

the Socialist

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SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY ART

EDITORIAL

Art as Activism and Activism as an Art

Let's be clear: I am no art historian. Nor am I anything close to an art critic, or even a budding art philosopher. What I am is a lover of art. I love it all – paintings and illustrations, music, film, poetry, literature, you name it. My proposal to do this issue was rooted in that love. Naturally, that love extends to the art I see among activists today. Whether it's a painting, a flier, a poem, a song, a film – the relationship of art and activism is undeniable. The degree of symbiosis between the two can mean the difference between a movement that no one notices, and a movement that no one can ignore. When art + activism perfectly collide, minds can be changed, communities can be mobilized, and paradigms can be shifted.

This is just one of the things that the Black Panther Party did so masterfully. To be sure, the BPP programs were core to their movement. The free breakfast program (and other community services) continues to inspire the work that activists do today. But the feeling of power – and self-empowerment – that the BPP inspired was enhanced by the arresting art of Emory Douglas, the Party's "Minister of Culture." One look at his art – depictions of proud men, women and children, of pigs as police, of historic and contemporary symbols of oppression -- and one cannot help but feel emboldened.

The BPP example shows us how art can be used for activism, but it also reminds us that activism is also an art. Our work must appeal to the hearts and minds of people. Not only must we know and understand their struggles, but we must also find a way to communicate an alternative in a language that people "get." Art can be, and often is, one of the most effective vessels for .

The work in this "socialist revolutionary art" issue reflects the diversity of perspectives among our Party members. Not all of the art presented here is literally socialist or directly activist; but all of it is revolutionary in spirit. From the amazing paintings of Paul Garner to the passionate poetry of Kim Ortiz and Steve Clarke, each piece of art here represents in its own way a sense of freedom and love and vision. That essence of personal power is revolutionary.

In the words of the extraordinary poet and member of the L.A. Local, Martina Reisz Newberry, "I feel strongly that those kinds of things need to be said and heard in a revolution. The arts are an x-ray of society and their place in the changing of a "people" is crucial. Anarchy is true freedom ESPECIALLY in the arts."

In unity,
Lynn Lomibao



THE SECRET
© K.S. Liberato 2012



TIME TO UNITE!
© Paul Garner 2012

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Lynn Lomibao

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The Socialist welcomes fresh material that highlights the struggles of the working class. This includes news, first person testimonials, all forms of the arts and letters from readers. Please limit letters to 500 words and articles to 1,250.

Submit as .doc or .rtf file.

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INTO THE NOID

Paul Garner is an active visual artist, musician, and student of life, born and raised in Shreveport, Louisiana, and currently residing in Memphis, Tennessee. Paul is a member of the Memphis Socialist Party and an active member of HOPE - Homeless Organizing for Power and Equality. See more of Paul's extraordinary art at intothenoid.blogspot.com.



AKTION CAT
Latex house paint and
ink on wood.
© Paul Garner 2012



LUMPEN

Latex house paint on wood. Part of the "Public Housing" collaborative art show at the University of Memphis.
© 2013 Paul Garner



TIME TO UNITE!
Latex house paint on wood.
© Paul Garner 2012

"Art has always played a crucial role in revolution and social movements. The oppressor uses pictures, images, the spectacle to keep us divided, to keep us isolated and atomized from one another. We must subvert the oppressor's images and ideas, explode them and create images of our own to unite and empower us, to teach each other about the history of struggles that have come before us and remind us where we are headed."

- Paul Garner



YA BASTA!

Public mural.
© 2012 Paul Garner



CAIRO 2 MEMPHIS

Acrylic and oil on wood panel.
© 2011 Paul Garner



IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU

Abandoned home in Memphis (now demolished). All art by Paul Garner.



WINDOW TO THE WORLD

Acrylic, oil and xylene on cardboard.
© 2011 Paul Garner

the parallels of counterculture

by Bennett Foster & Michael Perry

Memphis Art Brigade is a guerilla arts group in Memphis, Tennessee formed in 2011. Michael Perry, a working poet and musician, helped organize the group. Michael is between extensive tours with the Memphis band Ex-Cult, but we found a moment for conversation to explore the role that counterculture plays within society today, more specifically their role as poets, artists, etc. and how effectively does it shape or subvert mainstream values.

In a speech James Baldwin gave in 1966 titled "The artists struggle for integrity," he said:

"Something awful is happening to a civilization that no longer produces poets. And what is even more crucial is when it ceases to believe the report that only poets can make."

MP: I wanted to ask you, what do you see as the role of what would be called the counterculture in society today, or in Baldwin's terms, the poets (all artists, writers, etc.)? And whether that culture is effective in subverting the values of mainstream capitalist culture ... or has it been integrated into that culture, homogenizing it in a way?

BF: It is like an insidious disease how the market dictates culture. There is always counterculture trying to subvert that, but there is always the parallel force that feeds off the ideas of that culture and tries to translate it into the logic of capital. When we talk about counterculture, it is important to define what norms are market driven and what needs to be subverted in order to resist the culture of capital.

MP: I think you bring up a good point ... that mainstream culture or capitalist culture has this capacity to integrate what was once considered subversive into its logic, even strengthening itself through that process. Slavoj Zizek points out that is one of the strengths of capitalism -- this ability to adapt its logic to these movements, strengthening itself. His example was the initial protests to the Iraq War; George Bush stated that this was great -- that's why we are fighting this war, to protect the freedoms of Americans to protest. While that protest was a subversive mass movement, counter to mainstream culture, it

was also integrated into the mainstream culture it was resisting. And this is one of the dangers I think.

BF: So, what are the choices artists have in terms of avenues to get their work out while trying maintaining their integrity? For instance, there are artist collectives, and then there are fake grassroots organizations funded by million-dollar corporations.

MP: Yeah, like the Memphis public library hosting photo exhibitions funded by Wal-Mart about the problems facing of the black community in Memphis. This is another danger.

What's going on in Arizona today is a good example of a counter cultural shift, where there is the ruling culture in Arizona that says they are not allowed to teach these courses that deal with radical artists, not allowed to teach racial identity ... where the subversive writers and poets that do make it into the curriculum are looked at as an enemy who is fueling an antagonistic relationship, which we know already exists. But there are organizations that are setting up libraries with all the books that have been banned. I went to one in Tucson called "Revolutionary Grounds," which had an entire "banned book" shelf, and people who smuggle these books in to these kids. I think this is a good example of a culture subverting and acting against the state apparatus.

There are plenty of collectives working ... the beehive collective, remember we saw them?

BF: Yeah.

MP: We saw that lecture regarding coal mountain removal in Appalachia and the struggle of folks living there. They worked with the residents to create work that they all felt adequately represented the struggles around this issue. Which is a resistance, I feel, to the mainstream logic of capitalism ... creating artwork from a place of solidarity among workers, their families, and the artists of the collective.

I think guerrilla arts groups are one effective avenue. They typically work anonymously. They put their artwork directly in the public sphere, on walls, trestles, etc.,

around a city, which goes outside the logic of the market, outside the logic of capital, outside the logic of even the art market. It also demystifies the artwork (artist) in a way, and I think that is a relevant area of cultural/political struggle.

BF: Memphis has had a recent surge in mural work, which seems to be the opposite of artists creating their own art in public without the sanction from the city. We have these businesses commissioning murals that perpetuate ideas about the locality of the business and creating an identity around mid town, for instance, a sort of centric-ism ...

MP: "Midtown is Memphis" ...

BF: Yeah, exactly. So these kinds of messages come out of corporate-funded art that tell people there is something geographically and culturally exceptional about a certain part of town, which is really unscientific in that it ignores the material conditions and how the value of a community is measured by city government when TIF zones are drawn, etc. They help businesses in an area create a self-serving myth. I think this is meant to attract what the neo-liberal urban "regeneration" theorist Richard Florida coined "the creative class" or "high bohemians."

MP: Yes, the liberal notion that art and artists by virtue of being artists somehow makes them feel like they are participating in some kind of uniqueness or maybe even counter-culture. And it's a way to equalize and homogenize everything to where the businesses are the ones who dictate what goes up, and they are the ones whose interests are served by art not taking a subversive stand.

To me, this is why the murals are typically these bland, very abstract or playful pieces whose content is simply a depiction of the neighborhood -- mainly the businesses in the neighborhood. It's a way to keep out the threat of genuine subversive voices from within the city. These typically come about through gentrification, displacing those who already live there, driving out lower-class and black folks in Memphis to develop this culture. And it comes from this very liberal notion of "community" to tag something with "We" such as "We Are (insert city)" when there really isn't a "we" at all. Liberalism functions through a particular group thinking they stand for the whole.

A good example of this is about a year and a half ago MAB was working to create a public arts gallery beneath a bridge in Memphis ... we went out, put up 20 or so primarily radical pieces as a group, and then more pieces started showing up, so there was a brief moment where this public space was functioning. But then it was torn down, and the Cooper-Young Association released some statement talking about the "hotbed" of urban art and how they were going to get in on it, which they did by planning a mural to cover the entire area and squash the potential for more art to be placed there. They did this through private donations -- so they privatized the walls essentially -- to protect them against public use.

Baldwin says in the speech that "what is even more crucial is when a civilization no longer listens to the report made by poets," meaning poets having a sort of critical distance to criticize the world to change it. This was during the time of the dwindling of the Beat generation and the rise of the hippie generation and the middle of the Civil Rights movement. But also, just before a rise of massive popular struggles in America with the Black Panthers, and revolutionary groups becoming openly antagonistic to the system itself. And there were plenty of poets, musicians, and artists who had dedicated themselves to these struggles.

The Beat generation program was in a way, to subvert the concepts of American values and attack a system of morality. It came from the surrealist movement in France but with different tactics and a different viewpoint. I don't wanna be overly nostalgic like "it was just the 60's" ... I think it's been happening ever since. But I do think that it was much more popular in the counterculture to engage politically.

BF: And there were venues to support this work and artists with the ability and leisure time to create. Many of the Beat poets came from very wealthy families. But even as the easily marketable hippie movement arose, there was still this undercurrent of radical feminism, militancy and radical art coming out of the Black Power movement, like Gylan Kain and Last Poets and Elaine Brown.

MP: Yeah, look at the 70s, with the Black Arts movement in New York, lead in part by Aimri Baraka and the Last Poets ... bringing Sun Ra in and performing these plays in neighborhoods. I think that's a really good example of a genuine counterculture because they created

their own venues independent of already established networks by performing revolutionary plays in the back of trucks in Harlem ... all the poetry and activism and political struggle that was coming out of that was much more revolutionary than the Beat poets. But an interesting connection between the Beat poets and the Black Arts movement is the story of Amiri Baraka reading Howl while he was in the military, and he found Allen Ginsberg and they kind of had an artistic relationship. But as the 60's progressed and Ginsberg started shifting away from revolutionary themes of his earlier poetry, they kind of had a split. Amiri Baraka, growing more radical over the years, says that Ginsberg wanted to make peace and universal love while he wanted to make war, which illustrates a shift in culture there.

But coming full circle, today the development of capitalism is taking a position of strangle holding and creating cultural hegemony more and more. In my experience with counterculture today, being marketed by VICE magazine and so on, is that the statement became more of an individualised expression rather than an expression of collective struggle.

With popular movements such as the Arab spring, what do you see as the potential for counterculture to act in a revolutionary way?

BF: I think we need more public spaces for that to be possible. The market cannot continue to be the only place where artists are welcome... as the public spaces for art and criticism are defunded, if they still exist at all.

MP: Yeah, they've taken the ethical duty of people to be critical artists, taken away the space for art to be anything but a commodity, thus downplaying its significance and by authoritarian means preventing its threat, which is actually a much smarter way to eliminate the threat because the mainstream culture projects capitalism as ultimate freedom. That's why I think it's necessary for artists to try to act autonomously from the state because it increases the pressure to create new possibilities and new spaces that don't have to rely upon what the state says is possible. And while we have organizations in Memphis, such as Urban Arts commission and other nonprofits like this, their donors have their own class interests.

BF: And if the donors are being criticised by the art ...

MP: That's not gonna fly. That's a good lesson for culture.

BF: Have you seen Memphis College of Art's new ad campaign? It's really humiliating. They have pictures of graduates on billboards that say "Never had to wait tables" or "Never had to fold clothes at the mall" and then lists the artist's name and occupation as a designer.

MP: Yeah! It's also completely false because I know so many people who work food service who are students or graduates from MCA. It's insulting because its saying that food service industry workers are below artists. In fact many artists, including myself, work in the food service industry so that we can make the art we want to make. The whole thing points to MCA shifting its curriculum to get rid of critical art and just crank out people to get jobs in design or marketing. It also creates a gap separating an artist's work from other forms of labor.

Outside of these institutions, art and poetry have become superfluous activities but when you look back in history you see art has shaped material struggle and political spheres. A lot of people think there should be a division between politics and art. I personally believe there is no such thing as being neutral or apolitical. You are either against the ruling class or you are complicit in it. I know that seems kind of black and white, or cut and dry or whatever, but it is like that. So reconciling that fact might be what is necessary. I think if we can bring class consciousness to a higher level, our culture will become more subversive. And it's not just a responsibility of artists; it's a civic responsibility. It's a responsibility of society and communities and of everyone.

Bennett is Co-Chair of the Memphis Socialist Party and a working musician.



PUNK GAVE ME A VOICE

Call it a blessing or a curse, all my life I've clearly seen class divisions. I've hated it since I can remember. Today, I stand in solidarity with those who vow to put power into the peoples hands, and put an end to exploitation, abuse and, yes, murder.

Stay Alert, is a band I joined out of a love for Punk Rock. The genre embodies many of my beliefs, and I believe it can be used as a voice for those who have none. In effect, it gave me my voice.

Though the band itself is not a "Socialist" band, I am a Socialist, and we operate wholly democratically with many Socialist over tones, such as the equal share of all profits made by the band. I am not Stay Alert ...WE are!

While we cover many topics, I our focus -- or at least mine as the lyricist -- is one of educating and addressing issues that affect us today. I would like to see Stay Alert become more involved in activist issues. I feel we have an obligation to practice what we preach.

Steve is a member of the Los Angeles Local.

Manifestation

*The English came to a foreign land
to establish its freedom
So they took it from the Native Man
And gave him God as the reason*

*By force we've come to kill and take you from your home
Inferior Savages in wastelands made to roam*

*Now in the 21st century
We're a new generation
We can't blame it on the White Man
We are now an immigrant nation*

*Now we go out to foreign lands
To establish its Freedom
Sending out young Americans
To die, and what's the reason*

*Good morning America
This is the Stay Alert News
And we're bringing to you live and direct
The unadulterated truth!*

*Wake up America
We have a new war to fight
It's a war that's always existed
it's the enemy ...
within ourselves!*

© Stay Alert 2009

punk & politics

by Greg Pason

Hardcore punk and politics have had an up and down relationship, but separating the two is nearly impossible. The energy and angst of punk and hardcore tend to bring out the best and worst of bands, and “non-political” bands tend to be “non-political” in name only.

For me, the punk and hardcore movement were and are interchangeable. Homelessness in my late teens (the mid-80s), drew me to the North Jersey and NYC hardcore scene – a scene filled with youth in similar situations. I became politically active and socially aware around issues of police brutality, racism and housing issues. As a young skinhead, I organized with others to fight back against racism and support Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice and helped to found Red and Anarchist Skinheads (RASH).

Years of involvement in music -- whether starting short-lived bands or booking shows or festivals -- has merged my political work and activity within the hardcore punk “scene,” a scene that I’m happy my son is now part of.

Dual Power & DIY Punk

The libertarian-socialist idea of “dual power” calls for building “a new society within the shell of the old.” Every DIY space, band-organized show, fanzine and pirate radio show follows that ethic. This applies to other music scenes but has been a big part of the DIY punk movement. The idea is not just to set up an independent space for music but a community space where issues can be addressed and skills can be learned -- a space where community can practice solidarity. A DIY Punk motto is “Fix Shit Up.” Thousands of young people have learned about building community, addressing problems without the involvement of the state or police, and sharing resources and building relationships in punk collectives and events.

Rock Against Racism – Punk for Punk/Against

I’d like to focus on projects I’ve been working on in the last 15 years -- a series of projects that allowed bands and movement organizations to coordinate activities and promote left ideas.

Rock Against Racism followed the lead of the many Rock Against Racism events held in the US and UK in the 80s. These events were mostly set up to combat racism in the scene and righting groups attending events an recruiting membership at shows. In 2003, we had our first Punk Against Racism show in Hoboken, New Jersey, overlooking lower Manhattan. This was the first since 9/11. After months of red tape and negotiations with Hoboken, we were able to pull it together. It was the beginning of a few Rock Against Racism events, bringing together left and anti-racist activists at the punk scene.



Starting in 2005 the Punk for/Punk against series started. This was a a series of punk shows in New Jersey, which focused on issues (for or against) where bands played, DIY grassroots organizations tables were set up, and a safe political space was created. Events included Punk Against Racism, Punk for Economic Justice, Punk Against Xenophobia. We created an ongong space for political bands and DIY organizations to meet, table, socialize and share ideas. It also serves as a way for Anglo and Latino punk scenes to play the same bill -- something that did not happen often enough.

One of our best events was a Punk for Economy show where we screened a documentary film on political prisoner and SPUSA ally, Farouk Abdel Muhti. A screening in the basement of a punk club filled with 70-year-old Palestinian activists and 20+ punks was hosted by SP member Sharin Chiorazzio, who recently passed away.

These were the first events my son Trevor started to at-

tend. Punk for Punk Against continues to this day with the support of solid venues willing to donate space.



ABC-No-Rio

A space I’ve been involved in over the last 20 years is ABC-No-Rio. ABC is a former squat that has been transformed into a community center. Volunteer collectives run it and the punk/hardcore collective is just one of those formations. All shows are all-ages, alcohol-free (this just applies to the punk/hc shows, not other events in the space). Racism, sexism and homophobia are not tolerated. ABC has served as an alternative to misogynistic clubs, and provides a safe space for all-age shows where political and punk are interchangeable.

ABC-No-Rio was borne in the early 80s as an art space set up in an abandoned building. Over the next 10 years, various art collectives were created, and battles with the city, real estate developers , and police continued.

The first punk shows started in the early 90s, and they continue to this day. All shows are run by a punk/hardcore collective which operates on consensus and are all volunteer-run. All shows are structured with 1/3 of the

proceeds going to the space to cover insurance and 2/3 of the proceeds going to the bands. The building also includes a screen-printing lab, dark room, computer lab and zine library.

My involvement in ABC started in 1994 when I was active in RASH and Love & Rage (an anarchist collective in New York City). I got back involved (as an “old timer”) as my son became interested in punk. ABC also serves as a community center and info space. SPUSA member, Jerry Levy, performed “Marx in Soho” this winter as a fundraiser for Occupy Sandy.

As part of the ABC collective, I’ve also been part of organizing the free summer fest “Punk Island.” Make Music New York, a non-profit in New York City, has been working with the ABC-No-Rio punk/hardcore collective to bring a large free concert to NYC every summer. I’ve worked as a co-stage manager over the last two years and will continue the project this year. The event will have seven stages of approximately 100 bands. Last year, my stage -- DIY Punk! -- included tabling from the SPUSA, Earth First!, Milk not Jails, IWW, and many others on Governor’s Island. This year’s event is scheduled for Staten Island on June 22nd.

Many similar projects happen across the US. Young activists and older-scene vets work to build safe spaces and support each other while building our little part of the “new society in the shell of the old.”





BORN ON THE BAYOU

"I grew up an only child near New Orleans on a huge rice, sugarcane, and soybean farm. The moment I got the 1979 National Geographic copy of "Picture Atlas of Our World" (I still have it), I knew my life would be different. I ran...

I am who I am, not who I'm not -- the proud custodian of two lovely dogs, half-ambidextrous, chivalrous, intuitive, humble, career-oriented, a lover of the disenfranchised, capable of fixing or finding any "thing," empathetic, generous, idealistic, always down for a good time, loyal, impatient, naturally opposed to "auto-promotion," collaboratively inclined, impulsive, skeptical, occasionally too smart for my own good, artistic, adventurous, non-photogenic, weird, funny, and tough.

My life has been amazingly interesting and frequently *charmed*; it has been filled with extremely hard times, extremely great times, and extremely *beautiful people*."

Lauren is a member of the Los Angeles Local.

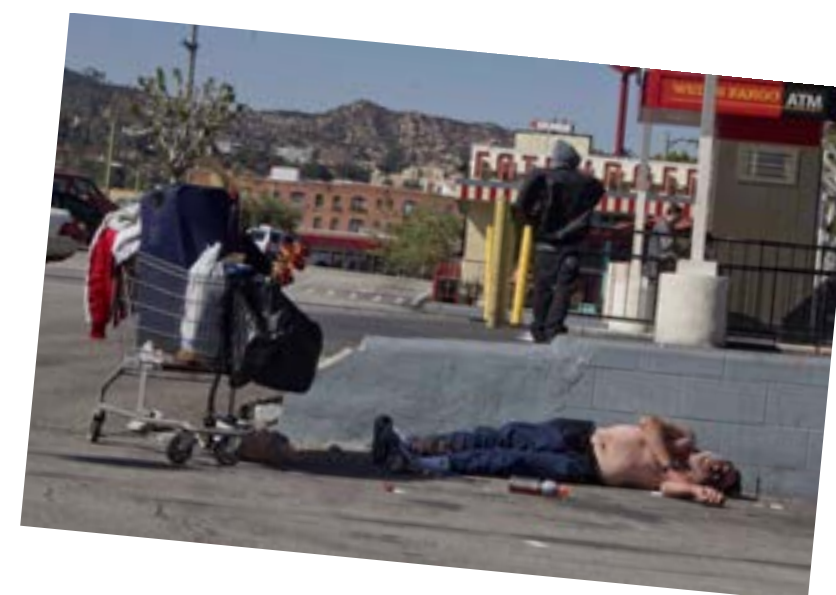


"The measure of a civilization is how it treats its weakest members."

- Gandhi

BANK OF AMERICA

Skid Row, Los Angeles
© 2012 Lauren Avery



FATBURGER

Hollywood, CA
© 2012 Lauren Avery



FOR FOOD
Skid Row, Los Angeles
© 2012 Lauren Avery



PRIDE
Skid Row, Los Angeles
© 2012 Lauren Avery



HER
Skid Row, Los Angeles
© 2012 Lauren Avery



UNTITLED
This piece was created to educate people about children being used in warfare. Morgan is an art student from Collinsville, Connecticut -- and the grandson of Jim Marra, of the Socialist Party of Connecticut.

MORGAN BROWN



photo: Brian Newberry

NATIVE ANGELENO

Brian Newberry grew up in a military family and began his professional life in the Air Force as a communications specialist. Although an active duty participant in Operation Desert Storm, Newberry never saw live combat. Eight years and an honorable discharge later, Newberry moved to L.A. and began teaching software classes to various corporate clients and legal immigrants. Today, Brian is a photographer and multimedia specialist living in Hollywood, California, where he keeps a flat with his wife, Martina, and their cat Charlie.

Brian is a member of the Los Angeles Local.



DREADKNOT GLEE

Talented, bright street musician, "Dreadknot" is an artist I first met while I was taking pictures of street scenes surrounding the Oscar ceremony.
© 2012 Brian Newberry



RED LINE STATION

Looking down into the Metro Red Line Subway Station/ L.A. City College, which is located at the south west corner of Vermont & Santa Monica.
© 2012 Brian Newberry



TORUNG

Hollywood & Wilton -- the bright yellow building is "Torung Furniture," not to be confused with "Torung Restaurant," which serves some of the most delicious Thai food I've ever had. Fresh ingredients, affordably priced.
© 2012 Brian Newberry



LADY IN RED

Walking along Palm Canyon Drive one spring afternoon, a woman enjoys a cool desert breeze.
© 2012 Brian Newberry

Anchor of Me

The Anchor of Me, small and seemingly unthreatening -- tiny little thing with a grasp so vicious it possesses me.

I lose sight of even breathing just to think of our next encounter, then I wake up and the fairytale turns to pure, utter shame. You won again.

Anchor of Me, I am at your doorstep, begging you to ruin me.

And you do, because Anchor of Me that is what you are ... The destruction of me, my smile, the shine in my eyes, the life in my LIFE.

Then we meet again, but this time you look different.

We dance, and I taste you so smooth and sweet, I just want more -- so I get it, and then you show me. To taste you too much when you shift in form makes me feel so sexy, unstoppable, so out of all control. My conversations just flowing, like you are through me, I know it all with you, can handle all with you -- Anchor of Me this was fun!

Then I wake up and the fairytale turns to disgust ... I went to bed with you Anchor of Me. Who is this stranger in my space of peace?

Anchor of Me, these new sneakers are fly, the jewels make me feel good, older, better than those girls across the street. They can't judge me -- my rock is bigger, the one I sold and the one I bought.

Anchor of Me, you make me better.

Hey there again, wow you look brand new! Anchor of Me, let's get hype, Let's blacken the skies building after building. I have to clean, Anchor of Me ... I have to move. You scare me like this. Yet you free me and ruin me and I need you for it.

Kim is a member of the New York City Local.

untitled

strange -- i seldom dream (at least that i recall) and never have of you. but i did last night...

short, with no clear images, just a knowing it was (We. no hot passion of demanding sex, just a warmth of smiles and gentle touch, freely shared. then i awoke

without the tears of yesterday, but with the echo of your short note -- the surety of your texted words:

"hey, steve -- it's all ok" ... it is ... and i (Am

sham

my poetry is such a sham-- a coward's way of choosing words; to turn a phrase in such a way that deeply felt and starkly, simple Truth) is camouflaged in hues of sometime-sensuous, alpine green. or perhaps an earthy, virile rust.

all they do is mask a fear to say straight-out the simple words within my heart that long to burst upon your ears -- i love you

no tomorrow

there is no tomorrow-- never has been, never will be. so forget the 'what ifs?' and 'suppose thats?' ... let's risk it all and go for Door #1. we don't really need to know what's behind it or what's coming. i just want to take your hand, your heart-- and walk

with you

in (Now.

Steve is an at-large member of SP California.



W.E. DUBOIS
Philadelphia, PA.
© 2012 K.S. Liberato

COMMUNITY ART

K.S Liberato is a Dominican American Marxist organizer and former union organizer. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate with interests in social movements, Urban Sociology, Black History and Critical Adult Education. He grew up in Washington Heights, New York, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he currently resides.

K.S. is a member of the Philadelphia Local.



HOME
Philadelphia, PA.
© 2012 K.S. Liberato



EL CENTRO DE ORO
Philadelphia, PA.
© 2012 K.S. Liberato



REVOLUTIONARIES
Washington Heights, NY.
© 2012 K.S. Liberato



by Amanda Macchia

Devastating Masterpiece is a body of “lost tracks” that Brooklyn-based MC Hired Gun gathered after the creation of his 2008 debut release *The People’s Verses*. Put out through the artist’s own Fresh Roots Music Group, *Devastating Masterpiece* is the second installment in the MC’s collaborative MC/producer EP series *The Hits and Pieces*. Working with producer Mista Mayday, the new record takes the MC’s energy to the next level, giving us a taste of what we can expect in the run-up to the anticipated release of his second full-length album, #NiceGuysFinish.

Devastating Masterpiece powerfully exercises the method of flow, painting a “canvas of hectic city streets” in which the MC exposes the various moods and realities of urban life throughout the course of the record.

Periods of tightly-packed lyricism and politically tense subject matter glide back and forth between sonic backdrops, lighthearted interludes, and easy-to-swallow, upbeat tracks. “The System,” a song about “hierarchy and the kingdom” in a capitalistic United States, transitions to an interlude

featuring a bright-voiced young children shouting out the project and innocently posing the question, “What happened to peace? Peace!” The album then drops you back on the streets of Brooklyn for a classically hip hop, anthemic tribute to being the best of the best in New York on “Ghost of Ocean Ave.”

The collection of 8 tracks integrates myriad styles, emotions, and imagery, hanging on essential hooks, while bartering between the push and pull of the MC’s classic and contemporary influences. Flying between phases of boom-bap, politics, claves, and Braggadoccio, *Devastating Masterpiece* finds its balance. Beatsmith Mista Mayday kills it on this one, providing a sonic backdrop as dense and diverse as HG’s lyrics.

The album opens aged. On “Future Sound,” an old recording of a jazz drum beat rat-taps in the back, a steady rhythm knocking behind the sound of the drums. An announcer introduces the entertainer. A drum solo cuts in mid-sentence and Hired Gun’s verse drops, amidst vibrating organs and sampled-in audience hoots and hollers. “It’s clear we live it, here’s the future sound,” the MC spits, slowing his verse, “Europe, Brazil yea man we’ve been around.”

It’s true. Hired Gun has been around. The influence of his work and travels to Zimbabwe, Paris, and Brazil make their presence known on *Devastating Masterpiece*. “Agent 109” starts with syncopated Afro-Cuban rhythms. In this track we get to see what makes Hired Gun the beast of an MC that he is. HG writes lyrics that read like poetry and sound like hip hop music.

Connecting to the traditions of spoken word griots, Hired Gun’s 20+ years of ciphery, writing, slamming, and spitting have lent him the skills of a true poet and MC. In “Ghost of Ocean Ave.” he spits:

*Nice guy on sabbatical. Radical.
Ridiculed by addle brain masses, Think I care here’s a tissue
Ghost of Ocean Avenue, walk through on the humble
Jersey Scarred hard with a little Brooklyn attitude
Yea, you haven’t heard of the black nerd general*

*Power fist minded white collar criminal
Meaning I can bend a few rules like them light folk,
Yellow-bellied spines with the color of an egg yolk*

Hired Gun makes surprising leaps with the rhyme structures in every song off of *Devastating Masterpiece*. Some are frenetically packed with differing rhyme patterns, rhythmic flows, and lyrical density. Others are simple, structured on the weight of sound. In the all-star mashup that is “Krew Kut ft. Stats, Luck D, Unpaid Bill, Mista Mayday, Topix, and Dazz the StarChild” Hired Gun waxes poetic, slowing his flow to articulate each word:

*Speak from the spark been deep from the start
Seek dreams without being asleep in the dark
Means and ends between me and some friends
Who convene on a weekend before a season’s end*

HG ends his bars on “Krew Kut” using alliteration to embellish upon the existing rhyme structure:

*Open minds to closed doors Coded words co-Orsed till it goes No more
Folklore fabled of faded friends and turntables able to create from the core*

Hip hop today is all about the slowed-down bass, sped-up synths, and spacey, swag-style lyricism. On *Devastating Masterpiece*, the poetic, thoughtful, mastering of rhymes and rhythms, flow and subject matter, is eye opening. Even though it makes you think about the way the world works, or the way that words can be used, it still manages to be fully fly.

Hired Gun is not just an rapper - he is, as he claims in “Future Sound,” the “8th Samurai” - wordsmith and warrior whose “amplified antagonist rap lyrics ... submit a thesis to the people at large about the sleazy in charge”, facing head-on the realities of rap, urban life, and U.S. politics, with the loving energy of a hip hop state of mind.

TODD VACHON, a member of the Socialist Party of Connecticut, did the production on Devastating Masterpiece.

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