

Hello, from Julie Voyce

By Rebecca Diederichs

February 15, 1999 at Nova Era on College Street, Toronto

Julie and Rebecca: First we have to describe what we have here ... we have the body of Christ in the shape of a sea shell containing sweet eggy stuff ... we have to hold it between two fingers and melt it on our tongues ... I want to get the recipe ... great to bring to parties ... so beautiful ... unadorned sweet egg ... are you having problems with that? ... that is so gross ... (laughter) reminds me of ... not marzipan, Turkish delight, a cross between custard and Turkish delight ... weird colour ... I really like it with Christ's body! Never seen or eaten anything like that ... it definitely needs some adornment, a substantial pastry around it ... very peculiar. I really like it!

Editorial note: Rebecca realizes very early on that interviewing Julie Voyce is going to be like trying to catch a swarm of bees in a jam jar. Like the amazingly peculiar and sympathetic characters in her drawings, paintings, prints, and photocopies, there are just so many thoughts that jabber up against one another. Rebecca tapes the meeting and transcribes the following:

I was in the library. Down in Daytona, in the surf, in six inches of water, lying in the sand, when I was bitten by something ... I thought it was something sharp, something dragged in the surf ... but there, low and behold, two puncture marks, they're not there now ... so I went to the library to find out what it was ... something really exciting! Where is my deep sea angler? What do you think?

That's what bit you?

I don't know what bit me, but neither does anyone else. I was in a souvenir shop and they had these live hermit crabs that were decorated with pig snouts and shit painted with epoxy on their fucking shells, and they were slowly asphyxiating, the poor things, because of the paint. Each crab probably had fifteen percent of its body in epoxy, right? So imagine fifteen percent of your body covered in epoxy and you'd be asphyxiated pretty fast, too.

Is this for new work, the drawings from the library, the crabs and deep sea anglers?

Yeah. I just finished something that has hermit crabs with pig parts on it, except the shell looks like a toque. It looks like a hip-hop crab! It's just something I could never have done on purpose, it just would never work.

I want to ask you what is the inspiration for the haute couture in your work, the shoes, the dresses, the colour?

The first real inspiration was from my first trip to Italy in 1991. I did all these gouache books when I got back. I'd done all these gouache books there, when I first arrived in Rome, then more as a reaction to Toronto when I got back. And for the first time since finishing art school I had a kind of floating time, when you get to just look and make things, and you are suspended from all your errands. You're in a new country and you don't have to think about anything. The actual looking at and making of things became the main structure

LOLA

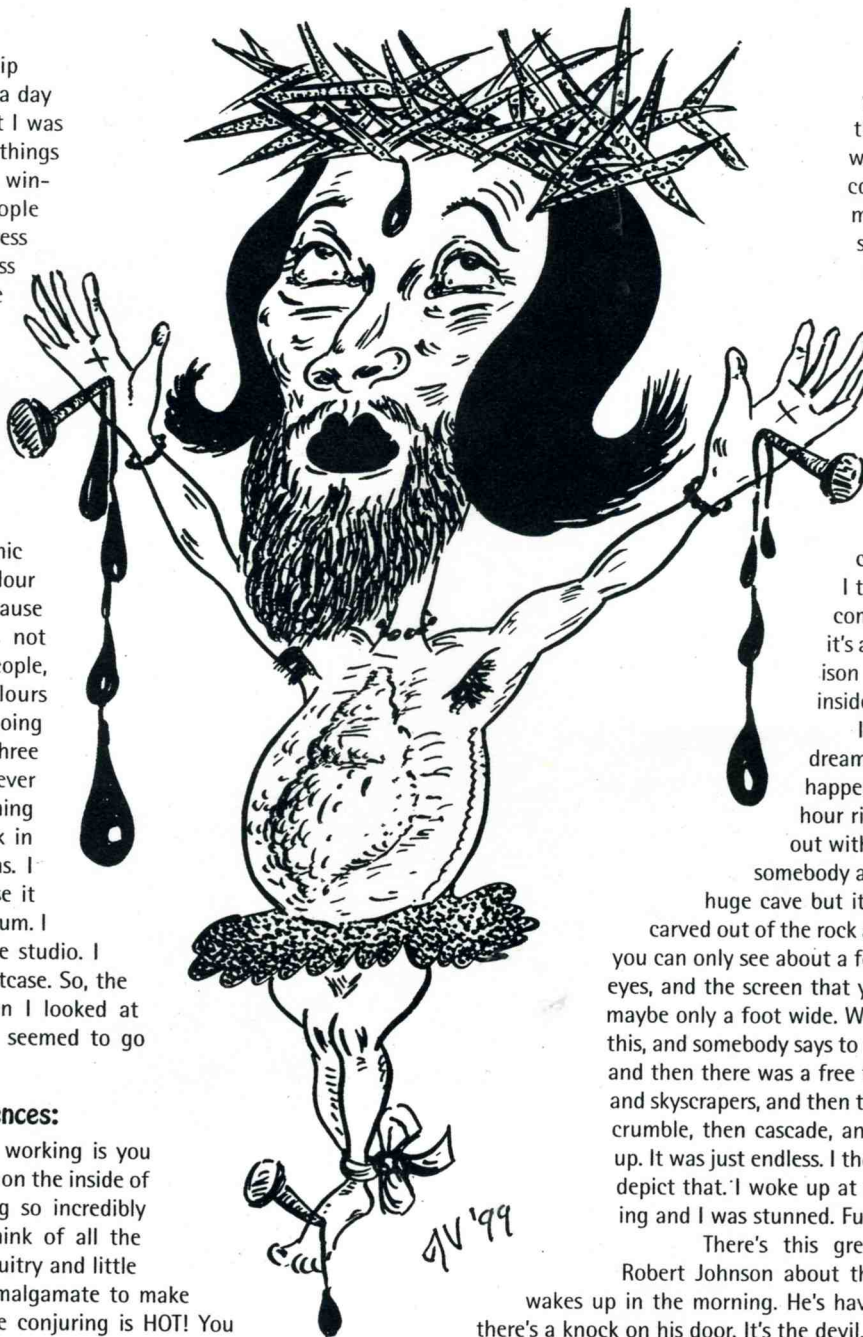
of the day. It wasn't something I had to whip together after work or after a day job. And I found in Italy that I was totally indulging myself in things like bras and shoes in shop windows, and the way people dressed, 'cause when they dress good there they *really* dress good. So that's where the haute couture aspect came from.

Do you think gouache contributes to it too, because it has such a buttery quality?

Well, I think of diagrams because gouache is a graphic medium. I took up watercolour when I was travelling because watercolour dries quick, it's not toxic, and it doesn't bug people, and people find watercolours rather charming. If you're going to work in a *pensione* with three other people that you've never met, you've got to use charming mediums. You can't just walk in there with a big huge canvas. I used gouache in Italy because it seemed a sensible travel medium. I could set up in my own little studio. I could pack it all up in my suitcase. So, the medium came first, and then I looked at stuff, and, you know, it just seemed to go together.

... On cross medium influences:

What you have when you're working is you have this impulse and it starts on the inside of your body and it's something so incredibly sophisticated, I mean you think of all the impulses and little bits of circuitry and little light shifts in dreams that amalgamate to make this conjuring BANG, and the conjuring is HOT! You just have to make it, and I think that all of that is so



sophisticated, and what are we working with on the outside? We're working with these comparatively crude materials, you know starting with this thing, with these five sausage bits sticking out of it (Julie points to her hand) and I think, you're always bartering. You know you barter your ideas with these crude materials and I think it's all crude ... computers are crude ... it's all crude in comparison to what's going on inside.

I had this amazing dream last night. It was happening at 90 miles an hour right?, and it started out with me in a train with somebody and we're inside this huge cave but it has little potholes carved out of the rock and it's infinite. But you can only see about a foot in front of your eyes, and the screen that you can see it on is maybe only a foot wide. We're racing through this, and somebody says to me 'you made that,' and then there was a free fall of Roman ruins and skyscrapers, and then they crack, and then crumble, then cascade, and the scenery rises up. It was just endless. I thought I could never depict that. I woke up at three in the morning and I was stunned. Fuck!

There's this great blues song by Robert Johnson about this guy, right, who wakes up in the morning. He's having his coffee and there's a knock on his door. It's the devil, and the devil says, 'Well, you want to go for a walk?' And the guy he says 'Okay'

Original artwork by Julie Joyce, made especially for this publication, 1999

I mean it's the devil, he's not going to argue. And this whole song is about walking with the devil and it's such a nice little metaphor, perfect, about being an artist.

What do think is the greatest challenge for an artist?

FAILURE.

How do you define that?

I don't think failure as an artist is a bad thing, I mean if you think you're failing maybe you're doing a good job. Maybe it's UNCERTAINTY I mean. That's a better word. I think that's the biggest challenge in being an artist, especially in the society we live in now, the challenge of always being an apprentice.

Maybe I'm just flattering the whole fucking lot of us here, but I think what we hope to do, and I don't care whether you're doing it with video, whether you're doing it in an ornate sense, or a minimalist sense, or if you're doing it cynically (which I'm not too fond of, I think of cynicism as a form of chicken-shittism, but anyway...) No matter how you're doing it, in some way you're trying to make an inanimate thing, this object, and you're trying to give it a soul. I think that's what we're all trying to do.

I think the apprenticeship thing comes from the fact that you are always in training, you're in training until the day you die. Because it's MAGIC. You are making this little thing. It's like a little incubator for feelings, and you hope, and you pray, and you tinker, and you stare at it, hoping to god it can sustain its own life, and that maybe it's carrying a little tiny soul with it, and then you put it out there and you don't know. Is it still going to tick in a year? Is it going to fall apart in three weeks right in the middle of an exhibition?

I always feel grateful when I find a work of mine that is five years old and it still works for me. I guess that's the thing for me, that uncertainty and that you'll always be at the service of something, an apprentice of this larger thing. Wow, people are going to read this and puke.

What's your next project?

I keep working on watercolours. Actually, there are a whack of things. I'm resurrecting the 'What do you want when you are 50?'

I did this when I was 39. It's for a show I'm going to be in called The Poetics of Aging with Naomi London, Arlene Stamp, and Gisele Amantea, at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. I started doing these 5 x 5-inch silkscreens in 1993, and there have been several manifestations of them. Every so often I inject them with new imagery. So I started thinking about being older. There are some artists out there who can work in a very profound and deep way. I'm not one of them. I'm really shitty at it! So I don't even try anymore. I just think you can't cut it! In the land of the BIG, you can't cut it. What are you going to do when you get older? There's only one thing, and that is being optimistic, so I fabricate fairy tales ... things I am thankful for in my older friends. I made these things that are thank-you cards on one side and abstracts on the other.

You used to be an abstract painter.

Yeah, back in the 1980s. They were hard!

I remember reading about you and your work in Canadian Art.

Yes, that was an article on painting that Gary Michael Dault wrote in the mid-80s.

They're hard to do, oh man! So, I'm trying to do them again because they're hard. Right now the work is only 5 x 5 inches. They don't, at the moment, have an interior logic. They're just decoration, so they're going to be treated as decoration. They're a two-sided screen, with the thank-you card on one side and the abstract design on the other. That's one project.

I'm going to keep doing abstracts, and instead of 5 x 5s, do 10 x 10s. So I can start with little pieces and experiment, right, and print out ten of them and see how they all look together, flip them, print them on the back. That's going to be an ongoing thing. And then there's going to be another book, and the mail art thing for the year 2000.

This is the second year that I've done a mail art project and I'm

Maybe
I'm just
flattering the
whole fucking
lot of us
here...

new at this. I know there's a whole network out there. I'm just a novice. I know Mitch Robertson did some, and I know there's a guy out West, Chuck Stake [aka Don Mabie] who's been at it for twenty-five years. I got some stuff from a guy named Maurizio Nannucci and also from Mark Dicey.

There's a thing called Mani Art. It's out of France and it's run by this guy called Pascal Lenoir ... one helluva name! Think of that name and you think of sex!! What he does is, you send him sixty of something, and then its put together in Zerlox-bound booklets of twenty-five artists, and you get one back.

It's like old fashioned correspondence. Put it in an envelope, stick a stamp on it, and mail it.

And it's touchable, you can HOLD it. It is a way for me to have a one-person show. I'm going through a phase. I want to work on alternatives to sending slide packages all over the place. So for the time being, my thing is to send 200 of these cards everywhere.

And see what happens, who responds?

Well, you never expect a response because as soon as you expect something it's a form of solicitation. So, as soon as they get it and open it, the piece is finished, right? What I have now is over twenty reference people and each person has given me anywhere from one to sixteen addresses, so the envelope says "Hello, from _____", with the reference person's name. That way they know who it's coming from. I have a file thing, really old-fashioned! It's an index box actually, with files, and I don't have to worry about anything crashing! I've just begun and if, IF, Chuck Stake ever comes to town, I have to get him drunk and drill him because I'm sure he has tons of information!

Me and Doug Guildford decorated a box once because I saw this Italian guy's art, his name is Walter Pennacchi. He sent me this thing, and I thought it was a piece in and of itself. It was a piece of cardboard with those screws that fold out at the back, like Duo-tang screws.

In England they're called cotter pins.

I like that! So, I showed this thing to Paul Petro [Julie's dealer] and he said, 'You have to open it up!' Inside was a box with instructions to stamp the box and send it back to Walter. So, I hadn't gotten around to it and kept thinking I should do it, and then Walter sent me a little postcard thanking me for participating in the project! So I called up Doug, because Doug is the KING of rubber stamp carving! He carves INCREDIBLE rubber stamps out of erasers. He gives workshops on that. So we played around with origami and rubber stamps, decorated the box, and sent it back to Italy. God only knows what

will happen to it! So, it's little things like that I'm working on, and I have to do a book for the Fall.

For?

It's an annual thing.

The annual Voyce book!

At about this time, we are interrupted by friends of Julie's, Don and Les, just as I'm asking her who her major influences are. Don and Les comment on the café's merriment and Julie's new haircut, which isn't so new. Don says he just got back from New York where he spent an entire day at galleries. The Jackson Pollock exhibition was on but he refused to see it because he doesn't like Pollock, but he was dumbfounded by Kurt Schwitters' collages. Julie's ecstatic. 'Kurt Schwitters! He's great!' Don responds, 'Tell me you like Rauschenberg and I might marry you!' 'I do!, I do!'

If I were to name one overriding influence, and I hope I'm not derivative of her, it's Frida Kahlo. That's if I name a biggie. When I was in art school it was David Hockney, and I also remember Sue Coe really did me when I was graduating from high school. She was doing a lot of editorial stuff then and when the Toronto Star used to do a weekend magazine, they used a Sue Coe and it knocked me right on my ass!

It's funny, you know, I was working on a watercolour and looking at the composition and thinking, hey, there's some Gretchen Sankey in this, and some FASTWÜRMS, and a little bit of Catherine Heard, and then David Salle!! I saw his stuff at the AGO and I hated it, but there it was! And I realized that there they were, all these contemporaries just slid right in. Seeing your buddies, your contemporaries in your work, that's the way it should be. It means you're a fan, a fan of your contemporaries. We're drawing from a common pool, so there are going to be connections.

What do you see as the future of ART in the new millennium?

I think more technology, but I also think people will keep drawing and painting. I don't see that being wiped out because there's something really primal about taking a greasy substance and dragging it across a surface. It is one of the first things we did as a species to state that we were human. We have this thing in us that we always hope that things are more than what they seem. We hope they're BIGGER. We hope they have a SECRET. We hope they'll give us POWER. We HOPE. I think it's in our cellular makeup to take that grease and drag it across the surface.

Julie Voyce's work is part of The Poetics of Aging, curated by Carol Podedworny, with Gisele Amantea, Naomi London, and Arlene Stamp. Art Gallery of Hamilton, May 13 to August 22, 1999. She is represented by Paul Petro Contemporary Art.