

# OPEN

*Season*

Opening night of the fall art season in New York. I'm doing the rounds with my daughter Nell, a severe but scrupulous critic. Tonight she looks marvellous, and those five-inch heels put her eye to eye with me. I adore tall women, but so do all the hungry middle-aged men looking our way, probably figuring how much capital it took to reel this one in. I should be wearing the T-shirt that proclaims, "She's my daughter, asshole!", but instead I'm sporting the other one that says "Chet Baker had it coming!", worn to irritate the Old Methadonians I expect to encounter tonight. Daughter's presence always elevates my mood, and the barely contained pulse of New York throbs beneath the streets of Chelsea, the fierce energy of this town an elbow to the solar plexus, so many attractive people out and about on a lovely autumn evening.

First stop is Nychaus, a converted townhouse on 20th Street, where co-curators of cool Tim Nye and his elegant partner Jacqueline Miro are creating a scene that feels refreshingly free of the stink of money, focusing primarily on California art from the early sixties onward. George Herms, a West Coast hipster of indubitable authenticity, has been transforming street detritus into funky sculpture for 50 years, and he gets three whole floors on which to display his alchemical sleight of hand. George, wearing a slightly demonic beard and a handsome corduroy suit, sips a beer as the surfer-inflected crowd wanders among the ruins regained.

At 303 Gallery on West 21st a Sue Williams retrospective beckons us in, her first gallery show in ten years. Nelly finds the painting of a woman serving her oppressive male partner a steaming plate of shit, hilarious. These early works in which Williams depicted unpleasant men sexually abusing and generally brutalizing women, paintings that once caused feminists to run screaming into the night, now seem to exude a patina of nonchalant acceptance, like the side chairs in that Baudelaire poem, "des meubles luisants/polis par les ans." Two art critics stand ogling the works on display, tittering at their own cleverness, quoting shit in French. I ask Critic Number One what he thinks of the show; "She paints scrotums very well," he glibly remarks, which is true, Williams does render the insanely unattractive rugaceousness of that crucial part of the male anatomy with a harsh yet laudatory gaze, her

fine brush barely touching the sac. She must have spent a lot of time gazing up at naked men. The smirking scribbler also notes how he is not really "looking" at the show because he hasn't been invited to the dinner party after. A strange dependency. Presumably he would be more inclined to donate his simian opinion about the work if he was on the exclusive guest list for the dinners that follow certain gallery openings. The other little feller struts like a budgerigar on the mate as a few 20-year-old grad students gather round to catch his oracular utterances, which will later be posted and dissected on Facebook. Reputations made or maimed, with the click of a mouse. I'm googling that Brendan Behan quote about critics as we leave.

Two blocks north, the Steven Kasher Gallery actually has a bouncer on the door, and a mob milling about on the sidewalk. A few people say hello. I see Nell's eyebrows rising skyward as she silently asks, "Who?" and I explain that the attractive lady was Vi who used to 'sing' backup in the Rubber Duckies. Vi still looks terrific, but other faces from the past have not fared so well. Some of us have been flying too long with our heads outside the plane. The gallery is mobbed, we can't see much of the exhibition that Steven Kasher has so carefully arranged, except for a tasteful cluster of portraits by Anton Perich, who is finally getting his due as an artist and documentarian. Out of the crowd emerges a man in a Borsalino hat and a slightly rodentical face. "Bonjour, Max," he says to me in a rasping, electronically tinged accent that emanates from a plastic object inserted in his throat. It's Grisbi, notorious junkie from the sick old eighties, looking more French than ever, a low level gangster out of a Melville film. Nell is delighted by this guy. Grisbi was a lovely feller back in the day, but under the sway of heroin, like most junkies, he became less than trustworthy, stealing anything that was not nailed down, shameless in his abjection when discovered. I'm happy that he is still alive, and all these other survivors jabbering like the Ancient Mariner. New York needs its quota of freaks, now sadly depleted, to counterbalance the latest wave of whitebread kids roaring in from the suburbs and the plains. There is another Max's KC-related show on 24th Street, a collection of portraits of the artists when they were young dogs, but why do I need to see old photographs of these over achievers, with their terrible haircuts and

polyester clothes? Perhaps only to marvel at how they ever got laid. Enough of this nostalgie de la boue already. Make it new, somebody!

A flash mob gathers outside Larry Gagosian's enormous 24th Street emporium, all modelly and slender, the girls teetering in their red-soled shoes, the men with uglifying little beardettes glued to their chins. Inside are various massive objects, which neophyte artist Dan Colen seems to have placed there simply because he could, working with the unlimited budget his shrewd dealer has provided. Oh for the simple, carefree days of shit in a can! A brick wall that caught Colen's fancy has been summarily deconstructed and re-installed in the front room. It stands there mute as two thousand Carl Andres, neatly stacked and jacked, speechless. Referring to what? Sartre's Huis Clos? A real chunk of Edward Hopper's red New York walls? Pink Floyd? I dunno. A line of toppled motorcycles apparently references the choppers Colen had seen parked outside the Angels' clubhouse on 2nd Street, so he made copies of them. Because he could! Ask the Angels. A half pipe flipped on its back like a skateboarder's inebriated take on Donald Judd, who made, like, boxes. Colen has also directed two hundred assistants in the fabrication, from un-chewed candy gum, of sweet smelling faux abstract expressionist pictures, which are entirely lacking the slightest semblance of the raw power of authentic abstract expressionist pictures handspun by alcoholic visionaries in the grip of something real! Hello! The whole gallery smelled, not like teen spirit, but like greenback dollar bills. Why not just bring in a rig and drill for oil, down into the schist below Chelsea? The absurd cost of materials and manpower was all that this random accumulation of objects evoked in me, though Nell thought the gum pix were a hoot. Anyway, it's all sold, so who cares about a bit of critical bitching from people who weren't invited to the after-party?

Maybe next month's openings will match up to the energy that is running through New York right now. Truth and beauty, we demand it; in my daughter's green eyes is where I find it. Fadeout to rice and beans on 10th Avenue and then get the child home from the heels. "New York, I love this stinkin' town!" Rest in peace, Sidney Falco...