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LIFESTYLES OF THE REASONABLY WELL-KNOWN

Peter John Boyle, Vitriolist

"My life is fun"

by Steve Dubois

Some smart people are easy to talk to and some smart people are really difficult to talk to. Peter John Boyle sort of falls into the latter category. Every conversation I've ever had with him has always bordered on confrontation. His art is like that as well. You've probably seen his blackboard drawings around town. They currently grace the front of Perishable Theatre and the bedrooms at AS220. They used to hang in Leo's. And they're invariably scattered around the city comprising what Peter calls his Street Museum. He's an intelligent, often overly articulate philosopher about towns. And although he's actually a nice enough guy he always looks like he's not having a good time, an observation he vehemently refutes if you read on.

What is it that you do?

Gee whiz Steve, that's too big a question. You couldn't possibly do one interview on all the things I do. Get some specifics. Why today? Why this week? It's got so I can be specifically challenging in the places where you draw on a wall in front of people you know who's looking at it. And you can't possibly do one interview on all the things I do. But the real significance of it is the fact that if you paint something that was completely blacked out and ideally it would have like a black light or something inside of it so that when you were sitting there looking at it you would get a sort of infinite sense of space.

What about the art you do in the bathrooms at AS220?

Well, I'm not in there with them, if that's what you mean. I definitely get to see how they feel about going to the bathroom drawing. But that's never really asking me. [laughs] I could give you a list of anal compulsives at AS220 if that's what you're interested in.

No. No significance whatsoever. What is it your birthday or something? Is that some anniversary or something I don't know about?

It's sub-Freudian.

It's sub-something.

What do you want me to do is define myself as an artist. What you're looking for is my identity blurb which is Cultural Enzyme.

OK. Can you explain that?

Yeah, I mean, anytime; it's a presence which makes ... so that chemistry operates in a different way.

What has this to do with your art?

Well, you're familiar with the kind of controversy that goes along with my chalkboard drawings. How long have you been doing these?

Since 1975. It's basically a medium that I created so I could make big drawings without doing their art-making procedures. But the real significance of it is the fact where I draw is where people look at the drawings so I can be specifically challenging in the place where people are looking at my work. Because of that fact it's possible for me to talk directly to the people who are looking at the pictures and get under their skin in a way that doesn't happen with regular artwork.

Why the chalk? Why the subject matter, the manifesto? I mean, I don't understand it.

[laughs] OK, it's because of the fact that if you painting or you make sort of a traditional art object you don't know what it's really about. You're not aware of it. If you draw on a wall in front of people you know who's looking at it. And you can watch them react. You can watch them try to assimilate and you see a style prevailing in the whole population over a long period of time. And in my mind the style is ignorance. The basis of the art market and the acquisitive instinct is a method of extinguishing or extinguishing the stimuli. Now people buy art not because they're moved by it, but because it bothers them. They want to possess it, sort of tranquilize it. And the manifest... as you say, I don't really think of them as that, are just me specifically speaking to the people that look at my art and saying, "I'm watching you watching and I'm also aware of the fact that you're doing something else."

What about your birthday or something? Is this some anniversary or something? Is this some occasion over a long period of time?

Yeah, I mean, enzyme; it's a presence which makes me feel important. I've wanted for a long time to do a space that was completely blacked out and ideally it would have like a black light or something inside of it so that when you were sitting there looking at it you would get a sort of infinite sense of space.

I remember they did have colored lights at first. I guess it proved a little unsuitable for the folks.

Apparently yes. But that's just another incarnation of what I consider to be extinguishing artworks. They're trying to tame art and make it subservient to a decorative scheme or some sort of ego-dominated strategy.

I've been reading your commentary, "State of the Art," in the AS220 newsletter. You can be pretty vitriolic. How come you're so mean?

It needs vitriol. It's like a tonic. I feel I'm providing a mean since the very first day of AS220. I've been performing a function which is somewhere between witch doctor and devil's advocate. This is just one more way. The fact that I'm writing directly about the situation is to me, just freeing me to draw on the blackboard because as more time goes by I'm not really interested in writing on the blackboards. I write on the blackboards because there are times when that stuff is required, but I'd much rather draw on the walls and just operate traditionally as a critic or gossip columnist or whatever. You should come up with a noun, adjective or whatever. If anyone could come up with the term you could.

I think you just did. I like vitriolic. I like is a lot. Listen, has anyone ever taken you on with the same vigor and sarcasm as you? I mean, I've seen you take people apart. You can be downright nasty.

That's not really true because what I do is stimulated, by a very committed, caring mentality. People don't waste their time on me the way I waste my time on them. Criticism is essentially a huge acknowledgement. In a world where people go out their way to pretend that things don't faze them, for me to actually sit down and construct an attack, which is a shitty world, for me to construct an approach or a penetration of someone else's activity is, in my opinion, an enormous complement. It's an acknowledgement that someone else's activity has affected me, that I spent a lot of time thinking about it and I think of criticism as essentially being very positive. The cliché is it's better for people to react negatively or positively than have no reaction at all.

As long as they spell your name right.

That's what I'm saying. It's a cliché, you know, the Oscar Wilde thing; the problem is when you're not being talked about.

What do you do for fun?

For fun? My life is fun. Everything I do is having fun. There isn't any separation. I don't have any concept of weekend. Talking to Steve Dubois is fun.

I guess you don't have a regular job.

No. I've been a cliché of the starving artist since 1991. I've just learned to live without money. The pieces downtown that I've been working on under the title of "Street Museum" have all been executed just from change I've gotten back from my food stamps. I've just come up with ways of doing everything that I do with out money. The fact that I invented a medium like blackboard drawing was just preparing me for something that I would eventually be doing without financing. I've designed my existence. And it happens to be working out quite well right now.

Well, I've been living on next to nothing since we started this paper, little did I know that I was actually creating a work of art.

You're making a good parallel. My life and your life are quite similar [laughs]. I could be just as happy interviewing you as talking about myself. All of these questions, I don't think that you have to ask any of them except for the fact that you're ostensibly performing a service to the community.

But Peter, what are you going to do with your life?!

This is it. I'm doing it.

Oh.

What brand of vitriol does he use?

Vitriolist; John Boyle, KNOWN.