

How Firecat Came to Be

by Stan Klein

My goal was always to be an interested traveler in the arts. I have been fortunate to make many unscheduled stops in various forums and been close to many different forms of creative expression. My curious nature took me as a young adult from my artist fortress in my parent's house to the world of live jazz music. Experiencing the inventive force of Rahsaan Roland Kirk in a small bar opened flood gates of what unexplored facets of one's expression laid before me.

Finding an oasis under another name in university life, I was able to expand those thoughts. One helpful teacher was Leon Katz, former personal assistant for Alice B Toklas and close friend of various playwrights. The idea of expression, audience and the inner play of all those elements became a continuing element in my art making and thinking.

In order to sustain myself financially, I eventually started a picture frame shop with very little money and for the next twenty years watched and witnessed the local art gallery scene and its artist's world play out in front of me. They were all customers in their various roles in the system. At some point I needed to move away from all this local claptrap. More identities and skilled working employment followed in another location until I was back in the 'regular art world' again as if by nature. Many curators, directors and installing a couple hundred exhibitions later, I started to work directly for artists.

Along the way my perception of people in the arts was forming certain repeated patterns. I loved all the tasks and work performed with these folks but my mind was becoming even sharper to the pond I was swimming in. A few of the artists that I worked closely with shared stories of fellow friends and their experiences. This world of visual culture and history was taking on a multidimensional examination of human nature itself. Egos,

vanity, greed, and sheer jealous ambitions were on full parade. In many cases the more exposed the "famous" became, the more I turned away. A friend in the film industry always warned me to stay clear of the "talent."

Constructs of achieving success came many times with all sorts of compromises to one's self. It all started to become rather distasteful as a whole. One artist in his later years would tell me stories of talented painters who walked away from the opportunity in order to be true to their vision. Others walked away from the gallery structure and its commercial nature of doing business.

Which brings me to the formation of my gallery in Chicago, Firecat Projects. Having a policy of not taking commission on sold work took me out of the dealer realm. I could exhibit folks who didn't fit into societal accepted notions of art making. With the support of friends and interested parties I was free to provide forums for that 'odd' overlooked visionary to interact with a new audience. I had come full circle in my journey. Every exhibition each month is a time to engage with a new mind and perception. I sometimes offer some suggestions as I install their ideas but feel happy to be a part of their world.

In my last conversation with my father before he passed, he asked me if I had any regrets. I was stunned by his asking me that question rather than the other way around. I gave it a thought for a while and answered him honestly "no not at all." Running Firecat Projects as I do, I can pull the sheets up in my bed at night with a warm smile in my heart. That's all one can ask of oneself anymore.

Each issue the New Art Examiner invites a well-known, or not-so-well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest – whatever it may be.

