of an artist is long and grueling, much like any other profession that includes creativity. It takes years of dedicated focused work to even get close to any kind of recognition. But, like the panda holding the cupcake up high for everyone to see, artists need to give it their best shot and show people what we find to be so beautiful.

I was thinking one day and wrote a little idea down about the nature of an artist. "It's funny, as an artist, one's greatest gift is the ability to entertain oneself hours on end. The hardest challenge as an artist is to overcome that very same gift." I mean this in the form of creating something that communicates to people. The argument has been made that art exists without the viewer ever being present. My response to this argument? Who the hell cares!

My friend Patrick Winn, an architect, put it so well in his artist statement. I will share this with you. I have thought about this many times since Pat wrote it in 2008: "To create is a gift. Manifesting this gift with others is a blessing, and without these people there is no gift."

Pat pretty much hit the nail on the head.

The next question is what does Chinese take out have to do with this book? The answer is simple, survival. If you have ever visited New York City for any period of time, you will see these little Chinese restaurants. They are unmistakable, and they all carry with them some of the best 5-dollar lunches one can have in the city. We call it "the 5 dollar box" because of the nondescript cellophane box the piping hot Chinese food that the food comes in. I lived off those boxes for years. They were all I could afford. John Cowen and I usually get a box every time we go to the MET or when we are up in Washington Heights at his Apartment. Then we go get a cigar.

If you look at the painting itself there is a sign that says "Happy Taco." This is a real place located on the 7th Ave stop on the way to Jimmy Greens Soap Box Gallery. I would eat one to two tacos a day! For a kid from San Antonio there is no better smell or familiar taste than a real beef fajita with onions and as much hot sauce as you can stand. Now the hot sauce in New York is nothing like the hot sauce in San Antonio. I'm telling you there is something about it. San Antonio has a sauce for every block that twists throughout the Alta Vista and Monte Vista neighborhoods (which is a lot); that is where Hausmann Millworks is, the studio program I help direct with my family. For a kid from San Antonio, there is no better place. My friend Burcu and I (Burcu's Coffee in Brooklyn) talk about Happy Taco often with fond memories.

Happy Panda Chinese Take Out: Sharing the 5 dollar box with the artistic community (and the rest of the community of NYC) since forever. It's a familiar site to any New Yorker—and a wonderful smell too!

Expansion Pack: Business is Good and Everyone is Buying - Even the Big City isn't Big Enough (on a plane to Berlin from USA to visit Art Forum Berlin)

I started this series to explain the New York that I have discovered over the years. Now on a plane to Berlin, Germany, to visit Art Forum Berlin (the international art fair), I'm traveling to a country I've been trying to get to after seeing the work of Anselm Kiefer, a German artist. More than four years ago, I stumbled across Kiefer's work at Art Basel Miami in an old warehouse space in a back alley of the Florida city. Finally in Germany, I began to appreciate that my friends stretch not just across the U.S., but the world, and New York is the international crossroads I have been exploring along with new friends who have navigated the same city of convergences.

My first effort at travel came when I applied for a Fulbright Grant. The U.S. approved my application, but unfortunately the Italian authorities made a less favorable decision, concluding that my proposal had too much travel involved. So I set my course to the Art Forum Berlin on my own terms after meeting a person in the most unlikely manner. I was introduced to Monica through a lady who collected one of my first "archaic photoshop" pieces. Monica is a international booking agent/curator who runs a web site in Berlin Germany who tries to link Berlin and America, thus the name of her company is "Art Link Berlin." All I can say is "Nothing will ever take the place of hard work and calculated risk, even if the risk is not so calculated. It just kind of happens.

Business is Good and Everyone is Buying was supposed to be about New York. Well, that was when I wanted to move to New York. Now I am quite settled into the role of the "International Texas Artist," or as I like to call it "A Texican in NYC." Visit New York City part time, ya know? I'll hold a studio and go back and forth.

I started this series trying to find why I needed to go to New York in the first place. Upon coming back to San Antonio, I found a few more things than when I had left. I wish I could say that my coming back was a storybook re-entry into the world that I had left. It's a little more complicated than that. With so many unknowns no matter how much council I seek, I am only sure that there are no right answers, just choices, and life's little surprises.

Needless to say, my return to San Antonio has been a good one. I suppose I will always be traveling somewhere else, just kind of the way the cards stack for an artist. If you want to be international, guess what? You can't do that from the comfort of your home couch. "One cannot wrestle at a distance," the writer Glemm Packiam said. One of my mentors, Tim Blonkvist, once told me "Rex, if you stay here (San Antonio) you will always be traveling out." I like the sophistication of Dallas, I love the ambition of Houston, and as for Austin, let's just let that one alone. But for now I find myself in San Antonio, and it is in San Antonio that I will linger, until some things are figured out.

In my wrestling with personal relationships, family relationships, ideological shifts, and with business strategies, basically doing "what a man's got to do," I have

learned much about myself, and I consider it a true joy, even with all of the challenges. The one thing I have found, more important than anything, is what wonderful people I have in my life: The people with whom you share lunch, dinner, breakfast and coffee are what make life worth living. You just have to hope you have enough cash in your account to pay for the meal, and that you have a profession that can sustain your way of living. Thus "business is good." As my brother once told me "Rex, all there is is coffee and conversations. Nothing else matters." To this I say, "Brother, those words are profound."

So this new jaunt of the book is an unexpected U-turn. The city limits of New York cannot contain it, not even with Brooklyn and Queens in mind. No, so in this next set, San Antonio lays its claim in New York City and the five burros. The places in the city are still based on real places and have just picked up a few more tenant personalities along the way. By all accounts of my plotting and planning, I should be writing this from my Brooklyn apartment, which I don't have. So as I conjure my place in the city while I am on a plane to Amsterdam and then to Berlin, life twists and turns, as does this book.

Heaven is About 1 Hour Outside Kansas City (on the Missouri side)

Heaven is

The place where

Happiness is

Everywhere

--Langston Hughes

I was in the car with "The Běbě" (Clair), and Noel who was "stuck" on the same line of a song, repeating it at least one hundred times. The girls' father, Darin, was hanging on to a fine thread of sanity as he said "I can feel it everywhere. Noel, if I hear that one more time, I'm gonna pull the car over." I thought she sounded great, and I think the girls knew it. Darin drove as Shannon took care of Little Clair, who just the day before was dressed like a bunny for Easter. We were on our way to Lisa Lala's house on Lake Lanawana. I know, it sounds like I'm making this up, but I assure you Lisa Lala is as much a real person as Langston Hughes.

We came up the crest as Darin said, "Man, this is in the boonies! I've come out here maybe three times in my life." We parked the mini-van and walked down some stairs. Up to this point all of us were wondering if we had the right place. Then the door opened.

If I were to tell you that Heaven was about an hour outside of Kansas City, would you believe me? Well, if you haven't been there, you need to visit. I think God sits on an icy couch designed by Phyliss Pease, when he wants to watch a movie.

I met Lisa Lala through Darin White, and Lisa met him through his wife, Shannon. She was supposed to have a cameo appearance in a show called "The White Show" put together by Darin and Shannon in 2009. The show then traveled to San Antonio, Texas, after I had participated in its first show in Lawrence, Kansas, followed by a long bout of shows in Los Angeles, Brooklyn, NYC in the West Village and San Antonio. To be quite honest, I wasn't expecting a whole lot when I agreed to be in the show. I had participated in the show because a friend had juried it. When I saw the show I quickly changed my attitude, something I need to do more often. I wrote a check after selling a big painting, worked with Darin to bring it down, and the rest is history.

Less than a month later Lisa came to San Antonio with her "List Wall Project" (less than 48 hours after I returned from Art Forum Berlin). We had a bunch of people come out, not as many as I would have liked, but a good 100-person group. But as Lisa put it, "I could tell these people really considered the project. They really cared and knew what they were looking at. San Antonio is a great place to be from." So all in all she was happy. I don't know how, but I ended up in Kansas and Missouri looking at Clause Oldenburg's shuttle cocks.

Now on to the parable of a pear.

I was sitting on the third story of Lisa and Bob's newly finished contemporary home, and I had a pear in my hand. I was sitting there thinking on things, and I looked at the pear, a small round, reddish object that less than two hours ago had

been quite pleasantly nestled in its basket. I now had the pear in my hand. I was thinking about how lovely the pear was. And then I looked at a squirrel in a tree. I then thought of the pear tree in our backyard in Boerne, Texas, and how I never really wanted a pear from that tree. Come to think about it, I never really think of the tree. To my point, we as people always want the pear tree, the expense account, the larger savings fund, the bigger newer car. We always want something else. But when we have what we need for the day in our hand, right there, it's just enough.

I am learning to enjoy one pear, for now, in this moment, and then the next moment will come. I have my fair share of insecurities and worries, as does everyone else, but ya know what? Life is just fine.

Life Is Fine by Langston Hughes

I went down to the river,

I set down on the bank.

I tried to think but couldn't,

So I jumped in and sank.

I came up once and Hollered!

I came up twice and Cried!

If that water hadn't a-been so cold

I might've sunk and died.

But it was
Cold in that water!
It was cold!

I took the elevator
sixteen floors above the ground.
I thought about my baby
And thought I would jump down.

I stood there and I hollered!
I stood there and I cried!
If it hadn't a-been so high
I might've jumped and died.

But it was
High up there!
It was high!

So since I'm still here livin'.
I guess I will live on.
I could've died for love—
But for liven' I was born.

Though you may hear me holler,

And you may see me cry—
I'll be dogged, sweet baby,
If you gonna see me die.

Life is fine!
Fine as wine!
Life is fine!

Day Two: Museums, Jessica Stockholder, Stretch and permission

The day was a whirlwind. Lisa and I set out on the day a little suspicious of what it may hold. Lisa had put in some calls to some curators, galleries, local art organizers and nonprofits. All I can say is that Lisa Lala is well connected in Kansas City. Everyone knew her and was happy to see her. We blasted around for the better part of a day in her little Mini Cooper, zooming around and talking about art, life, ideas on artists and art organizations.

Our day started at a contemporary art museum and ended at a Jessica Stockholder lecture at a community college. Don't let this fool you. This community college is about one of the spiffiest campuses I have ever seen. It would make any contemporary art enthusiast drool. It had a collection in it on par with The Roubelle Family Collection in Miami.

I won't go into the details of the day. All I can say is there are some really big

personalities in Kansas City, each in their own way. A guy they called Stretch, a friend of Jimmy La Floor or "Jimmy La Foure," screamed with a French accent was one of the biggest. Another personality that stuck out was Jeff Becker of The Arts Incubator, a program that reminds me of Hausmann Millworks. His pleasant disposition and hard working mentality, riddled with an altruism that is unfettered with quiet contentment in his organization and a job well done was reassuring. It was nice to see someone dealing with the same daily issues I deal with at the mill, like hanging fresh sheetrock and keeping the buildings inhabitable on next to no budget.

The galleries were...well, galleries: Closed off, quiet, reserved, not showing any cards. But I understand. The environments were on par with any Miami, New York Chelsea/Lower East Side or Berlin gallery. The museums, in particular the BLOCK museum, are "WOW" is all I can say. Everywhere is the same. I liken it to this poem out of Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll, the sections "Through the Looking Glass":

But I was thinking of a way
To feed ones self with batter,
And so go on from day to day
Getting a little fatter.
I shook him well from side to side,
Until his face was blue
'Come, tell me how you live' I cried

And what it is you do.

You can change the last two lines in this book to

Come tell me how to live I cried...

And what I am to do!

What made Lisa Lala's house Heaven was not the physical structure or placement of the building. It was the people and the context by which the building existed.

When I got to Lawrence, Kansas, I met Darin and Shannon White. We hung a show in an old unused space. I met with a number of very interesting people, one of whom was Linnea Spransy, a former grad student from Yale, who now runs an institution called "The Boiler Room" located near "The Bottoms" of Kansas City. She's a wonderful girl with big ideas and high standards. I then came to Lake Lanawana with Lisa Lala and bombed across Kansas City meeting every type of organized eccentric one could imagine. All the while I thought to myself, "I know these very same eccentrics in San Antonio. How can they meet one another? And how can we as an art community reach more people both to find new art buyers, encourage artists to keep fighting the good fight, and keep revitalizing and breathing life into a society that is exceedingly untrusting of artists in general. At the end of the night, I listened to a lecture from a lady I had wanted to meet for the better part of four years—at a community college nonetheless, the dean of Yale Sculpture at a community college! I never saw that one coming.

Heaven is simply the place you find yourself, surrounded by smiling faces with enough "mana" for the day. Heaven is where community and common interests collide to create joy. That is Heaven, to me. Heaven, this particular last couple of days has moved to Lake Lanawana, with not Peter but Bob and Lisa holding the keys, for today anyway. Not to sound sacrilegious or anything, for I am a spiritual person, and I very much do believe in Heaven and in a Hell. But I do not believe life is to be taken so seriously as not to sit back and laugh at oneself.

Which brings me to my third point: communion and Oreo cookies.

My entire life I have wrestled with my weight. I have always been "The Big Dude." In the words of a close friend, "Rex, you never were the 'fat guy,' just a big dude, like a bear or something." In dealing with this issue, a lot of insecurities have become realities for me, something I have been working through and something I have found, to my surprise, everyone deals with, even skinny people who have no right to think they are unattractive deal with the issue of "Do I fit into this?" With this realization I have found that I love fashion, a point driven home to me when I saw Andre Leon Talley rocking a red robe at my graduation at SCAD in Atlanta in 2006. I said to myself that day, "If that guy can look good as a big dude, why can't I?" I also have taken a liking to Kanye West and his ability to throw temper tantrums on stage and get away with it, while looking like a SoHo trendsetter.

All I can say is I am looking at a lot more Vogue and a lot less Art Theory. I don't

know if that is a good thing. It's just A thing at the moment. I started reading Vogue just to get a glimpse into the world of a girl I was interested in dating. I tried to get a clue as to what in the world is going on inside of a woman's head. Dang, is all I can say. Women are fascinating. I balanced out Vogue with Martha's Vineyard and Southern Living, with a healthy dash of Rachel Rays cooking whatever. I also read Popular Mechanics and American Muscle Cars and Lowrider Magazines if that helps clear things up (or muddy them) and assure any readers that I am very much in touch with my machismo!

Let's just say this. I have tickets booked for next year's Fashion Week not only in New York, but Kansas City.

Then I get to the Oreo reference. I did a series called "communion" some time back with one of the photographers from the Millworks. We ran around and photographed all the meals we were eating. I was very cautious to release those photos because of the religious connotations and the fact that, as a religious person, I would in essence be committing blasphemy. Well, I think I have wrestled through that subject, as I have wrestled with my love of fashion and my personal relationship department.

In Berlin, I was watching the movie Dogma put out directed by Kevin Smith. It was funny as Hell. I found it incredibly witty, and if you actually took the movie seriously, we need to have a talk. In this I found one can actually poke fun at what they believe just as much as believe in it. I think it is actually quite healthy.

So while I was at Lisa's, I ate Oreo cookies and wrote. And you know what? I probably gained three pounds because I realized my shirt is fitting a little bit tighter. Which may be okay for a dude that weighs 185 and is in good physical condition, and for a girl who is up to snuff on her eating program and is looking quite saucy, but not for a dude that IS NOT 185. That is not a good thing! Well, that is why we have gyms, and Weight Watchers.

All in all, is heaven really a house on a lake?

Is good Ol' Peter at the gates with his set of keys?

Those questions will not be answered in the reading of this book. If you are looking for those kinds of answers, you picked up the wrong type set. If anything this book will more than likely sit on a coffee table and shuffle around like so many other things, like a coaster. Or, if the book is lucky, it will sit on a dusty shelf of a museum curator. Not to be defeatist, I'm just saying I have been in a lot of curators offices, and I have seen a lot of books, and I have been in a lot of houses with art in them with a lot of books that have never been read. This is my fourth book mind you. It's not my first rodeo.

But, if you are reading this book, I hope you will get a glimpse into my friends, the art world I have come to love, and the people that mean so much to me. Life is

made up of the people in your life, nothing more and nothing less. Let's just hope you have enough in the bank account to pick up the tab. Off to the next meeting.

Pralines, David Van Hee, creativity and the definition of "talent"... and living in the future

Yoko Ono once said "I think I live in the future."

I Heard this when I was in a group show with her. She had a fly piece in the show. I was in the lower level of the show, but was happily placed across from Dennis Oppenheim (an artist whom I very much enjoyed in books, till this point). This is where I first met the man, in person and not in a history book. He had his dog with him, a massive horse-looking beast with hair as wild as his. Oppenheim was wearing a blue coat. I had made plans to visit his studio on three occasions that never quite materialized. I still remember the day. I was sitting outside of a mall on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn; my cell phone (which was a piece of junk) kept dropping calls. In frustration, after the third call dropped, his studio assistant said "Send us an E-mail." That was the last time I was to speak with Dennis Oppenheim. He passed away a year later. I remember the day because I stood waiting at the doorstep of Robert Storr. Literally. We were supposed to meet for coffee at his home. I stood there with my box of assorted dried fruits. Mr. Storr had to cancel the meeting, which I understood. That man is one of the busiest people in the art world. I later spent an evening chatting with him after a one-hour meeting in his office and two unlikely run-ins on the train back to Brooklyn. Mr. Storr is one of the most fascinating and genuine people I have ever met.

It was a cold January day in Brooklyn. After I left Mr. Storr's home, I went to go get a slice of pizza, when I received a text from my good friend Michelle Carollo:

"Dennis Oppenheim died." Then almost two seconds later "Dude, Dennis

Oppenheim passed away," from John Cowen (another close friend). Both of my friends knew how I felt about the man's work. I loved it, and despite the fact I never went to his studio, even though I was only a block away a few times, I respected him greatly.

The next time I was in Brooklyn and I received a text was much more hospitable. I had a warm enough coat and an apartment with a heater, thanks to Maddy Rosenberg (a wonderful friend). Maddy is a painter, and a damn good one at that. She runs a gallery that is quite unique. Central booking located in DUMBO (Down Under The Manhattan Bridge Overpass), just a hop, skip and jump from Jacques Torres' famous chocolateer. Best hot chocolate in Brooklyn, it's like a liquid candy bar.

Yoko Ono's seemingly "artsy remark" finally made sense to me while I was making pralines one day. I was making them for my mom to take to my uncle in Utah (who is part of the 10%, non-Mormon population), a fact we enjoy joking about every time we visit. No offense to you Mormons out there, I have debated hours on end with a friend who went to Brigham Young. Your beliefs are your beliefs. That is what makes the world so fascinating, varied views and histories.

As I made the Pralines, the sugar boiled. I added the butter and the vanilla, and I'm telling you, you don't want to know what's in them. Let's just say take a spoon, dip it into your sugar bowl and just start eating. This of course won't stop me from having one, which just would not make sense. This is a time honored Texas

tradition—and one must honor tradition.

If I am to make sense of the Yoko Ono quote above, I must explain with the second part of the praline story, the plate which came from deep in the hills of Kansas at the studio of David Van Hee. If you haven't been to his studio, do yourself a favor. Book a ticket to Kansas, meet up with Darin and Shannon White, grab a burger at The Casbah or "Burger Stand," and go to The Lawrence Art Center. Ask for Ben. He'll take you from there, and get ready for an adventure.

David had made these wonderful little plates that were completely non-functional. I would say that they are a tile, but I would be misleading you. They are warped like a bent break roader (for all you mechanics out there, you can understand what I'm talking about). He gave them to us in a care package, old mailing envelopes stuffed with a tile, and a sign: Mine said, "Bio something-or-other" and "Thanks for coming to the studio."

These, non-functional art, tile, plates were quite beautiful. They reminded me of the line drawings of Matisse, with the brush quality of Picasso—blue and white, that was all. I asked my mother just the day before "What on earth do we do with these?" Then came the pralines! This moment struck me. Finally all the stars aligned, "Champagne fell from the heavens" as put to us so eloquently by Nicholas Cage In The movie "Gone in 60-seconds," and all was right with the world. Then, right then and there, I found out what "I think I live in the future" means. This so aptly put is the definition of a creative individual, regardless of form or manifestation. Art, or

should I say "creativity," is nothing more and nothing less that a chain of circumstances, materials, preparation, time and life itself—a willingness to accept things as they are, but not stopping there and accepting things and working within those parameters as best one can, allowing life to filter in.

Education gives you a foundation, time gives you knowledge, the school of hard knocks gives you experience and hope gives you the fuel to fire that 8-cylinder engine if you're American (God bless Chevy big blocks), four if you're Asian (a Civic rice rocket) or if your into Ero-imports (the wonderful S-class Mercedes).

Creativity and all its forms, functions and ideals is nothing more than time and problem solving. Talent, as we have so aptly put it, is simply this: the ability to finish whatever it is you are doing a little faster than anyone else and still come out with a product that is exceptional. Back to Yoko and her quote of living in the future...

As for myself, I'm an artist. I'm not necessarily a maintainer of things. My dad tinkered all the time, he created. My dad is the truest artist I know. His creativity comes from a pure place. He's always thinking of how to make something better. In photos of our family trips we would find my dad's random pictures of a hinge on a door or a stop sign bolt thing or a curb reflector. We hated it! This was before the invention of the digital camera, before our ADD society could document every second of every day and post it on Facebook. I now understand that fascination. He was sketching. He is the opposite of my mother. She is a planner and a nurturer.

She loves to garden and is perpetually planning a new something or other. She could delegate to an army of help and still find things to do. She does this in love and it is often misunderstood. It is because she cares. This is why my mom and dad are a pair, two individuals who are really one. As much as one would like to think it could operate without the other, their daily destination to stay together is a testament of time. Being creative every morning they wake up, choosing to see the optimism and hope, yet still accepting the docket of the day.

As I said before, I am an artist. I take what is in front of me, try to arrange it as best I can, and then move onto the next piece. This applies to life as well as painting.

So I took those pralines and I stacked them on Dave Van Hee's plate. It was perfect.

As for Yoko, I think she means she is always looking to the next idea, staying in the moment long enough for the next one to come along, adapting past experiences and living long enough to know that tomorrow the sun will rise and a new day will start—like this morning, and a fresh batch of Pralines on an interesting art thing that is now a plate on a plane to my uncle with his little sister saying “Hi.”

...Texas Praline anyone?

San Antonio, my home.

To understand San Antonio is to understand a rare and wonderful gem. One of the best places to witness this gem is at either one of two bakeries: a Mexican panderia or a cup cake shop.

My good friend Lee Imbimbo and I went to lunch at Thai restaurant. I ordered duck and he chose the pork with curry sauce. My spice level was at about a 20, a sharp contrast to his 1, especially on a scale that only goes up to 10. I like hotter than hot food. We then went to a cupcake shop, on the north side of town. Lee lives on the North Side, outside the loop 410 area where many an interior San Antonian would NEVER venture. This cupcake was incredibly good with a chocolate foundation underneath and a glistening butter-cream crown. This goodness, however, did not come free. For any of you who have a cupcake crazed sweet tooth, you will find that the habit isn't cheap. A half dozen cupcakes will set you back about twenty-five to thirty-five dollars. Yeah, I know, that cup cake had better be gold plated and come with an insurance policy to boot. This gives you a good feel for the North Side. I grew up in the North Side, by the way, but my family's Business is nestled inside of VERY old San Antonio, as old as San Pedro Park, between the Monte Vista and Alta Vista area of San Antonio. Which brings me to the second part of San Antonio, the Non-north Side, but this, again, begins with a story.

Just this morning I was at Alamo Stadium, "The Rock Pile" as everyone calls it, and the oldest football stadium in Texas. I found myself looking at what was said to be

the largest Monoprint in Texas by the artist couple Kim Bishop & Luis Valderas, and artist Paul Karam. Together they form the San Antonio equivalent of The Three Amigos of art. They have been making this print for the better part of two years. The print stretches 4-feet tall and 90-yards long (in segments). It took over 60 people to hold the thing up for a big group photo, truly a moment of glory for the trio. What was more impressive was Kim proudly stating "This is the OLDEST stadium in Texas, and it's the last event it will have." Kim is speaking of the new Gordon Hartman project: The Scorpions Pro soccer team that is locating its main stadium in the heart of San Antonio at Alamo Stadium.

A side note of how I met Mr. Hartman and it's relevance to this book: I first met Mr. Hartman when I giving a TEDx San Antonio lecture at Trinity University. I had no idea who he was, but found myself sitting next to him saying, "Hi," my name is Rex. What do you do?" I think he was surprised to know I was oblivious as to who he was but found it kind of humorous when I gave him a "Boot Five," meaning he was wearing boots, as was I, and we gave each other what was the equivalent of a high five, but with your feet, thus a "Boot Five." I was the first lecturer, so I got to watch all the rest of the lecturers (great people), one of whom was Mr. Hartman. I said to myself, wow, this guy is great! He lectured about Morgan's Wonderland, a non-profit amusement park he developed for children like his daughter who has a severe disability. It's a great project. Then as I was driving down the interstate, I saw three billboards with his family trust on them. Yeah, I know who he is now! Actually, I really prefer being somewhat oblivious some times. I think people find it refreshing.

Beyond all of this, I come back to my metaphor for San Antonio. And speaking of rock piles, I'll talk next about a Piedra. No, not the rock as the word "Piedra" means "Little Rock" in Spanish, but the baked good with its namesake, the not so tiny pink pastry called a "Piedra."

Pink and festive, a Piedra from any particular bakery in San Antonio may set you back fifty cents, a sharp contrast to the three-five dollar cupcake of the North Side. I first came in contact with this baked good when I was a teenager. I was mowing lawns at my father's millworks business when my brother and I stopped to take a break. Toby, my father's construction foreman and lead craftsman, walked over to me and my brother and said, "Do you guys want a Piedra?" Coming from the Northside of town, where little to no Spanish is spoken, we said, "A what?" He said, "A Piedra, or little rock. Try one!" as he handed us the pastry bag. As we opened the non-descript white paper bag, we came in contact with "pan dulce" nothing short of mana! This little pastry has the consistency of sand in your mouth as it crumbles. You taste small bits of raisins and ginger bread. I could liken this baked good to a ginger bread cookie, shaped like a football with pink, brown or white icing glazed over the top. The icings really all taste the same. I know they are supposed to represent strawberry, vanilla or chocolate, but I think they really do all taste alike with only a small variation from color to color. So from then on, whenever my brother or I came in town, one of the first things we would do is head over to Bedoy's Bakery on Hildebrand to get any manner of baked goodies. Usually in the pile of pastries, or pandulce would be one or two piedras.

So, you ask yourself "What do a cupcake and a Piedra have to do with San Antonio?" I will tell you. Cupcakes, they come from the north as far as I'm concerned. I had never thought of a cupcake as a gourmet delicacy till I had them in New York. It was in 2006 when I was with some friends. Apparently, there was a cupcake shop that was making cupcakes that were about 5-7 dollars a piece. Lines were wrapping around the block to get some of the baked goodness. I heard this, coming from San Antonio (remember the 50 cent Piedra) and said, "What? A five-dollar cup cake! That's NUTS! And then I had a bite. I'll never forget that Oreo goodness. It was crazy awesome. As time had it, the fad started to trickle its way down to San Antonio, and we started to see gourmet cupcakes in the form of cupcake mobile vehicle units and at fancy party's. Now, gourmet cupcakes are everywhere, so much so that I know of 15 independent cupcake shops in San Antonio. For us, that's a big deal. San Antonio has influence from the American side of the border. We have German Blood in the hill country, Italian culture sprinkled in all over the place, Indian culture in the medical area, as well. So, yes we are an international city of sorts, we do have some large businesses sprinkled in that bring in flair from the West & East Coasts, and we definitely are a vacation spot with our River Walk. "The Cup Cake Effect," in essence is a metaphor for San Antonio as a multi-national American city, getting things like overpriced (but delicious) baked goods in our homes.

On the other hand you have the Piedra, weighing in at 50 cents (on the expensive side) but every bit as good as the cupcake from the East Coast. There is the Mexico

side of San Antonio that is seen EVERYWHERE. Lee and I have a theory that if a restaurant fails, it will become a Jalisco style Mexican food joint almost within months...and succeed! It doesn't matter if there are three in a row, they will succeed. I liken it to the bagel shops or pizza joints in New York City. Each place has its specific flair, and each one, even though they are right next to each other, will have a sustainable market place in this city.

As much as you have The Smith Family, The Maverick Family, The Wolffs, The Frosts or The Bowery family, you have The Guerra Family, The Gonzales, The Gutierrez, The Vega and The Martinez families. You have just as many Hispanic as you have Jewish, Anglo, German or Italian.

San Antonio is an old city. Its roots run very deep in the histories of both America and Mexico. The American history is as spotted and controversial as the Mexican history. You can see this in any number of places from the Alamo, to the Spanish Governor's Mansion, to the varying neighborhoods that wind throughout the greater city itself. The diversity of this place is what unifies it as well as divides it. Did you grow up playing Soccer or did you grow up playing football? Do you eat burgers or do you eat tacos? There are so many delicate, fragile and interesting estuaries that make San Antonio what it is, a town with a very old identity that isn't necessarily showing its cards all at once.

I grew up in this place. The working class is as important as the white color class. The West Side is as important to San Antonio's image as is its North Side.

Downtown is a mixture of tourism and law, Business and infrastructure. Our highways of 1604 & 410 connect us as well as divide us. You may find yourself having a beer at The Lion and The Rose across from the Central Market or "Gucci-B" as we call it, or at Joey's on St Mary's. You may find yourself having a Business lunch at Alamo Cafe on 1604, or grabbing a cheap dinner at The Jalisco Restaurant on Dewey & McCullough (An old Pizza Hut painted bright orange with the best \$10 pound of beef fajita you can find in the city). You may find yourself in many different places, speaking to many different people about many different things. If you are an artist as I am, I assure you that you will.

San Antonio's burnt grass in summer is a golden brown. It's ground is iced over dirt in winter when nothing grows. Seeing the faded bleachers of The Alamo Stadium today was heart warming. As I went to the car I looked out over the skyline of downtown, just months before lecturing with the guy who was going to develop it with a pro soccer team and just getting back from 12 cities in 2 months. I sit and remember, everything from New York cupcakes to the Piedra and coffee I just ate for lunch at Bedoy's.

The Parable of the Blind Swimmer and Tyzee's Book Shop

(San Antonio TX, preparing for Kansas City & Laurence Kansas... Now in Kansas)

David Rubin was sitting on his front porch waiting for me. David is the Brown Foundation Curator of Contemporary Art at the San Antonio Museum of Art. I was 30 minutes late as I pulled into his driveway. Not bad for San Antonio time, but an eternity for someone used to the urgency of a New York minute. I had just returned from the first Art Forum Berlin less than 72 hours ago. Within that time I had picked up an artist from Kansas City (Lisa La La), all the while texting and posting with my new iPhone to promote her exhibit opening at the Millworks.

Before I went to Berlin and before Lisa La La and David Rubin, I had taken the leap and purchased a new, old iPhone—not the latest one because I couldn't afford it. No, the 3GS which was on sale for the low price of \$86 because AT&T wanted to make room for the new 4G. Little did I know that the roaming in Berlin was going to cost me \$700 which negated the \$86 dollar deal, but that's another story. Now, with this new empowered mini-computer, I could text, talk, Facebook, take pictures, email, cook breakfast, talk to my brother and watch Netflix all at the same time. Perfect! As the band Bad Religion puts it, "I'm a 21st Century digital boy." All this to say, I am doing the promoting while traveling on half a tank of gas in my dad's old pickup because my Bronco is in the shop. Nonetheless, you do all of this anyway, to be 30 minutes late for someone on New York time.

As a result of the magical new iPhone, a group of more than 100 people were already waiting for Lisa to show up for her exhibit ('cause there's nothing worse than showing up to a party and no one's there). No matter how many press releases I sent from Berlin, there is no substitute for the impact of physical presence and phone calls. They need to happen.

So David Rubin and I were traveling companions, mostly on the ride to The David Shelton Gallery on the far North Side of town. David doesn't like to travel long distances alone, either that or he just wants a good conversation. When we hit the galley, I looked through the window and recognized 80% of the people in the room, so I spent a little time saying "Hi" and looking at the art, plugging Lisa's show coming up the next day and then spent the remainder of the evening smoking a cigar by myself and looking at a landscape painting that was in a studio next to the contemporary art gallery. All I could think of was how pretty it was, a thing one must never admit to in the presence of contemporary art. This wasn't contemporary, far from it. It was a landscape, bordering on one of those blue bonnet paintings that can be found everywhere in Texas. So there would be no intellectualizing over its significance. I was safe.

As a matter of fact, all I could think of was, "Contemporary art? Is there something wrong with me? Well, I don't want to be cured!" I like thinking and talking about art all the time. It keeps me busy and entertained, and it seems to help other people understand the nonsensical world in which I choose to operate. As my good friend and mentor Carle Rice Embrey said to me once, "Rex, from the outside looking in,

art makes no sense. But from the inside looking out, it makes all the sense in the world. There is a reason for all the stopgaps." After being in the art world for the better part of six years, I couldn't agree more with Carl. I haven't been in it long enough to have grown bitter, but I have been in it long enough to know some ropes, and remain optimistic.

When I was looking at the landscape I could only think about the artist, Banksy. He stencils letters onto cheap paintings he finds in thrift shops. Imagine an English countryside with the words "Not a Photo Moment" spray painted in stenciled letters over the landscape—that's Banksy! Brilliant!

So as the evening winded down, so did my cigar sent to me by Joey Scott who is also in this book as a cigar shop proprietor. Joey is more of a cigar aficionado than I am, by a long shot! I mean, the man takes the hobby to another level. Not only can he find some of the best cigars I have ever smoked, but he can find them at prices that are simply unimaginable.

So my time with David Rubin ended as he told me his story of the Blind Swimmer: "When I interviewed the late Surrealist Gordon Onslow Ford in the 1970s, he told me about a favorite phrase that Max Ernst had used for the title of some of his paintings: "The Blind Swimmer." What Onslow Ford was essentially explaining to me was his philosophy of life—keep moving forward, like the swimmer who is blind and doesn't know what lies ahead, but is fearlessly willing to go on the adventure." David and I got on a tangent about relationships and how people go in and out of

our lives at different times, for seemingly specific purposes. He brought up Jung and some other philosophical stuff, as well as the fact that he would write me a letter of recommendation to Yale, no problem. David is a curator. When based in Los Angeles, he was a frequent contributor to *Art Scene*. The man lives for art, he really does. He is not afraid to go to openings, or be accessible, or talk with people. He is not elitist, far from it. He calls himself a "Populist," believing that anyone can understand art, and I like that.

David has all the right to be elitist. He was awarded a fellowship at the Guggenheim, went to Harvard, and just curated a show called "Psychedelic: Visionary Art in Contemporary Society" recently reviewed in *Art News*. He is in the middle of curating some really interesting shows involving some big so-and-sos. I hope by the end of this book I can actually list the shows, but at this time, I cannot. That information is not public.

I bring up Adam Tyson and David Rubin in the very same chapter because they are very similar in personality. I just met Adam in Berlin for Art Forum Berlin. We are about to head to Miami for Art Basel Miami. Adam is a writer who has traveled the world. He lives in Greenwich Village and has written the better part of five books. He often screams "Freedom Lovers Unite," something that has perplexed me for some time, but in reality he is sincere which makes him quite interesting.

I am often skeptical about altruistic statements. I am not, on the other hand, skeptical of altruistic actions. In the art world, or in any world for that matter, I see

far too many people whose good intentions end with words. Actions are what actually move people, although I acknowledge that most of the time actions start with words. Adam Tyson is one of those courageous souls that do act on beliefs. Thus, 5 books.

Tyzees Book Shop is based on the store "Spoonville and Sugertown" located in Williamsburg in Brooklyn. I first saw the place when I was with Adam. We were going to some part of hippsterville (Williamsburg) to see a show by an artist whom I had met at the Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation in 2010. We saw the show, said "Hi" to the artist, and then like always moved on. After grabbing some grub at a taco truck in Williamsburg, "Tacos made with Love" as Adam puts it, he suggested we attend a reading at this really cool bookshop. Adam got an invite that said, "Please join us on Friday, July 9 at 7:30 p.m. to hear Arthur Nersesian read from his brand new satiric thriller, MESOPOTAMIA. Matthew Sharpe will also be present reading from JAMESTOWN." Arthur was quite a character reading his book about Elvis impersonators. I ended up buying a book from Matthew Sharpe.

As I entered into the shop, I was fascinated by the people in it. It was like the librarians convention had gathered. Instead of "freedom lovers unite" as Adam says, I thought "Introverts of book world, scream!" I had stumbled upon a small world where hardly anyone spoke aloud. Their language was in pages, words typed on paper rather than spoken with vocal cords. All the conversations these people needed were in neatly published and well organized sentences, softly whispered through the pages of books. I am sure that to some this is reassuring with the fact

that a book doesn't need any response. They can't talk back at ya. They stop when you put them down and continue when you pick them up. This convention of readers would rather buy a book, go home, and never go out again, except to get a little air and to make sure the world knew they were still living, or perhaps just get a few groceries and another book, basic sustenance. The fact is that if you really do want to disappear from life in New York City, one can quite literally disappear. It is the one city in which you can have everything delivered to your door and have a doorman pick up whatever it is you want and never actually go out. The rich spend most of their time in cabs and rarely have to hit the streets among the "everyday people." In New York City, if one does not want to be found, you won't be. This book store, Spoonville and Sugertown, seems to be a place where these individuals unite.

I find it fascinating how people in the book world usually hide behind glasses, eyes worn out by reading too much nine point font. I guess it is the same way stock brokers hide behind Versaci suits, artists hide behind paintings, children under their bed covers. All in all, we as humans are hiding behind something, real or imagined. I am as guilty of this as any. I hide behind many things. I will be the first to admit it. Everyone deals with reality in different ways. There was this quiet, striking attractive girl at the reading. She had long hair and looked like a model, but hidden behind a baggy "librarian sweater," grey worn out shoes, and cat-eye style 1970's glasses. I'm not saying this is bad or anything, but all I'm saying, as Pedro Lujan puts it, "Honey, if ya got it, flaunt it!" Go with it. Don't be afraid. Go get a dress! Go talk to people! Go out and live!" I don't know if I agree with Pedro 100%, but I

believe people should have fun. Go out there and live. Liberate life. Or as Adam says, "Freedom Lovers Unite."

I now understand Adam's statement. Basically, it is saying embrace every day, or Carpe diem as it is said in Latin. "Seize the day."

The Ghost Paleta Cart on Flores Street

“What is a Paleta Cart?” you might ask. The paleta itself is an ice cream bar on a stick, but not exactly what a typical American might imagine. I came to this conclusion after witnessing the paleta encounter of my friend, James Helm, who is a blacksmith in a studio at The Millworks. I tempted him with, “You want a Paleta?” Once I got one in his hands, he looked at the frozen treat with suspicion, but when James bit into that creamy goodness on a stick, he had to buy three more. Think Italian gelato at a tenth of the cost and a fourth of a gelato’s calories. I need to start a new diet line of paletas. It would make bank if I could only figure out the distribution.

As for the paleta cart, it is the means by which one usually acquires one of these creamy delights on a hot summer day. You will hear the cart before you see it, and your childhood instincts must take over. You should be on foot, or in an old house without soundproof walls. You also have to be in a neighborhood where there is little traffic, and on a side of town where you can find a paletaria (the place where paletas are banked in freezers), and then there’s the guy with the cart. It’s actually an ice chest fastened to a bicycle that is used to pedal the frozen fruit on a stick. This minimizes "broadcasting distribution" to use business terms (Remember, I was a business major for two years before I turned to art. Thanks, Communications Class 101).

Mostly, one sees these peddlers in the streets of Alta Vista, Monte Vista, The Deco District, Downtown, and I'm sure in both the West Side and South Side of San

Antonio. These are not the suburbs, at least not for some time. This is old San Antonio inside the loop where culture lingers like a ghost made of confetti. You will hear the tinkle of bells, or the annoying honk of one of those clown horns that kids used to put on their bikes, usually honking at an interval of three bursts at a time. The rest is a Pavlovian frantic flagging down of the paleta man that speaks little to no English and points to his stock of creamy goodness until you communicate your choice with the bulging of your eyes and nodding head.

Some of the flavors can be pretty bizarre, like pecan, vanilla, coconut, banana, tamarind, melon, strawberry, cane sugar, chocolate, cherry, avocado, pistachio, piña colada, red berry, pineapple, sour apple, lime, and pepper. And I haven't even listed any of the outlandish ones. These are all pretty tame. Just go check out a real raspa stand from the south side, the one with the chile powder, salt, lime, twizzler, Lucas, pickle juice and cherry syrup over ice. It's actually pretty good, but will eat the enamel off your teeth.

I'm not sure how long paletas have been around, but the ingredients of the paletas and the places the treat is sold embody Ole San Anto, as San Antonio is called these days in reference to the city's authentic culture. A friend of mine, John Phillip Santos, wrote a book called *Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation*. This book landed him a publishing career and a good amount of fame in Texas. I call John a ghost because of a line about Ole San Anto that he wrote in his book: "I lived on North Flores Street, and I can tell you that fog did roll in. It's eerie. It settles in places like San Pedro Park, it just kind of floats." And it is here that I

imagine John Phillip. He is between worlds. I don't know if this is learned, or who he really is. I think it's a bit of both, but what I can tell you is that John is always somewhere else. Even in conversation he is thinking about something that is in another place or dimension. When he actually talks about what interests him, I can track him to a point, and then I'm gone. I just can't follow. His conversations are almost esoteric, hermetic.

John always speaks with a smattering of English and Spanish, something I find charming as he refers to me as "Brother Rex, saludos!" and to Angel and Rolando as "Angel y Rolando." Rolando Briseño and Angel Rodríguez-Díaz are both prominent artists in San Antonio. They are the ones who introduced me to John Phillip. Rolando, Angel, and John all managed to live in New York City for a considerable amount of time, something that has earned them a sort of prestigious "Worldly Badge of Honor" in San Antonio. I guess I'm in the middle of that process, myself.

The first time I brought John Phillip to my studio at The Millworks, my dad was working in his shop. I yelled over to him, "Hey, Dad! Ya wanna meet a writer?" My dad yelled back through the grate that acts as a vent between his office and the rest of the building: "Sure, bring him in." When my dad saw John Phillip, he said "John, you old S.O.B.! How have you been?"

I think my dad secretly knows everyone of any merit in San Antonio. Much of his notoriety comes from my father's double grade-A millwork at half the offices in San

Antonio. After graduating from Trinity University as a drama major, he taught at the Southwest School of Arts and Crafts when it was practically still a nunnery.

So John Phillip and Dad reunited, and I got a back-story on the man. But the most important thing I get out of John Phillip, Rolando, and Angel is that they are on a mission when it comes to San Antonio. Everyone needs missionaries. The church needs them, the government needs them (they are called diplomats), businesses need them (they're called salesmen). I am an artist, a Texan artist who resides in San Antonio. I sell ideas. I sell history. I sell a story. My hope is that with these sales, my benefactors will have a richer life in knowing that another person is going through the same things: Love, belonging, the "American Dream," placement in this world, personal relationships, business relationships, cultural relationships. In this letter that I call a book, I am as much of a ghost as John peddling a paleta cart. In the same way John wrote *Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation* to explain his past, I explain mine through paintings as I peddle through the pages of this book, one stroke at a time.

David Almaguer and his Hotdog Stand

(somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean coming back from Art Forum Berlin)

David's work can be very innocent and almost childlike, as in his works "The Big Wheel," "Baby Face," and "The Gun Show" (A small child flexing his muscles with a Luchadore mask). But then his work can be extremely offensive, egocentric, and at times exceedingly sacrilegious, like the "Urinal" (A picture of a urinal in multiple colors), and "Mama's Boy" (A picture of Jesus with Mary 'Bling'" which I have chosen to look past, and focus on the image of Christ as an amazing rendering of Jesus).

The first time I hung out with David (outside of an art context), he took me to this little bar on the east side of San Antonio. He wanted to show me an art piece that he had completed a year ago with Robert Tatum. We got into his Crown Vic, and barreled down to Blue Star, past the King William District and into a side of town I had never been. We ended up at this little bar where there was this guy named Rudy who had a tattoo of a rather oversized woman on his arm. Let's just say a Botero painting pales in comparison to this inked portrait of a woman named "Rose." Rudy, said "Hi," and I said "Hi" back, and that was about the extent of our conversation.

David bought us two Lone Star beers for a buck a piece, and we sat there bullshitting. I didn't really say much because I was in such a foreign environment. I was just taking it all in. If you have ever been to The Mar's Bar with Pedro Lujan in New York (the last "dive" artist bar in Manhattan), this was about the same

experience. The place smelled like beer, old cigarettes and whisky. It was kind of homie in a way, a neighborhood watering hole, but I prefer digs like the recently re-opened Esquire in Downtown San Antonio (the Lone Star's cost three dollars there).

David took me to this place because he wanted to show me the piece he did. I will not go into the details because I would rather keep that between me and David. I still think about that piece. I'm not sure if it is still there, but I wouldn't be surprised if it is. All I can say is this: One day I was sitting in New York when I called David to say, "What's up?" and he told me "Honestly, Rex, New York shows are good and all, but if it doesn't begin with a SAN and end with an ANTONIO, I could give a damn." That's my good friend, David. He IS San Antonio, a web of wonderful contradictions.

I often say to people, if I show with someone, it will be with one of four people whom I see as artistic equals. One of those people is David Almaguer. I can't tell you exactly why, but David and I get along in the strangest of ways. We are from two different worlds: he is from the West Side of San Antonio, and I'm from the suburban North. I am Protestant. He is Catholic. He loves to wear T-shirts and just hang out. I love suits and formal meetings. He eats hot dogs and hates this restaurant I call "Jaliscos." I love the place and could eat there three times a week if I could. Actually, I don't know the real name of the restaurant. The name Jalisco is painted on the wall-sized glass window of the restaurant to advertise a type of cooking from Mexico. Nonetheless, the restaurant is located at the corner of

McCullough and Dewey in San Antonio in an old Pizza Hut that they painted Tex-Mex orange.

David and I don't have a whole lot to say to each other most of the time. When we talk we usually insult each other, going back and forth endlessly. I know he sees me as an art snob, and I see him as someone who refuses to be part of the system. David never went to art school for any long period of time, and really doesn't need to. David always says to me "Rex, when I went to school, they wanted me to change what I do, but I already like what I do."

David and I, at the earliest stages of the Hausmann Millworks, would always do things together. He would drive up in his old Crown Vic, and I in my old green Bronco. He would light up a clove cigarette and I would spark up a cigar. We would sit there and complain about whatever was on our minds. One day he came up with a packet of little dried up something or others. I asked him "What are those?" He explained, "Dude, it's lent! (As a Catholic, David does not eat meat during Lent, particularly on Fridays.) Want one? They are dried shrimp. They taste kind of like popcorn in a way." To this day I can not look at shrimp without recalling this moment.

There have been a lot of moments with David. Recently, he came into my little office and said, "Hey, Rex! Want to come check out my studio? I've got some new stuff I want you to see." We ended up, as we always do, complaining about sales, our busy schedules, and women. I knew something was different when David

stopped me mid-sentence which is a big deal. I usually do most of the talking. David is a quiet guy. He said "Dude, you're standing three inches taller; you're different!" To which I said, "In what way?" and he said to me "You're just different dude." Let me just say that I didn't have anything to complain about on the subject of women that day, to which David simply stated, "This is one of the best things that has ever happened to you," which meant a lot to me at that moment. There are just some friendships that are. I can't explain them because they don't need a whole lot of explaining. They just are. That's me and David.

So what does David Almaguer have to do with a hot dog stand? It all started at a time when I had very little money. All I could afford was a dollar hot dog from a Stop and Go. We've all been there before. When David and I were at the studios those hot summer mornings in San Antonio, we would go grab a slushy and a hot dog. David Almaguer and a hot dog stand just fit. I think David would like it that way. There he is, standing, watching, not saying much outside of the MoMA on 52nd street. A little kid comes up and he gives the kid a balloon, and the dad orders two hot dogs and a slushy. To my knowledge, there are no slushy machines on New York City hot dog stands. To which I make a suggestion, find a way to get one. You will boost your profits through the roof.

Day in and day out those hot dog guys are there selling, doing the best they can to make ends meet. The only difference between David and those other guys is that David will be hanging in MoMa one day. He just will! I can tell you that with confidence. He is that good. He has the kind of talent and commitment that

deserves a show at an institution like that. People need to see what he does.
because it is honest. Like a good ol' American hot dog, David is a staple and his art
is something everyone should experience, at least once.

Angel and Rolando: Mannequin Shop & Cultural Awareness Connection

(New York, NY - the JFK Airport)

Angel Rodriguez Diaz is a master painter on the level of Rembrandt. I remember when my mother and I visited the MET the last time we were in New York. She was very enthralled with a portrait by Rembrandt she had seen there. I have never witnessed the painting myself, but I can tell you this, my mother was really excited about it. She especially appreciated a Rembrandt portrait of a rather large man, and she could not stop going on about the power of the painting. I was busy closing up the gallery on Front Street, and shipping work back to the 25 artists I had included in an exhibit called "A Library of Texas Contemporary Art: With some friends that have joined along the way."

My mother and brother decided to go to The Frick, a place I have never been to, but a place that Jon Cowen swears has the best collection of art in New York. I hopped on the train to meet them in Central Park and then to go to the MET for a look at the Alexander McQueen show, which by the way was incredible. As we strolled into the MET my mother said, "Rex, you must see the Rembrandts! You need to see these paintings. They speak." So we strolled on by Picassos, Renoirs, and Rodins. On the walls surrounding us were masterpieces by some of the greatest artists the world has ever known. We passed by all the collections Jon Cowen and I have been visiting for years, and then we went into the room of Rembrandts. As I looked at all of the lace and filigree, I thought to myself "My God, they say the Dutch are modest, but come on! Look at all of that tooling! Give me a break! How is this modest in any way? This is unmistakably over the top! As I took

in this opulence, my mother was glowing. She gazed in awe, like a kid in a candy store. Then, all of a sudden, she made a comment that took me by surprise: “Rexy, Angel is just as good as Rembrandt.”

I didn’t give an immediate response, but I thought about that for awhile. I have studied art historically for years. I have read books, seen documentaries, gone to museum functions, and have dined with some of the world’s best artists and art critics—a road that I hope is only beginning—but none of those conversations have stuck with me as much as the one with my mother, a 5’3’ over-opinionated Italian, which I love about her, standing there in her little fashion-modest ballet flats. I said to myself, “Did my mother just compare a living artist to a master? A living artist that I know? A living artist whom I count as a friend?” Not only did she compare it, she said it as if this is a matter of fact, and she was sticking to it.

I thought on this and thought on this and thought on this. Finally, I came to the same conclusion. It just took me a little longer. She was right. Angel is a master! His use of layering in portraiture is uncanny. His sophistication in conversation is quite impressive. His knowledge of not only art history, but of society and the world is quite unique. He knows what’s going on in a national and international level. When you get Angel talking about a subject he is interested in, he becomes passionate, kind of like my mother did when she was so excited about the Rembrandts. I realized that my mom’s matter of fact statement was much greater than a casual exchange in the course of a museum tour. My mother, father, brother and I—and the San Antonio Art Community—know a living Rembrandt! Only he’s

Puerto Rican! I want to say, "Imagine that!" But you don't have to. Angel Rodriguez Diaz is alive and filled with passion, and so is his portraiture.

Now imagine a white flower tortilla with dark brown spots burned on by a hot griddle, or molcajete as they call it in San Antonio. Look at the burned spots as though they were stars in the night sky. Now imagine that tortilla is the size of Texas (at least metaphorically speaking) and it stretches across the sky. Take that tortilla and spin it. Let all the waves of energy keep spinning. Take that spinning tortilla and wrap in your favorite ingredients, be it charro beans, pollo, puerco or asada, making a burrito the size of a Super Taco. By this time, after filling it, the "cosmic tortilla" has not stopped spinning, but has slowed. Sprinkle fried crickets on it, and then cover it with yellow cheese, or if cheese is not your thing, use some mole (mole is a rich Mexican sauce to oversimplify), and add more crickets for garnish, or to taste. Sounds crazy, right? Well, what's really crazy is that none of this needs to be imagined in the tablespace of Rolando Briseno's work. The guy wrote an entire cookbook on Tex-Mex cuisine, with Mexican and Mayan recipes included! (Some date as far back as...well, let's just say the Mayans were probably making this stuff before the Conquistadores ever got there.)

Coded in his series of ten years, there are paintings of every imaginable subject matter from hairless dogs (Yes, the ones that Picasso was obsessed with.) to iguanas and to gourds with crickets spilling out of them. And get this, they are ALL edible. Furthermore, Briseno has personal experience with each dish, taste buds included! Rolando even paints with mole chiles and powders. He has absolutely no

reserve when it comes to materials. He will paint with chile, with ground leaves, with pigments, with masa (ground corn that you make tortillas with), with sauces, with words, on table cloths, CHEESE, and most importantly, lots and lots of stories! To summon all of Rolando's cosmic superhuman gourmet interests, he puts them in a book that is as outlandish and far reaching as this writing may sound. As I said, "Stretch that tortilla all over Tejas!"

There was a show at The San Antonio Museum of Art called "Moctezuma's Table" which is one of the most eccentric shows I have ever seen at SAMA, and I have seen some pretty outlandish things at SAMA, not to mention the exhibit with a statue in a case that shocks a statue of a Greek god with a Tesla Coil with the push of a big shiny red button. So I can say I have seen some strange things. To top it off, Rolando chronicles "Moctezuma's Table" with a publication of the same name which is quite possibly one of my favorite books because it's more than just a typical art book. You might even say that it's part cookbook? There is no cookbook quite like this one, at least that I know of with both ancient Aztec recipes and Tex-Mex "Fatso-Watso" plates. Rolando is a wealth of knowledge on just about every kind of Latino historical ethnographic subject imaginable, a man that, according to himself, spent the better part of 10 years in school because he couldn't decide what he liked. He just kept on reading, and reading, and reading.

Rolando's art career was birthed in the belly of the arts beast, also know as New York City, and has come full circled ending up in his San Antonio hometown. He, Tim Blonkvist, Carle Rice Embery, Gail Smith, John Senneff Sr., Andreus Andujar,

Jayne Lawrence, Ottis Parchment, Danville & Diana, Rene Barilleauxe, David Rubin, Louise Vega Trevenio, Mark Wiegand, Philip & Suzanne Arevalo, John Phillip Santos, Bill Fitzgibbons, Chuck Ramirez, Felix Padron, Eric Lane & Kelen McEntyer, Elda Silva, Larry Greaber, Angel Rodriguez Diaz, Mary Heathcott, Danny and Arturo, Gary Sweeny, Ansen Seale, Maralyn Landfier, Jimmy La Flore, and a number of others form the pantheon of San Antonio icons that have really set the path for the new generation of artists and cultural voyagers. I know there are many more, but these are the people who have had the greatest influence on me, of which Rolando is not the least.

No matter where I am in the cosmic tortilla of Rolando—on the brown burned spots of its New York, Texas, Kansas, Florida, California, or as far as Italy and German, or even China—my home will always be a burned brown tortilla spot in San Antonio, the center, never moving, pleasantly stubborn and resistant to change. In good times and bad or the progress that comes with time, there will always be the tortilla. It is people like Rolando that have made my artistic world what it is. The axis of this cosmic tortilla is pleasantly nestled between West Craig and Fredericksburg, about a stones through from the Millworks.

I am always glad to see Rolando and Angel at Garcia's where the tortilla spins every Friday, whether I am there or not. Where every Friday three brothers make their brisket, the brisket that their father made, a special family recipe that has been passed down from generation to generation. On the corner of Fredericksburg Road and West Craig in San Antonio, Texas, rests the small modest-looking restaurant.

The sign is faded and they usually close at 2 p.m. on the dot, except for the little lunches I share with Rolando Briseño and Angel Rodriguez Diaz, and occasionally John Phillip Santos, which often don't wind down until 2:45. Every Friday there is that smell: smoky and dry with a hint of green chile garnish from a little salsa container of tin. Angel always wants the homemade barbecue sauce that is so peppery it will give you a nose run if it's at the same table. The place I am speaking of is Garcia's Mexican Restaurant and their famous Friday Brisket Plate Special: warm flour tortillas, borracho beans, pico de gallo, and rice that has no rival. The plate is a vision that can only be compared to how an artist splays out his paint pallet of delectable twists. That's the brisket plate special. They nearly always sell out of it by two o'clock every Friday, and have forever.

Both Rolando and Angel are artists who were based out of New York City for over a decade. They frequented the shows of artists like Jean Michelle Basquiat, Andy Warhol, Keith Haring and Louis Bougua. Angel had his first studio in Brooklyn as did Rolando. In terms of artistic taste, Rolando focuses on cultural and political matters of social involvement and public works projects. Angel is mainly known for his large portraiture and recently for his public works projects, as well. I decided it only proper to set up Angel with a mannequin shop for and a small cultural newspaper involved in social awareness issues for Rolando called "The Cultural Adjustment Connection."

Located in Dumbo, Angel worked on painting make up on mannequins for years. So in a way he has always been a portrait painter, some for commercial purposes, and

others for self identity and self exploration. Angel's store would be a small one. I could imagine him behind the counter in his fedora, or sitting in the corner tending to the store, reading the arts and culture section of the New York Times, while sipping on a cup of coffee. Lavishly baroque curtains would hang on the walls. His shop would be one of those old world places, as though it had been there for a thousand years. Not too trendy at all, just solid. You know those places. They are stabilizers to the neighborhood. One of those institutions that not everyone knows a tremendous amount about, only that the shop has been there for generations. He would always be there, with a smile, welcoming you at the door in a quiet kind of genteel way.

Right across the street would be Rolando. There would have to be some kind of picket line going on, raising all kinds of hell about something going on with Latino rights or cultural injustice. Rolando would be there, probably in the back of the crowd. Yet there would be this jovial presence around. He has a calm, composed, self-confidence, almost quiet but in a very outspoken way. He is very passionate about what he believes in and is more than happy to tell you why he believes what he does. He can back his perspective, too! If you're looking for a history lesson, you will get an earful, with statistics to match. Rolando is a one of a kind, as is Angel.

Their little shops would host all manner of personalities, mostly people just stopping by to visit and chat about whatever topic is of interest that day. Every kind of walk of life would walk through those doors.

You ask, why Dumbo? Well, if you haven't been to Dumbo lately, it is one of the trendiest and most expensive spots in Brooklyn. The only difference between this new hip, yuppie-neighborhood and Rolando and Angel, is that there is nothing "hip" about Rolando and Angel. It's not that Rolando and Angel aren't fashionable. Far from it! They just aren't "trendy." They are solid individuals that are a wealth of knowledge, and I consider myself very privileged to call them friends. They would have been in the neighborhood before it was cool to live there. They would have been operating 20 years ahead of the curve, where the area didn't have all the trend setters walking through the streets looking for new business deals.

Mikey's Tuba Symphonium.

(Boerne, Texas - October 2010)

I carry this little notepad around with me. I jot down ideas whenever they hit me. I usually list ideas in it: titles for paintings, things that catch my eye, or interesting conversations I have. The list is kind of like a time box that I can reopen at any time and pick out a little gem and place it in a setting of whatever it is I happen to be working on at the time.

Here is a little list from the pad:

300-ton rosary

Visitor Parking

QUICK, DEPLOY GOOFY

Berlin by Morning

"You have no idea how little I need,
and how much I want my darling."

Secretariat

Memory of a Moment

Flash Bang

Sweet Little Thing

The world we wish we lived in

The first blank stare

The casual nature of ambition

I just wanted to let you know

"True Hymn, Life Hymn."

Daggers and Darts

I could sleep in a warm bed for a thousand years.

And

"There is nothing manlier than the sound of a tuba blast."

The last little phrase is where we will take off from today. The tuba blast.

I met a guy names Mikey, with his friend Tim, whom we have spoken of in this book (look at The Brothers Hat Shop). I met Mikey at a social function when we were in high school. Mikey was a super mellow guy who went to the high school Macarthur, or "Mac" as we all called it. Mikey played a most unusual instrument, the tuba.

You see, Mike and I go way way back. When I meet someone and the first thing they say is "I play tuba," not I play soccer or I'm into girls or I am a jock, but "I play tuba" I say to myself, I need to get to know this person. As a matter of fact, Mikey and I to this day share this strange bond, of our love for our practice, me with my painting and Mikey with his tuba.

Mikey at this point and time is studying his doctorate at Rice University in Houston, Texas on a full scholarship, a journey that has taken him from Main, to Bloomington, Illinois (living off of rice balls) finding his wife, having a kid with a second on the way, still keeping his sanity and still playing an instrument that is so

specialized that a "position opening" is quite literally when the old guy in the symphony that has been there retires after being there for 40 years—or worse yet dies! That's when there is a job opening, requires a certain type of personality. And I love it. Mikey is a feather in anyone's hat. All I can say is, "Mike, your doing it buddy. Back to the story.

“Dave Brower’s Masts to Freedom” located in Chelsea at the 21st street stop on the 123 train.

Note to the reader: this first paragraph is a bit melancholy, but it is true. If you don’t want to go down the path of melancholy that first starts this vibrant and colorful chapter, cool. Skip two rows down. You will enjoy it, but do know that the beginning of this chapter is very different from the bulk of the chapter, as well as the end. This chapter on boats talks about one of my closest friends. I am speaking about my good friend Dave because of getting waken up at 3:30 a.m. after getting back from Berlin less than 38 hours earlier and having to entertain and install a show from Kansas City in the studio Program I help run in San Antonio called Hausmann Millworks. Maybe it was the 6 Diet Cokes I had last night at dinner, I don’t know. I don’t have time for jet lag, wish I did. In life and in good painting, the dark is just as important as the light. If I were to sell you something that was all roses and peaches, it would be cheap and dishonest. Life has a way of being that way. This book comes from a very real place, and it is my hope that you see it for its humanity, the honest good and bad in life. More often than not, ones ability to focus on what they do have rather than what they don’t have is in great part ones ability to live life well. Enjoy this chapter, it is talking about one of my closest friends in the world, a man named David A. Brower.

Bob Marley once said in a song, “The one thing about music is when it hits, you feel no pain... so hit me with music, hit me with music now.” In writing this book I want to change those lyrics to “The one thing about memories is when they hit, you feel no pain... so hit me with memories, hit me with euphoria.” To which I say to myself,

"I only wish this were true." Memories are a funny thing; we remember things in this foggy haze. We as human beings often have selective memory. We choose not to remember the fight, the conversation that sent us on a path that we want to forget. And like a movie in our heads on super-eight film stock, those moments of regret loop through our minds as if an old record hit a nick in the loop and will not stop skipping. You know the feeling. I think it is called "regret." We have all been there, we have all gone through it, and we all are guilty of it, and we all need to get over it!

In writing this book, there is very little regret attached, I can tell you that. I can tell you that because in this book I have been able to delve into that foggy past and dig out the gems of my relationships. I sit assembling the crown that consists of the name "Rex" which in Latin means King (I have yet to meet those expectations of a name given to me by my parents. Thanks mom and dad, you endowed your son with a perpetual inferiority complex. I say this in jest.) In this haze is a good memory I would like to talk about: a guy, and his fictional company, who is almost as close to me as my brother. David Brower is 6 foot 7 inches and he is one of the biggest, quite literally, friends I have. Dave is a giant among men, in more ways than one.

David A Brower and I met when he had just transferred from Panama City, Panama. I have always chuckled at the idea of David standing among the native Panamanians, which I gather are quite small, the indigenous people that is. He had just transferred to San Antonio Christian Schools, a very small school at the time. I

believe the graduating class of high school that year was something like 50 students. This number may be a normal number in some small towns in Minnesota, but in San Antonio the public school system has classes that graduate 3000, like in Judson High School. Needless to say, our school was very very small. It was Dave's first day, you know, the awkward first day. I am sure Dave had many of those being in a military family. But he got good at them, he had to in order to survive that all-American right-of-passage we all remember with just a little bit of sarcasm, the dreaded middle-school days, that awkward jaunt of seemingly dependent independence that every American child goes through. It's called the "teen" years. This is the stage right before a young person is sent through drivers ed. The child is still dependent on good ol' mom and dad to get them around, or public transportation. The child is still finding out who in the world they are, more to themselves than anything else. Mom and dad are not recognizing their child that they have nurtured and loved for the better part of 13 to 14 years, and the child is even more confused than mom and dad, for that matter. And there Dave was, smack dab in the middle of all that process, being 6 inches taller than anyone else, nice.

My always being the "big kid" immediately gave David and me commonality. Let me tell you, I was no marshmallow boy. I was a strange mix of a jock in that I played Ice Hockey and Roller Hockey and was part of the wrestling team, but I didn't hang out with the jocks. The jock label just didn't quite fit. The category of nerd didn't really work for me either, nor was I in the camp of the druggie kids, and I wasn't one of the socialites. No, Rex Hausmann fit into a strange group that me and my

brother from another mother constructed over a number of years that one can only describe as "Doing our own thing." This club that we created reveled in childish rambunctiousness; my brother Erik was totally in on it too. I would like to classify us as more of a Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn of the 21st century, and the friends we made together were voracious animals. We were kind of a strange conglomeration of roughians that required a bit of patience from the school's faculty and staff, but at the same time our parents had instilled in us a respect for property that kept us from vandalism and property damage. Erik and I had to spend too many summers painting over the graffiti on the side of my mother and father's business to ever get us to enjoy property damage. At a young age we learned a few things about a hard day's work. This fact kept us in the clear with faculty and staff because they saw it as good safe fun that we would grow out of. And Dave coming from a military family had very much the same upbringing.

Our little group of friends consisted of a strange group of eccentrics. David Brower fit into that group just fine. And it is in this context that over time David A Brower became one of my closest friends. In this friendship, Dave and I would share many stories, one of which was a hope of sailing around the world, together with our brothers, Erik and I in the boat and Dave with his three brothers at his side. I don't really know where Dave got the idea of sailing the seven seas, but I am sure we will do it one day, even if it is only in a rented boat sailing the seven seas of Horseshoe Bay located in the Hill Country of Texas.

I have heard a saying about boats: "There are two best days in boat ownership. The first is the day you embark on owning a new boat for the first time, the wind in

your hair, your family or friends gathered around you, the captain of your destiny on this little boat that you have newly purchased with a nice glitter finish to boat. You have an unabashed freedom, the water is yours for the taking, the sails will never come down, the wind is at your back, and a cold beer in your hand—you are free!

The second greatest day in boat ownership is the day you hand those keys over to the next schmuck with the same delusions of grandeur you had when you bought it from the other guy who was having his second best day. You have sold your pontoon of freedom. After the actual cost of the boat and its maintenance, as well as all the fees that go with keeping the thing operational have set in, and the fact that you actually use this “investment in your family’s well-being,” the line you pitched to your wife that got you the boat in the first place, only twice a year. You are now free of that glitter-finished albatross. That is where Dave’s little marina sets in.

Dave Brower and his Masts to Freedom Company is fictionally located at the Chelsea Piers. I say located in the Chelsea Piers only because of its geographic location. I don’t even know if there is in fact a marina on the Chelsea Piers. Last I checked it was the financial center of the art world, and I didn’t see any yachts parked at the wait, getting ready for the days loot of investment of contemporary art to be loaded. No, this is most definitely a fabrication of my imagination. What does exist in Chelsea is a building located on the Hudson designed by none other than Frank Gehry. The building itself is made entirely of glass and was

constructed to mimic the sails of a sailboat. It is a magnificent site. I was watching a documentary of Mr. Gerry's life when the interviewer of the film, the camera man actually, was asking the owner of the building what he thought of the structure. He said in a very nonchalant way (in a roundabout way, this is that foggy haze of memory working), "Well, when I approached Frank about designing a building we both talked about one thing in common. Frank likes boats, and I like boats. So at my office located on the Hudson in Chelsea, it has been a dream of mine to see my building from my boat sailing down the Hudson. I said that, and then Frank came back with a drawing that looked like a sail. A couple years later, I have my building designed after a sail, and I love it."

This building is absolutely fantastic. I take a pilgrimage to it almost every time I go to New York. I remember the first time I saw it, after seeing the documentary. I stumbled upon it, much the way a lot of things happen in New York. You just "find" things. In all actuality you didn't find anything, the building or thing has always been there. You just happened to have taken a wrong turn on whatever street and "found" this place or thing by sheer accident. Had you known where you were going in the first place and not in the middle of being late to your meeting because you were too cheep to take a cab, you would not have been lost in the first place, but inversely you would not have "found" this gem.

This is how I "found" the Frank Gerry Building located on W 21st Street and 11th Avenue. If you ever have the privilege of seeing the building, it is a glory in and of itself. Built to mimic a sail on a boat, the entire twist of architecture and steel looks

like it is about to take this corner of Manhattan, grab a gust of wind and send the whole island of Manhattan careening into main land USA, an occurrence that I am sure the many residents of Brooklyn would have no problem with. There has been an ongoing feud between Brooklyn and Manhattan for many many years regarding ownership of the city. All I can say is this grudge is old and goes way way back. Let's not touch that subject with a 10 foot pole; it is better to leave it alone for the time being.

This twisted heap of glass is simply exceptional. I decided to make this David Brower's Masts to Freedom shop because it is as close as David and I will come to sailing, at least in the immediate future. Dave just got married and has a whole other voyage he is embarking upon, a much more complicated journey than a bunch of smelly dudes that haven't bathed in fresh water for a couple of days, listening to "Me Without You" (one of Dave's favorite bands) booming from a little boom box brought onboard with us readying to round the coast. The closest Dave and I are going to get to this, at least any day soon, is renting a pontoon boat and fishing on a lake. That's good enough for now, for now I say because by all matter of accounts, I fully intend on parking SOMEONE ELSE'S YACHT that I have borrowed for the day, touring Miami about to see Cigar Boat races and to catch some great Cuban food in December at Art Basel Miami, located in Miami Florida. Yup, me and Dave smoking one of our favorite cigars and shooting the shiznap about the past. There is that foggy memory coming back again. Rolling in with the morning like the sunrise. Can't you see it? The mist over the water? The morning has a chill to it. The lunchbox is packed with some great sandwiches and some cold beers, and we

are about to take off. We are about to do what ever it is. Doesn't really matter because I am with an old friend, an old friend whom my brother said, upon meeting Dave for the first time, "Man, you're tall! My name's Erik, and this is my brother Rex. How ya doing?" Little did we know that the friendship would outlast the storms of everyday life for the better part of 11 years. Dave has been through a lot with me, through thick and thin, a thing I don't foresee ending any time soon.

Welcome to Dave's world of sail boats! Come on board! The wind is blowing and the water is fine! Want a cold one?

Rex's Hat Shop (The Brothers Hat Shop)

(Berlin Germany - Art Forum Berlin 2010)

An apartment on 72nd Street was the first place I slept on a bed of my own in New York City. Not a friend's couch, not a borrowed floor or a closet, a concert floor or a church floor, or a studio with no heat. It was the first time I had ever had a place of my own in New York City, and it was a moment of bliss. I will never forget the "River Side Studio Apartments" located on West 71st and Riverside Boulevard. A guy named Norman was the check-in man, and he always gave me a great rate. My first apartment in NYC was no larger than 8 by 10 feet. It had a small air condition unit, a small sink, a mini fridge and a mini closet. My little 8 by 10 felt like a mansion, though. I couldn't believe it! There was a term for these rooms. Jimmy Green said "Oh, you're in an 8 by 10," adding, "Is it nice?" as if the question were standard, the way someone might ask about "the yard" in San Antonio. In New York, it's not just about where you are staying, but what street corner, what side of the park, what floor, what time of year, what area, who designed the building; practically everything that can be delineated is and will have a criteria of protocol to determine status. After all, it is New York.

I was located in what is called "The Upper West Side" a.k.a., boring family neighborhood where nothing much goes on. And that's fine by me. For the first time in five years, I could come "home" to my boring upper west-side pad off the Number-Two Express Train and not have to worry about buying a gift, outstaying my welcome, invading someone else's space, or staying up till the late night hours because my benefactors are night owls. For the first time ever, I really "lived" in

New York. This may sound trivial, but I'll tell you this, if you haven't lived it, you can't relate, and that's okay. If you have never had the pleasure of living a transient life in an attempt to somehow validate what you do even though to many it seems nonsensical, don't worry, keep that day job. It's probably much better than trying to make it in New York as an artist.

Not far from my first place, over on 68th street there is a little hat shop. A couple of blocks from the park located in a very trendy part of the upper west side, there's a little hat shop with a big Kangol logo on the outside. Ever since I was about 15 years old, the British brand Kangol has always caught my eye. I can't tell you why. I have never owned a Kangol hat, or attended a Cricket match or seen a polo game where I would imagine many a Kangol hat. I'm just fascinated by the hat. I have been in that shop probably 10 times in the past 3 years. I never bought a thing, mainly because I could not afford to drop a hundred bucks on something that was not art related, especially when rent is what it is in New York. I have to watch my pennies to make sure I have enough to ship work back to Texas. Nonetheless, a hat shop is what I think best suits myself for a business. As an artist, you can wear so many hats at any one time that you don't even know where you are, but at least you have that hat on when you need to get a job done.

Speaking of the Kangol hat makes me think of an art piece I will never forget. Not to get into too much art speak, but there is an artist by the name of Damien Hirst, a British artist who is no new news to the art world. He is a superstar. There is the Brit, Damien, the American Jeff Koons, and the man from over the sea, Takashi

Murakami. These three individuals are some of the most talked about and speculated personalities in the art world. People love them, hate them, and still others could care less. But even more than his superstar status, Mr. Hirst's ideas for testing the market for what it can bear are quite fascinating. Hirst takes his work to the level of making the art world a spectacle in and of itself.

There is a book called *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida* which focuses on three artists: Damien Hirst, Angus Fairhurst and Sarah Lucas—some of the notorious YBAs or "Young British Artists." In this book there is a piece called "The Hat Makes the Man" which Damien, in a very witty way, takes broken shards of wood and constructs them to look like the Italian futurist sculpture by Umberto Boccioni "Unique Forms in Continuity" (1913). Hirst took this reference and made the sculpture out of hats. He then titled the piece "The Hat Makes the Man" (After Max Ernst). The sculpture is interesting, but it's the picture in the book of Good Ol' Papa Damien wearing all of the hats that makes the piece. It's the truest artist portrait I have ever seen.

In my painting "The Brothers' Hat Shop" the three main characters are the gunslinger (Pepe Rodriguez), the panda (Bowser Wowzer), and the Husky (Frankie Fonzerellie). The side character, a small panda surrounded by flowers (Mimi Super Cute), draws attention away from one of the main characters. As a result, the other two become more prominent. The gunslinger character in the background is a Mexican cowboy. He has a Texas flag on his belt buckle and is wearing a scarf fashioned after one I picked up while in Berlin at a fashion store called H & M. Pepe is somewhat of an icon of San Antonio, my hometown.

*Simple and at times flamboyant, San Antonio is a place with a whole lot of attitude that has a curiously charming and unique history. San Antonio is one of the oldest cities in Texas. The streets that wind through downtown are so topsy-turvy, you will almost always get lost. Why? Because the streets follow a manmade river that was in essence constructed to water cows coming for trade and sale. The city planning makes very little sense, and up until the 80s San Antonio was considered to be one of the poorest cities in the nation. To better understand what I'm talking about, there is a book called *Con Safo* by Ruben Cordova which goes into the history of San Antonio. Either that or sit down to lunch with the artist Rolando Briseño on a sunny Friday and eat the brisket plate at the little restaurant Garcia's and you will get an earful, as well as a stomach full of San Antonio history.*

San Antonio is a great place to be from. My brother, mother and I used to eat at this place called "Sombrero Rosa." It was a taco place that had around 200 sombreros plastered on its ceiling. I couldn't tell you how many there actually were. Just a whole lot. Remember there could have actually been only 20 sombreros, but to a 13-year old with an overactive imagination, it was like a sea of sequins and velour. Fantastic!

The other characters are much more pivotal. There is my brother, represented by a Husky Dog. He is wearing a pair of yellow sunglasses and a yellow fedora. The dog is smiling and looking quite full of himself. That's my brother. Actually, we are both full of ourselves. Not in an arrogant way, we're just Italian. What can I say? My

brother had two husky dogs, Sasha and Kitta. Both, unfortunately, are no longer around, but those dogs, "The Puffies" as we would call them, were wonderful. They shared a symbiotic relationship much like me and my brother do. There never really was just Sasha Washa or just Kitta Pitta. They were a pair. You rarely saw one without the other.

Anyone who has known my brother and me for any period of time will notice that we are unusually close. There has always been the two of us. We were in the same grade in school, played all the same sports, and had all the same friends. Erik and I are inseparable. "Rex's Hat Shop" started as the focal point, but without my brother, it just seemed...well, not all there. So when I was painting the hat shop I threw my brother in there. The painting then became more natural, more like it is. More, as I said, like "The Brothers."

Speaking of brothers, even as close as Erik and I are, we are very very different people. We both have our own personalities and have our own ideas on things. You will see a character with a Yankees hat that looks somewhat disgruntled but at the same time kind of cuddly. He is a panda which automatically makes him cute. Yep, that's me. Socrates called himself the Gadfly. I call myself the pissed off panda. We're often misunderstood or stereotyped because of our demeanor.

Why the panda you say? Well it's hard to describe why. From as far back as I can remember—I'm talking when I was born—I had this little stuffed panda bear. I forgot his name, but I still have that bear. I was working on the painting "Happy

Panda Chinese takeout" and the panda came to mind. It stuck! So when I was coming up with what to make as my own icon for this series, this hat shop Bowser Wowser came about. If you look at my past paintings like Segmented Self (2005) and countless drawings, you will see that I rarely draw in the eyes. I always leave them in this black abyss, just enough to suggest the idea of eyes. As the image of the panda emerged, it just seemed like a natural fit.

As I studied the panda, out of sheer curiosity, I learned that they are solitary animals who spend a lot of time to themselves. Just like an artist! They are territorial, but not overly aggressive. Another really interesting fact is that the panda is considered to be a noble and honorable creature, almost to the status of royalty. Not bad. I'll take that!

Speaking of panda's, there is another panda in the picture, Mimi Super Cute. Mimi is surrounded by pansies, edelweiss and good ol' Texas lantana. I will not go too much into the background of this little character, other than she comes from a very real place based on a very real person. In life you are blessed with certain times and certain people. You learn a lot about yourself when you are wrestling with life's simple issues of "finding relationships." In fact, it is where true art comes from. That's why I cannot explain it in any other way except for a visual reference. The flowers are important, as well. I love pansies. The color is incredible, and I love to garden, a thing I miss when I am in New York. My mother has confetti lantana all around our home in Boerne, and I love seeing it every morning. Edelweiss is from Germany, where I painted the piece while I was attending Art Forum Berlin 2010.

The shop itself is located on 72nd street in the upper west side of Manhattan. As I said, this particular geographic location is very important to me in that it was my first real home in New York City. The funny thing is 72nd street also saw another eccentric character that I would like to meet one day, Alice F. Mason. Ms. Mason was a powerful woman of sorts because of her "Big Deal Dinners" according to the book *The Sky's The Limit: Passion and Property in Manhattan* by Steven Gains. Many a public figure passed through her East Side apartment, including presidents, politicians, magazine editors and entertainers. It was a big deal to be invited to these "Big Deal Dinners." I say East Side because it needs to be pointed out that I am on the West Side of Manhattan. I do not pretend to come from New York. I am no more a Natural New Yorker than the color pink is welcome at a Hells Angels convention. I know I am transient, just visiting. As I said, I am a Texan with a knack for culture, an eccentric painter who wishes he was in a more stable job, but as the French say "C'est la vie." I'm an eccentric that wears many hats.

Welcome to the hat shop! Shopping for a sombrero for a fiesta? Talk to Pepe! Looking for a ball cap to go to Yankees' Stadium? Bowser can help ya there! Or just looking at one of Franky's Fedora Specials? We got it! Oh, and don't forget Mimi's springtime special: Fresh flowers from Joseph's House of Many Colors can accompany any brimmed beauty! At The Brother's Hat shop, you'll be treated like family. So stop on by and try on a brim.

Bleaker Street Bakery and Base, and Tea and Toons.

(Berlin Germany)

Now this explanation of the geographic location of this store as well as its owner has to be primed with a healthy dose of why I find this area so interesting. It is one of my favorite streets in New York because of the people I associate with this street and the years of its history. This chapter will tell you that story, as well as talk about my brother—the greatest guy on the planet.

West 4th is a center of NYC. At the corner of Bleaker Street and Carmine there stands an old massive Italian Catholic church. This particular part of The West Village is far enough away from NYU as to not get wrapped up with all the student driven businesses which permeate the streets flanking it. Like the streets surrounding Washington Square Park, it is close enough to its roots to hold an Italian charm. Amongst the movie stars and music industry buffs living off of royalties, and the image that Bob Dylan gave it (which you can see on countless T-shirts, post cards and memorabilia), there are still a few stores that remain loyal to the old Italian neighborhood roots that the Village once was. One of those stores is Rocco's Pasticceria. Down the street from Rocco's is another small church. In this small Protestant church I was doing an installation that the month before had been in a West Coast (Los Angeles) show, "Blood and Fire."

(It is of note that right down the way from the little church is Joe's Famous Pizza, which is famous because it was in the movie Spiderman with Tobey Maguire. It is my firm held belief that Joe's Famous Pizza does make the best slice of \$2.50 pizza

anywhere. A close second is Exclusive Pizza up on 181st street and Fort Washington. This is not to be confused with the sit-down pizzeria called Joe's Pizza. That's across the street from the little church.)

The fact that there is a gallery in this church is as strange as the start of Max Protech's gallery located in Chelsea. You will see this represented in this book as "Aeon Bike Shop." I was with Patrick Winn in Austin when he was seeking his Masters Degree in Architecture from The University of Texas at Austin when one of his professors told me the story of Mr. Protech and his gallery's beginnings. Max Protech started with a bike shop. Later when sales got better and better, he broke from the bike shop, and the rest is history. Max Protech now shows some of the top artists and architects in the world. Humble beginnings which cultivated over time a prestigious career, I like that!

The space on Bleaker Street is run by a guy named Samuel Kho, a former resident of Los Angeles, just recently transplanted to New York City. Sam has been throwing shows in New York City for the better part of five years. He is a brilliant writer and a good curator. I was doing an installation in his space. We worked on a book together as well as have worked on many projects together. When I was doing one of my "room benders" which had just come from Los Angeles, originating at the San Antonio Bihl House, I was walking along and found this little bakery on Bleaker Street called "Rocco's Pasticceria." I would sit and have my morning cup of coffee and muffin every morning for two weeks. I really got used to the idea! I had come to find that Rocco's was not so little. In fact, it is one of the oldest Italian bakeries

still serving baked good created in its basement. Legend has it there was a time when in order to work at Rocco's, you had to speak Italian. It has changed, as many things have changed; nonetheless, it is an interesting slice of West Village lore. When I was doing the installation "Blood and Fire" I had the band "Mikey House" travel with us.

Mikey house consisted of two very interesting characters: Arturo and Louie. I have known Louie Chavez for years. He, like John Cowen, worked at Asel's Art Supply, located on Main Street in San Antonio Texas. One day I was buying paint and Louie gave me a little cassette tape. He said "Hey, Rex! Have you ever heard my experimental music?" To which I said "No, should I have?"

I really had no interest in "experimental" music at the time, after being exposed to Dan Deacon, but thought I'd give it a whirl. Long story short, I was very impressed, so much so that Louie and Arturo not only did one show in San Antonio but traveled with me and Sam to Los Angeles and to New York City. They packed their stuff as carry-on, and both Sam and I transported this outdated sound equipment both to Los Angeles and to New York in a rainbow colored quilt. It was a riot. I don't think Louie ever really recorded any of his tracks because the equipment was so Jimmy rigged that it simply wouldn't work if you tried to plug it into a computer. I mean there were cables everywhere, but ya know what? It made for a great show!

So, onto my brother. My brother is a musician at heart. He has played instruments ever since I can remember. I think to date he plays 12 instruments if I'm not

mistaken. Erik and I made a decision a long time ago when we tried to make a band with our old-time friend Andrew. He was 13 and I was 14. I was into percussion at the time (as a matter of fact, I have never stopped liking percussion. I am tapping on things all the time.). Erik always said I had the strangest beats, just a little off, but still interesting. To this day Erik will send me a song via E-mail and say "This song really annoys me. I think you will love it," and, yes, it usually becomes one of my favorite songs.

Erik painted a little painting of a rose that was quite nice when he was about 14. My mother had it framed and it still sits in our family dinning room. I had bought this old drum set from a friend. Then it hit us, and we said to one another "(Rex) you pursue painting and visual stuff, and (Erik) you pursue songs and musical stuff." To this day Erik and I have never wavered from our bargain, and we are both the better for it. The closest we came was when we did The D'Antoni Project, where he and I combined music and painting.

If you walk into my brother's apartment in Houston, you will see his wall full of musical instruments. You would swear you just walked into Mick Jagger's closet. There is musical equipment in every square inch of this wall: a Hawaiian ukulele, a bass guitar that my friends and I wrangled enough money to buy him (and that was a \$675 bass guitar with a \$250 amp). For high schoolers that is a lot of money! But Michelle Enriquez and I figured it out. There are also drum kits, kick pads, guitars, pianos, headphones and wires and chords strewn across the floor.

Erik is a music machine! If a human being could be a music box, he would be one. Erik tried out for American Idol and is still trying out mind you. He has never made it, but I am so proud of him for trying. You say to yourself, "Oh, those kids on American Idol got lucky, what about paying your dues? They don't really deserve that fame." To which I say, "GO FOR IT!" Anyone who can surpass the "hard knocks of life" I fully endorse. From someone who is going through it, I will tell you, "Jump over it if you can. By all means go for it!"

Speaking of hard Knocks, there is nothing like hard knots—actually soft ones like the Jewish Challah bread! If your loaf is hard, get a new one! Challah bread is a miracle. Yep, my brother, armed with his music passion, set out long ago to make the perfect Challah bread, and Yeast Rolls! Well, actually this all started when we were kids left home in the summertime to fend for ourselves. I tell you what, growing up in a house with a health nut really teaches you to cook. You see, as kids our pantry was stuffed with every kind of diet food you can imagine, from Jenny Craig to Weight Watchers, Adkins and low carb, and a strange California diet that consisted of cabbage stew. As an Italian, my mother simply refuses to gain weight! And she does a great job of it. One of my friends who is a sculptor in Atlanta said "Rex, your mother looks like Sophia Loren!"

Most people look at me and say, "How are you such a big guy?" To which I say "Genetics." You see, my brother and I had to set off on the culinary caveat many many moons ago. We would navigate the barren wasteland of bland health food for a bag of sugar, a can of flour, and the almighty yeast! Then, we found Martha

Stewart and her cook book. That was the beginning of the end. It was our manna sent from heaven in the proverbial desert of health schemes. We were kids, we needed sugar! And white flour for that matter, not glucose free, genetically altered no calorie sand! We needed Aunt Jemima and pancakes!

Erik and I used to cook for our entire youth group in high school. People would say, "The Hausmann Brothers are here—and they're cooking! Quick, get them a budget and a kitchen! We're eating Italian!"

The Hausmann Kitchen hit an all time high when Erik and I were in college. He was at Texas A&M and the word had gotten out that we were cooking. There was Tim, Scott, Daniel, Erik and me. This is pre-Facebook and pre-texting as far as I can remember, but this small Texas Bar-B-Q with homemade flour tortillas turned into a 75 person smorgasbord. We started to call Tim Smith our "abuelita" (or little grandmother) because "Naked Tim" as we called him (he actually could have been an Abercrombie Model if he had wanted too), would always find a way of taking his shirt off, thus the name "Naked Tim." I swear, it would be 20 degrees outside and Tim would find a Frisbee and would play catch. He was as much a frat daddy as any one man could be, without being in a frat. That was just Tim, just the way he was, a super socialite who was always in the middle of things—without a shirt. Anyway, Timmy was cranking out handmade tortillas. I was Bar-B-Quing ribs, and Erik was baking, a ritual that has not changed in over...well, as long as I can remember.

I must make yet another aside; to our mother's credit, when she really wants to

cook, boy, can she! She puts both my brother and I to shame. As good a pasta as Erik and I can make, when you meet my mother, there is no one else on earth that can quite simply whip something from nothing like she can. It is magic I tell you, magic! Erik and I need to go to the store. My mom can conjure recipes from nothing. Some call it a gift. I call it freaking amazing.

So, Erik has been on this bread-making kick. I don't know why. He just loves baked goods. Once we were visiting Erik in Houston, and he walked in with this bag under his arm. He kind of looked around as if he was up to something. Slowly as he was watching to see if the manager was looking, he slipped me a slice of bread and in a hushed voice said as if he were pushing an illegal substance, "I think the coast is clear. Try my new baguette. I just made it. It's as good as La Madeleine's. I think it is better. Let's put it to the test. There's jam and butter." Now mind you, we were in a French restaurant that on its logo touts the French oven that bakes bread every morning. And here's my brother coming into a shrine of French cuisine where a cup of soup costs 5 bucks, and he said, "Here, does it match up?" as if there is some kind of silent competition we don't know about. That's just my family for you. Eccentric doesn't even begin to describe the situation. As one of my friends observing us once said to me, "Rex, you don't understand. It's not just you. It's all four of you. You're like a unit; there are no individuals in your family. You get the whole package."

"Yep," is all I can say. We're Italian, and it is a little like the Mafia in a way. We are always in each other's business, in all kinds of ways. There are no clear boundaries,

no divisions. As much as I wish there was, there aren't. We are a unit, a Roman century unit of paint, music, woodwork and horses—and health food.

Next to Erik's eccentricity for the best French baguette is his love of tea. The man has over 45 boxes of tea in his office cubicle. People have started to pay homage to the shrine that is Erik's cubicle by bringing votive offerings of the finest Rooibos. I mean, even the tea experts from India are impressed.

Erik's Tea and Tunes and Bakery and Bass is about as simple as I can explain him, a music lover that is a tea freak. By the way, he switched to tea because he thought he was having heart palpitations from too many espressos. Self control and caffeine don't rank high on Erik's to do list. You would be a caffeine freak too if you had to sit in a cubicle all day and program highly sophisticated ordering systems for some of Americas largest companies. I got to give it to my bro, I would go nuts. As crazy as the artists life can be, it is nothing compared to what he does for a living. He and I both have commended each other on our chosen professions. We have both agreed that we could in no way shape or form do the other's job well. I couldn't do the white collar office jokey, and he couldn't deal with the risk I deal with and the jet setting (not on an expense account).

We just are both two very different people, so if that does well enough to establish my brother and his music/tea/ bakery shop, good enough for me. Or you say to me, there is no such place that has such a menagerie of interests. All I say to you is remember this is coming from the guy who just tried to one up a French bakery by

bringing in a fresh baked baguette that he baked hours before to see if it can compete. There are stranger things in the world! There is the platypus, for instance, and it seems to do just fine.

The Carriage Trade. "Tough Life, Huh!"

"The Carriage Trade." My mom first dropped this little phrase about two years ago, and the term stuck. The "carriage trade" refers to the gentry class, namely pertaining to the means by which an individual traveled around during the early 20th century. One was judged by the quality of their carriage, whether the horses matched and the number of horses employed. Haven't you ever wondered why Budweiser makes such a big deal about their Clydesdales? Yep, that's the "carriage trade" for ya. I guess this trade in the 21st century is measured by the fashion one wears, the car one drives, or the shoes one wears.

Speaking of shoes, I just picked up a new pair of Adidas from a shop called "Soul Boutique" located in Alamo Heights, a suburb of San Antonio. I love shoes. Can't say why, I just do. I sold a painting the other night, and my first thought was what pair of shoes I needed to buy to rock out in New York the next week. I chose a pair of limited run Adidas Sambas, designed by an artist out of Hong Kong. These Adidas are each just a little different. Fabbie (the wife and co-owner of Soul Boutique) said "These are designed for the European market," a fact that immediately sold me. If it's European you automatically increase your selling potential by eighty percent, regardless of whatever you are trying to push. The same applies in Europe (minus the whole war thing). If it's an American product in Europe, it automatically becomes 200% better. If you want to argue about this, go to a McDonald's in Europe. In America, no big deal, at least no more than usual. You get a Big Mac and go on with the day. In Europe, all I can say is that the McDonald's in Florence resembles a night club. When I was over there in

2006, the coolest place to hang out at was...you guessed it, the McDonald's. It's the same in Berlin. Anything that says "New York" on it is automatically cooler. Come to think of it, we Americans fall for that one as well. It's all about "The Exotic" or "You'll be the only one in the room with these." There is something about being different that plays to a person's ego. And that's not all together a bad thing. We all want to be unique, thus we segue back into the Carriage Trade.

Every individual wants to stand out. Is this a bad thing? No, it's actually healthy. My great grandfather, Edwin Sidney Martin, had a carriage with four white matching horses to pull. This was a big deal in Odessa, Texas. My grandfather, Milton Hausmann, who was a school teacher and music shop owner. At one time a turn of fate could have destined my brother and me in the class of "trust fund" kids—but fate took another turn. In some kind of fluke circumstance because of a three year drought in West Texas, my great grandfather had to sell a considerable amount of his land and cattle. The land underneath the cattle turned out to be more precious than the livestock he was herding. Those cows were trampling on black gold, thus a carriage as a measure of status and not a Bentley or Aston Martin. C'est la vie or "such is life," another chapter in the pages of history. My brother and I are not trust fund kids, and that's okay. In terms of time, the carriages became cars and the carriage repair guys auto mechanics. Time marches on, and so does our story.

We are now transitioning from carriages to cars, from dirt roads to paved ones, a paved street called Lullwood near Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, where long hair and bellbottoms ruled and flashing the peace sign was a standard

greeting. In the midst of free love, a boy from Port la Vaca studying drama at Trinity University, who would later go on to build all of the Millwork for the Folgers Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, met a girl from San Antonio who studied business at the newly built UTSA. Can you tell I'm in awe of my parents?

My mom and dad met because of a cat named Walker. I'm not speaking of Walker Texas Ranger, which would actually be kind of cool. No, Walker the cat was named after a friend of my dad's. At the time my mom had a dog, a schnauzer, his name was Rothko. Yes, like the painter. Walker was a tabby cat with no tail. He always got lost or stuck somewhere and my dad had to go into search and rescue mode. One of my dad's favorite stories is how good Ol' Walker got scooped up under a Triumph Spitfire, a spiffy little car. Had it not been for the scoop, designed to cool off the engine, that sucked him up, little Walker would not be around, a fact that has stuck with my dad. He worries about where our animals are—all the time!

So my dad was walking, yes, looking for Walker, and he saw my mom on a balcony. My mom was reading the paper and he said to her "Tough Life, huh!" My mom looked down and said, "Yeah."

My dad continued down the road, and as fate would have it, my mom was later set up on a blind date. Her friend told her about "this really sweet guy you need to meet. He's always looking for his cat." My mom then had an idea of the guy she was talking about, and his "Tough Life" pickup line. Yup, it was my dad, and the rest is history.

My mother is Italian in every sense of the word. Extremely energetic, very charismatic and speaks her mind whether you want to hear it or not. She rides horses, always has. She says that her love for horses started when she was a girl and her friend Jonnie Beth Han's parents convinced my mom's parents to baby sit their pet pony in the backyard. Keep in mind this is in a very urban setting. Needless to say my mother did get the pink pony every girl wants when she was small. She got a real one (albeit it was probably brown) and she was forever hooked. She grew up the youngest in a family of five children and ended up being the star cheerleader, homecoming queen, and a member of the National Honor Society at her high school. She modeled during her college years to work her way through school and have spending money. My mom is very very tight with money.

As far back as I can remember, when we went on business trips or vacations with my dad, we would find ourselves in a museum. I can't tell you I enjoyed the experience much when I was little. My brother and I would have preferred to just play outside. Nonetheless, something about those museum visits must have stuck because now I love them. I can spend most of my time in them and really enjoy learning about their contents and sharing what I learn with others.

My mother has an insatiable love of fashion and is really good at picking out just the right clothes for whoever you are and whatever the occasion. I must confess, my mother is still my fashion consultant at times. It's just the way it is. She is always getting asked to help friends pick out clothes.

My dad is a woodworker. One look at his hands and you can tell that he is a man's man. But don't let this description fool you. My dad is one of the gentlest people you will meet. He has a soft smile and quiet disposition. He was a ballet dancer of all things. Every once in a while he will bust out a pirouette, and both my brother and I will sneer and mock him, lovingly of course. We're from Texas! You don't do that here! At least that's the way we joke about. My dad and I are close, but in a very quiet way. He is a good man.

My family is eccentric, for lack of a better term. Whose isn't? We all have our quirks and our faults. We all struggle with making a living and keeping our "investments" positive—investments being whatever you value: family, relationships, money, homes, buildings. Time, I would say, is the most valuable investment. If you spend all of your time being social, you will have no way to live. If you spend all of your time working, you will have no energy to be social. I hope we are investing in the right things. In time, all things will be told.

Peacocks still exist

I had an interesting conversation with my dad about the nature of business. We

talked about the difference between Vogue Magazine and an anonymous business that makes toilet flanges. With a quarter of the workload the toilet flange company probably makes a higher profit margin than Vogue, albeit the Flange company makes toilet parts (not the coolest thing on the block to do), and Vogue deals with a high-profile public image (which IS the coolest thing on the block). When you look at the net worth of the two companies, they probably level out. At this point in our conversation I concluded, "Dad, there are sparrows and then there are Peacocks, all existing on the same planet. Both birds have their places. The world needs both sparrows and peacocks, much as it needs toilet parts to make toilets work and magazines to report the latest trends. One provokes discussion, the other everyday practicality. Both are equally important.

Phil and Suzanne's Chocolate Box: a gem that might as well be a mini-museum (the only house on a 100-foot street)

I started bumping into Philip and Suzanne Arévalo at art openings and functions as far back as I can remember. Phil always carries himself with a casual confidence

that is something akin to a quality linen shirt and the most comfortable pair of Italian soft-leather moccasins you can imagine. You know, the ones for driving with the special rubber soles for traction.

I'm not sure I imagine him actually driving a sports car, but I see him with his Saturday paper, morning cup of coffee and a good cigar—after he and Suzanne have gone on their morning jog through the neighborhood, of course. I can see Phil relaxing on the front porch of their home, reclining in a chair with a book next to him, probably Tolstoy or Chaucer, puffing away and sipping his cup of coffee. My dad would probably throw in his two cents and say, "No, I think it would be Don Quixote at his side," to which I would say, "Okay, Dad! You're probably right." Suzanne wouldn't be far away. She is a consummate elementary school teacher. You'd think she had a platoon of gremlins doing her work, but it's all her!

Suzanne and Phil are inseparable. And when they're not together, I can say Phil's talking about Suzanne, which is pretty remarkable since the two have been married for 25 years. Suzanne is a lady from the word go. She carries with her a graceful smile and an elegant bounce. They are a true matched pair that classes up any place when they walk into the room.

For as long as I have known Philip, until the finishing of this book, I had never been to his home. We had spoken many times about a visit, but I'd have to take off to New York City or Kansas before we could ever make plans, or Phil's classes would have him busy lecturing at The University of Incarnate Word. Whenever Phil and I

would work on the book together, it would always be at The Millworks, or even as far as my mother and father's home in Boerne, a very long drive for any 09er. 09er (pronounced Oh-niner) is slang for a person that lives in the San Antonio suburb city of Alamo Heights.

The funny thing is I'd been to practically every family members' home of Phil's except his. I had visited his brother's home in Austin a few times (great art collection). Chris Arévalo and I ALWAYS talk about the steak house in Brooklyn called Peter Lugers. We often joke about how at Peter Lugers, one doesn't really order anything. You simply say how many are sitting and then a bountiful feast is presented, the most mouthwatering steaks imaginable. Anyway, I digress!

I have even been to his father's office (two homes close to San Antonio's Alamo Dome, where the Arévalo family has barbeques and watches sports events. We saw, or listened rather, to the first UTSA football game on Phil's old stereo system that his dad still has at his office). We have shared many a barbeque at the old hangout. I fondly remember listening to the radio on the old 1960s Hi-fi stereo rather than dealing with the crowds at the games. I prefer the old radio and familial company!

So I often wondered where Phil and Suzanna live. For some reason I call Suzanne, Suzanna. She just seems like a Suzanna to me, and that's just what comes out of my mouth. Now, I know Alamo Heights to some extent. John Bloodsworth & Jamie Bloodsworth live on a street next to Liz Mozer (a family friend). The Bloodsworths

live in an area of Alamo Heights that is picturesque in every sense of the word. Their home is filled with all manner of small wondrous objects that reminded me of Franco Mondini-Ruiz's home/studio extravaganzas, but instead of small trinkets and dress paintings, replace them with Victorian furniture and prints by Mary Bonner (I still to this day carry in my wallet the Mary Bonner print postcard John gave me years ago). I wondered, "Do Phil and Suzanna live in a home such as this?"

Then I said to myself, "Well, maybe it's something like Overland Partners Architects located on Broadway? Maybe it's like their office, the place I visited so often to meet with Tim Blonkvist. In the earlier times of my art life, TBB as I call him, has been a dear close friend of both my father and me. TBB is a sort of confidant and mentor. Maybe Phil and Suzanna are in a home like Tim's? Tim's home is Italian, Spanish Colonial in design. Perhaps their home is like The Blonkvist's with Italian mosaics, a Monet portrait, and bookcases revealing heads of Ghiberti and his baptistery doors found in Florence, a place I reference often in my paintings. Ask KT Whitehead to see the painting she owns, or ask Jennifer Goetz and you'll see. Perhaps their home is like Arturo and Danny's—covered with art wall to wall, filled with every manner of object and art collectable imaginable. Perhaps this is what Phil and Suzanna's home is like. I wondered.

I guess you could say I had visited The Arévalo home, but not in the way one would think. I visited many a time through the mail, postcards as my stand-in. I have sent Phil and Suzanna correspondence for years. The mailbox, the only one on their street (all 100 feet of it), has seen postcards from Berlin (which to my surprise Phil

has framed, which I think is WONDERFUL), New York City, Kansas, and every corner of God's green earth I have visited. These correspondents have called on a mailbox I had not seen, for Phil and Suzanna's home is very private. You may not even notice it if you weren't looking for it. I missed it a few times and I had been "looking" for it for some time. This is not to say the home isn't memorable, far from it. It's just private, much like the house's owners.

When I finally walked through the front door, I noticed a place very clean and tidy, everything meticulously kept in place. I immediately thought of a Chuck Ramirez chocolate box photo. I thought of Jay Z's new album cover emblazoned in gold. And then there were the frames, "all black everything" to borrow a line from the Jigga man.

I remember my mother gave me a chocolate box once, an artist's chocolate box, and I still have that box. Phil's house is like that box and the inspiration for this chapter. Glistening like small chocolates awaiting the person about to partake, everything is nestled its own little niche. Phil has this really great chair, a tri-point chair. He said to me, "No offense Rex, but you take this one!" (Phil's other furniture could be from the 1700s, still held together by the resin glue and European termites that have been binding them together since the furniture came over on the Mayflower.) All I'm saying is that Phil and Suzanna have great taste! Being a bit stockier an individual, I loved the tri-chair. It was like a throne!

Each piece of art on their walls is a gem, like a handcrafted chocolate in a gourmet artisan chocolate box. I saw many familiar faces in static form, objects of art representing people rather than people representing people. If one knew what they were looking at, they should be impressed: Angel Rodriguez-Diaz, Rolando Briseno, Ben Mata, Katherine Brown, Franco Mondini-Ruiz, Russell Stephenson, David Almaguer, Cesar Martinez, all kinds of Mexican folk art, and yours truly, of course. Oh, and that one artist, Albrechto Alvarez, whom Phil and I always, I'll just say, have civil discussions over. Each face smiles in its place, much like the postcards I sent, or chocolates staring up at you from a box—faces that keep saying "hello" long after their voices stopped.

When Phil and I started to talk about what his chapter may be, we thought of a gallery, which was a good idea at the time, but I prefer this chapter instead. Well Phil, I'll tell ya, what ended up is this painting and this chapter. Each icon in its place, like each chapter in this book, gleaming and waiting like an artisan chocolate poised for someone to enjoy.

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