

the journal

DAVID BLAINE & LILY COLE BY JUERGEN TELLER

BOBBY FISCHER SALON BY RONI HORN

ZINES SARAH BRAMAN MUSIC BILL SAYLOR

PABLO PICASSO HARMONY KORINE & MARK GONZALES

MACIEK KOBIELSKI COOKBOOKS JASON SCHWARTZMAN

NATE LOWMAN SUPPLEMENT



ENTRY NO 29 18 DOLLARS 16 EURO 14 GBP



My first encounter with Bill Saylor's work was at a big group painting show at Canada called "New York's Finest."

BILL'S CONTRIBUTION
WAS A GNARLY LITTLE
OIL PAINTING OF THE
HELL'S ANGELS WINGED
SKULL INSCRIBED WITH
"JET STREAM LOSER."





It was the weirdest thing in the room and I've been a big fan ever since. One scorchingly hot summer evening, Bill Saylor's ghost pops a can of Schlitz, reaches for the remote (Shark Week), shoots the TV, paints the TV ("Jet Stream Loser"), throws it out the window and eats it, too.

So, hi, Bill. What do you want to talk about? When were you born? How long have you been doing this for?

In 1960. How long have I been doing it? I don't fucking know. 30 years?

Did you paint in high school?

I painted somewhat in high school. A lot of drawing, painting, building, that kind of stuff. I just grew up that way, you know? Being from a construction family... at school you were either directed towards a trade or college and I was just good at building things.

What were you like in high school? A metalhead? Jock?

No, I was an outsider—hockey player.

A hockey player! Where was that? In Canada? Are you from up north?

It felt like it at the time. It felt like way up north. Just outside of Philadelphia. It was a big hockey town at that time. The Philadelphia Flyers had won the cup like three times. Yeah, it was good. I wasn't really a metalhead. I don't know what the hell I was. A motorcycle-repair-kind-of-punk-wannabe.

A motorcycle repair guy.

Getting into trouble...

Did you get into a lot of trouble when you were a teenager?

Yeah, actually I had to pay the cops a lot of money before I left.

You had to pay them off?

I had to pay off restitution for a few things, yes.

For what?

I think one night we went to a country club, my friends and I. We had this idea to steal all the golf carts. So we hot-wired them and drove out onto the back nine, and just rolled over all the flags. It was kind of a drunken night, some people got caught, and everyone sort of got busted at the end and had to pay up some money. Typical suburban Philly.

So did you go to college for art?

Yeah, out in California. I first went to Santa Barbara. In the beginning I was just skating, surfing, figuring out what I was going to do and one day I decided to start taking classes and to get into more serious training for art. I studied in Santa Barbara for a few years and, coming from a small town, I wanted to see the big city, so I went to Long Beach, Los Angeles to finish up college. The real education, though, was going to museums, galleries, just seeing as much as possible. A couple of trips to Europe...

Yeah, I think that seems to be what works. You need to actually see the work in the flesh for it to work.

You just go and see all the museums you can. Los Angeles was good, but New York was still so important back then, everyone felt like they really had to go there. Probably they don't feel that way as much anymore.

So when did you come to New York?

It was in 1986, or so. I think it was maybe six months before Warhol died. Basquiat, those guys were sort of dropping as soon as I got here. Things were shutting down. Everything just fucking folded.

Good time to arrive?

Oh yeah, it was just like coming to the closing.

You were just winging it?

I knew I wanted to go to New York and that is how it all started. There was no plan. I ended up working for Ross Bleckner for several months, watching his six floor building which housed his studio and taking care of the dog while he wasn't there. He was renovating and people were trying to break in from the scaffolding. That's when I first crossed paths with Kenny Schachter. There was a bar in the East Village, I think it was on Second Avenue, called Flamingo East, and Kenny had an apartment in a big high rise near it. So that was kind of his drinking haunt, and he got ahold of the upstairs floors above the bar where he was curating all these shows. If you met Kenny and would have a conversation and he'd like you he'd say, "Why don't you bring something for this show that I want to do." It was really casual.

So, did you meet contemporaries right away, like artists that you connected with?

Yeah, there was a downtown scene, all the galleries were closed and people were selling out of their apartments, so it really was Kenny's choice of finding these empty spaces and making deals with the landlords and installing shows for a month or two at the most, really. They were fun.

Is that how you know Brendan Cass?

Yeah. I didn't know him that well then, but we were in some shows together. I met people like Eric Oppenheim, Dennis Oppenheim's son. He was actually really involved in curating his own shows, sort of like Kenny. He curated a show, I think it was called "The Real Thing," and everyone would agree to have their studios open at certain times for a week and there were invitation cards with maps printed on them and people would follow the maps.

What was your work like back then? Were you mostly making paintings?

When I was painting and I had the space, ideas for sculpture would come up, and I would just sort of follow them through. I did both at the same time. In 1992 I had moved into a meat locker in the meat market, and there was this huge pile of stainless steel meat hooks. I ended up making a big tree out of the meat hooks and a steel tripod with a large metal pole, and Kenny chose it for this show he was curating down in Soho called "Unlearning." I was making paintings with seaweed. I was taking seaweed, mixing it into glue and squirting it directly onto stretched canvas, so the paintings also had a sculptural quality to them. It seemed like there were a lot more organic materials being used then. At the time, Marc Quinn was making his self-portrait head out of his own frozen blood, and Damien Hirst did the cowheads and flies.



Was there a connection with Julian Schnabel, or did I make that up?

Yeah, Julian and Ross Bleckner were pretty good friends and I got introduced to him through Ross, when I was living at his space. Ross told me that I should go work for Julian. So I would go and help with oddball projects. We were welding, moving really big paintings around, gluing plates. That lasted for years. There was a series of paintings that were green tarps with these black marks. Julian would tie the tarps behind his truck and drag them on the blacktop roads and somebody would go out onto the tarp to weigh it down, pretending to be surfing, until the black surface of the road had burned into the green tarp. It was a lot of fun and Julian was very generous. He rented the Warhol estate for years and when Hurricane Bob came through and destroyed the outdoor studio, I was asked to go out there and help rebuild it. I was there for a while and I had one of the bedrooms at the estate, and there were people walking up the beach stealing TVs. Again, I was watching someone's property and I put some artwork that was out there in my room to protect it. I had a Picabia, a late Picasso and some Picasso drawings in the bedroom. And we surfed a lot. At times, I would surf with Julian, I was surprised at how good he was.

You just moved all the art around?

I moved everything into the bedroom for protection. I lived like a king out there for about three weeks or so. Walking the beach, surfing, having friends out. So those were the kind of gigs that Julian set me up with there. It was good money at the time.

I've been thinking about Schnabel. The painting in your current show at The Journal Gallery made me think of him in a kind of different vibe, like minus the Schnabel bravado or something—

Exactly, yeah, it could be. I mean, I always kind of admired how he could do a series of works and then turn around and just start something else. He never had the fear of moving on

and doing different works at the same time. So that definitely influenced my work process.

Tell me more about your major influences.

I was really into Beuys, like *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*. You know that thick Beuys book with all those drawings? It's really nice, because they covered the idea of abstract painting, they covered the idea of drawing imagery out of nature, which I have always included, and that was someone who I really started with. And then of course you get into people like Paul McCarthy who just blows it all apart, he has a great style, and a great delivery with drawing, although I think a lot of people hate those drawings. And Artaud always made great drawings.

You mentioned Beuys, but the Germans like, let's see, Baselitz?

Yeah, I guess so. I mean I can't say that I really pursued them so much, but I definitely responded to them.

I'm just looking at this upside-down turkey.

I think I painted it the other way too and them spun him upside down. I'm not sure which way I even started that one, but yeah, I can see that reference.

No one can ever make an upside-down painting anymore, he owns it.

Yeah, he does, doesn't he. Polke was cool, too. I really love that crazy series of drawings he did—I think maybe it was at MoMA or the Whitney—those really giant paper works. Really cool, I tend to go with that aggressive delivery of imagery, whether it's Polke or Baselitz. I definitely like a faster delivery. I respond to de Kooning or Pollock, and the paintings by Americans that had a certain sensibility of space that I don't think the Europeans had. Well, Polke maybe, because of the way he put the imagery down.

Yeah.

For the paintings, it's a lot about the energy, and getting out in the city, that street graffiti that you see. I've been in the city for a little over 20 years so it's just an aesthetic that you're confronted with all the time. I've never been a tagger or interested in that sensibility,

but I think it's just more the collective quality of it all. These massive walls I see, this delivery of information from all these different hands, or you know, thoughts.

Yeah. I mean, I don't like tattoos that much and I don't really like graffiti for the same reason. Like, I'd rather look at an unadorned building than a building with a bunch of shit all over it—

Sure, yeah.

But yes, something about the way they handle scale is really interesting.

Recently, I've been attracted to all these wooden facades that get put up for the protection of construction sites. All these posters that get ripped off, and then someone comes along and there are just all these failed attempts, combined together somehow. And Albert Oehlen would definitely be someone who represents that in the nature of his painting. I mean, he's outside of Baselitz and Polke and all these guys, even Kippenberger, but he kind of represents that in a way. He's just going to keep moving on, and make this painting work somehow, even though it has failed so many times, and he's going to ultimately come through with something.

And you've done drawings directly on plywood or on the wall.

I got invited to go out to Yerba Buena [Center for the Arts] in San Francisco to cover the walls with drawings. It was a pretty huge space. I mean, 15-foot ceilings and maybe 60 feet of wall space. And you have three days to get that done. I had a sketchpad, I had a few images with me, but then I would sit down and make drawings, and then just quickly blow them at 10-scale at the top of a ladder.

Freehand?

Yeah, freehand. There was no other way at the time. I had no scaffolding, I was just hanging off a ladder. You know, you have that fear that you're just going to fuck something up and it's going to look horrible. But it makes you focus, and you're just clear in your delivery at that moment. It's really rewarding.

Do you try to take everything in? Do you go to shows and—







Yeah, I definitely stay on it. I just like the activity of going and seeing something unexpected, just seeing good works, you know? I mean, I enjoy it just as a spectator. It's that hope that you're going to make something equal. That you're going to produce works that other people enjoy.

Is there any good art being made these days?

I really liked Sarah (Braman)'s show, the last one.

That was a breakthrough show I think. She's going to be in this issue actually. Is she?

Yeah, Phil interviewed her.

That'll be good!

Husband and wife team.

I really liked her piece with the cubes that bisected that trailer cover. The way she used the transparent plexi and it looked like it shot straight through that. And it's funny... one of my favorite pieces down at the Judd Foundation in Marfa was this piece that Judd made, stacked boxes with green plexiglass centers to all of them. It looked like it was off of *Battlestar Galactica*.

I've never been to Marfa, you just did a residency there.

Yeah, at the Chinati Foundation.

So there's a lot of Donald Judd's work in Marfa, that's permanently installed?

Yeah, there is the Judd Foundation and the Chinati Foundation, which Judd started. It has 100 boxes that he had installed in the ammunition building. The other buildings around the 350 acres or so have Dan Flavin, and there's a Claes Oldenburg piece outside, a giant piece that he made. Roni Horn has two big copper pieces.

John Wesley.

He has work down there, yeah.

I always thought that was really cool.

That Wesley has an installation there?

Yeah. It's so not like the rest of the work. In Marfa did you feel like there were the ghosts of the people that had been there before?

In the studio?

Yeah.

The most recent one was Rita Ackermann and her paint was coming through the wall. They had painted it over but there were sections that were coming through. And certainly the floor, there was paint that hit the ground and splashed out, it was still all over the floor. They didn't bother painting the floors back.

That's strange.

Yeah, I could just see these patterns on the floor.

You make a lot of drawings.

Hundreds of drawings. A lot of the imagery is not even thought out at times. It's a real way of being free, discovering imagery as I make it, fleshing stuff out, and discovering new combinations of things.

Do you work from drawings when you paint? When you approach a blank canvas do you have any idea what you're going to do?

Things usually evolve into something different, you know? And at the end of it, I want to be surprised when I make a painting, I don't want to know what I'm doing completely. It's more fun to have created something that way.

Do you find inspiration in your trips out to Pennsylvania?

I guess just having that time to get out of the city, and to see things other than the city, obviously. Yeah, I just like the release of the city, being able to get out of it, definitely. And Chinati was cool for

that, getting out to Texas was nice. Just being dropped in the middle of nowhere, that isolation. I definitely like bringing these elements of nature into the work, these organic forms.

The animals in your work... As far as your painting goes, there's this really abstract work and then there are these paintings where there is more drawing involved, these reoccurring characters, like the snake, the cobra, the shark.

Yeah, the shark images, those I just collected when traveling, especially in California—going out there and free-diving off the beach or scuba diving when I first got there, interacting with all the underwater world. When I first came to California, before I started college, I got certified in scuba diving by this ex-Navy SEAL. He was a really cool guy, but it was pretty intense training. He would swim up behind you in an underwater sandstorm and rip your mask off and your regulator out to make sure you could get back on track on your own. So I did a lot of scuba diving, surfing and free-diving. It was great! Coming from Philly, the most you see are muskrats and turkeys, so being dropped into the ocean like that was pretty good.

Yeah.

The ocean was like a huge playground. One day, we were 25 miles off-shore, and you're supposed to have the buddy system, you know. We were diving at 80 feet and I just managed to get lost. It was like a forest, all the kelp beds and reefs, and there was a big sinkhole in the reef, just a cylinder going straight down. At the bottom of it there was a shark, it was about as big as me, not huge, and it seemed very



sleepy, not trying to kill anything, I swam down and tugged its tail. It was a tight space, so the only way it could get out was to do circles around me, you know. I was just amazed by it. No fear, just a shark swimming in circles, super slow, so beautiful, until it was over my head and took off. You don't experience something like that often, it was a truly peaceful moment.

And you're painting these things from a loft in Bushwick.

Yeah, you know, the power of memory, or myth, or whatever.

The first work that I saw of yours was actually a painting that was kind of similar to the Hell's Angels skull but then the text was—

The text was subverted—

Yeah...

Or taken away, with another text on it. In the beginning I made a painting with the original logo, which didn't work out really.

Because?

Well, I've always liked motorcycles. My family, my uncle and father rode motorcycles and I had this fascination with that older outlaw culture—it's probably not outlaw culture today, really, but I made a painting with a Hell's Angels logo and it ended up being in a show that Leo Koenig did in Las Vegas. There were a lot of tradesmen around before the show opened, like electricians, sheetrock and construction guys, so the word went out pretty fast that someone had made a painting with the Hell's Angels logo. It really was more like a fun, loose and sloppy oil painting, not a very graphic rendition. And I think it was only five days into the exhibition that the gallery got a phone call.

"Hello. This is Sonny Barger—"

No, no. Three or four Hell's Angels came into the space and confronted the poor girl at the desk. They demanded that the painting be taken down right then. So she started making calls to New York to see what she should do and by that time the president of the New York chapter of the Hell's Angels started to call my gallery in New York to contact me and ended up speaking to Leo. Leo used to think he was really intimidating as a dealer, but this guy, the Hell's Angels president was so scary and those guys are right down here in the East Village, much closer than the Las Vegas guys. So there was no way I could work with that, and it was just sort of a one-off, maybe I made two paintings like that. The best thing was the description by the girl at the desk of one of the

guys that came in. Apparently he was 6-foot-something and had a scar that went completely around the top of his head. I actually also had drawings in that show, one of which was a portrait of Sonny Barger.

Was that offensive?

No, they were like, "We actually like the portrait of Sonny Barger, it's pretty good," but the other one had to come down. Later, one of the Hell's Angels guys actually brought his family to see the rest of the show. I think that was one of the funnier parts of the story that they actually—

"Hey, you know, I actually like some of the art in here."

Yeah, "we are going to take in a little culture before we break your legs." But I really did like that logo and ended up wanting to keep something of that painting and move it forward and make some others. So I started subverting the text.

So, no problems with the Angels though? You just can't have Hell's Angels written on the painting?

You just can't have that, it's a copyright infringement. They are like a big corporation, except they will just come and beat you up, no lawyers at all.

Is it a liability?

Yeah, I don't even want to say that I sold one. Under what circumstances, but, it can't really even go into print.

I don't know if the Hell's Angels read *the journal*.

Do they read *the journal*?

They need to get their subscription renewed. Let's see what we can talk about to unburden you somehow. What's "the \$100 handshake?"

I have this wall of phrases and titles. Next to it it says, "My dog won't stay." The titles come before the works sometimes. Do you ever have a title that you wish you had something you could put it on?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Well, it goes on the wall if there's nothing for it. \$100 handshake. Yeah, I don't know.

A \$100 handshake sounds like... I thought of this thing recently that's "the miserable ending." It's a massage where you get punched in the nuts at the end of it.

Oh, yeah.

I think it might go over though. It's like the anticipation is just killing you the whole time.

I'm sure somewhere out there there are people paying extra for that right now.













Untitled, 2006. Old and Segal's drawing on paper. 17 x 14 inches. Courtesy of The Journal Gallery and Leo Nocchi





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