

Art

The white rooms, carefully illuminated to highlight the neatly spaced paintings and sculptures that inhabit them, are full of the soft murmurings and occasional forced laughter from the many sumptuously dressed couples. The bejeweled, begowned women and tuxedoed men form little sequin & penguin groupings, gathering here to confirm their importance as they coalesce, then dissolve into new groupings and hail-there greetings. They look around at others to see if they are being looked at.

They all appear jolly and tanned or ruddy in pampered complexion. Everyone smells good. There is an abundance of stretched faces plastically altered into expressions of permanent mirth. Martinis, champagne glasses or little dainty sandwiches occupy at least one hand of everyone present. To ensure the steady flow of art-appreciating humanity, the gallery has strategically placed glass-topped tall tables throughout the rooms for empty glasses (to be swiftly replaced by fast-moving young men in livery); there is intentionally no place for a person to sit (other than in the Performance Hall with its plush tiered seats, temporarily closed to serve later for the evening's much ballyhooed climax).

The settled as well as the ambitious rich of Minneapolis make their slow parades through the tasteful labyrinths of Evans Gallery, the Twin Cities' premiere avant-garde art house whose mailing list is the most coveted imprimatur of elite society many an excluded *nouveau riche* seeks in vain to get on. Evans opens that social sluice gate slightly once each year to let through just enough of the upwardly-mobiles to still maintain the status quo while keeping the gallery's bottom line healthy.

Alvin Hargrave, through the endless efforts of his wife, had just been added to the chosen few. He owned far too many A+ Tire Stores to be ignored further.

“I like how that piece manages to keep a balance between space and shadow,” Mrs. Alvin Hargrave comments to her husband, a foot shorter than she, sloshing her drink onto the parquet floor as she points. Her wobbly glass had been pointed in the general direction of a Mason jar filled with urine that stood atop a pedestal in the shape of a Corinthian column.

Adjacent to it on the wall hung the painting of an Indian chief's head on a bicycle pump. Responding to his wife, Alvin's eyes turned to it, and in a champagne-infused voice replied, "Yes, yes, dear, life-like, very life-like, that." The Hargraves had been in London the year before, after which Alvin decided to add Britishisms to his speech to give it more gravity and culture. He thought himself an eccentric wit. He even contemplated growing a mustache, then thought better of it.

The owner of Evans Gallery ("never say *The Evans* Gallery, darling, it's not done, though *The Evans* is quite all right and has a certain ring to it"), Maya Harrington (known to her high school classmates as Sandy Swanson) was steered by Jane, her assistant, towards the Hargraves in order to welcome them to this evening's major attraction, the next and highly awaited "Showing" of the skyrocketing sensation of the art world, Graechus. The nation's leading art critic, also someone with a one-word name, Remondo, whose syndicated monthly art column appeared in the Twin Cities' sole surviving newspaper, had written an ecstatic paean praising Graechus' "Showings" as "the most important paradigm shift in the entire history of all human expression, creating if you will a bold art form that defies categories and puts Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* to shame!" [typos omitted and inappropriate expletives deleted]. Rumors were that Remondo, who had become nationally famous with his predictable, scathing diatribes and insults to all "modern art", thus making his boundless praises of Graechus truly unique, might even make an appearance this night of all nights.

"Mrs. Herrington," intoned her assistant Jane as they arrived at the Hargraves, "may I present our new Platinum Club members, Mr. and Mrs. Hargrave?" Alvin wasn't sure if he should say, "Aw, just call us Alvin and Helen," but figured staying with Mr. and Mrs. is what you should do here. "Well, welcome you two," chirped the doyenne of Evans Gallery, "and I hope you are enjoying yourselves?" Yes they were, Maya Harrington not really listening.

"So, see anything you like?", the businesswoman getting right to it.

"Oh, it is all so wonderful, but we haven't seen everything yet," gushed Mrs. Hargrave.

“Well, you might take a look over there at that new piece we just acquired from Milan, it’s an Oreggio, I have to say I stole that last month when I was in New York, a bargain at \$18,000.” Alvin and Helen dutifully turned around to look at what Madame Harrington pointed at with a lazily dangled long lacquered fingernail.

Alvin thought it looked like a whale that had been blown to bits by TNT. There was a wide swath of beach and various mounds of flesh thrown about, blood flowing from them, along with large scattered broken bones and a fish head. The work was mainly in bright shiny red oils with several crudely glued-on black-and-white photographs affixed in what appeared to be a random patchwork. Below the massive canvas was a small plaque with the words: “No. 2489 - *“Awaiting Infinity”* - Mixed Media - Alfredo Oreggio, 2012.” As with all works at The Evans, there was no price tag. Prices were shyly and tastefully consigned to the “catalog” that was handed to each guest as they entered the gallery, each numbered work given a brief story, history and price, for to be so “mercantile” as to put art on the level of common commerce would be such garish *gaucherie*.

“It’s now modestly priced at \$24,500,” said Maya, “but for Platinum Club members I will let it go at \$21,000. It would certainly make a nice gift for the right collector with a fitting space for it,” fixing her eyes now on Alvin to see if this guy was a player or not. Alvin’s eyes however were turned inward, calculating how many of the new Premium Michelins he would have to sell in order to have the Oreggio to display in his house somewhere. If he took some of the Muskelunges and Northern Pike off that one wall in the rec room, maybe it just might fit there, but for 21k, holychristalmightly.

Maya could not read Helen Hargrave for a reaction, so transfixed was she in catatonic contemplation of *“Awaiting Infinity,”* frozen somewhere between awe and panic.

Sensing there would be no quick sale here, Mrs. Maya Harrington gave some hidden subtle signal, and Jane smoothly maneuvered her boss onto to the next clump of people standing around, gesticulating at various art objects.

* * *

Frank Jr. and Wally Watson lived a gently lazy, alcoholic life, happily spending the many years it would take them to fully piss away the impressive fortune Frank Sr. had amassed during World War II manufacturing ball bearings. A major line item in Frank Sr.'s ball bearing budget was "public relations," a slush fund for bribes to key politicians and bureaucrats in the armaments procurement morass. Frank Sr. also knew how to use his brief fame as a pitcher for the 1932 Cleveland Indians to get senators' doors to open for him, then he let the money do the talking.

President Truman would eventually try to seek justice from Frank Sr. and others for being "heartless war profiteers," but such proof as there was against Frank Sr. had a magical way of disappearing. When "Fastball Frankie" suddenly and conveniently died of a massive heart attack during the investigations, the government and press found other fish to fry.

News of his father's death was a great cause for celebration for Frank Jr. Within a few weeks he quit college, put his mother into a condominium in Florida, and set sail to the seven seas, eventually picking up and marrying Wally along the way. She was a healthy good sport who had one quality Frank Jr. prized above all others: she knew when to keep her mouth shut. They could sail together silently for days on end.

Twenty-two years later, standing on the balcony of a five-star hotel and gazing down on the colorful Venetian gondola and *vaporetto* traffic below, Frank Jr. was on his fourth Campari and soda when Wally broke the news: "Frankie, I think I'm pregnant."

"And I'm the Prince of Wales," he chortled, but then he saw Wally was dead serious. Though in her late forties, she was now with what would be their first and only child. A cloud of indelible dumbfoundedness descended upon them and remained until the child was born and they could eventually manage to pass the bouncy energetic boy onto someone else to raise and care about.

Their main act of parenthood had been to come up with a name for him: Tommy, after the bandleader Tommy Dorsey of the Big Band era. In his time he was known as "The Sentimental Gentleman of Swing." Frank and Wally loved ballroom dancing and Big Band music.

Tommy grew up in a number of environments of professional parent substitutes, learning to live life among other privileged unwanted kids who, unlike most real orphans, had the comforts of wealth. Aside from occasionally getting two-sentence postcards from his parents from various places around the world and making the rare "home visit" when the prep schools would be closed for the Christmas holidays and Tommy had no other place to go but "home," wherever that was for the moment, during which his parents awkwardly pretended an interest in him, Tommy Watson had no contact with his parents.

And that was all fine with him, it all seemed quite normal to him. He could be and do whatever he wanted, and nobody seemed to care about that as long as he obeyed the rules. Which he did. For after brief spells of rebellions that not coincidentally arose with an explosive emergence of puberty and zits, Tommy soon learned that one could accomplish one's ends more effectively by appearing to accept the oppressor's rules rather than challenging them. Under the protective cover of conformity he could live a rich, secret existence that was all the sweeter because none of his minders suspected anything.

Under the guise of having to visit or travel with his parents somewhere, with letters in hand from his parents he skillfully forged and handed to the head masters, Tommy was free to go wherever he chose, dipping into his trust fund whenever needed, again with the right forged documents. Thus began Tommy Watson's devolution towards becoming in time one of the world's most famous artists, since from early boyhood he began sculpting, editing, revising, reforming, re-inventing and renewing his life's greatest work of art: himself. He would craft a life to suit his own delicately honed and nurtured images.

* * *

As the clock ticked towards the moment when the guests would be corralled into the Performance Hall to experience the event they had all come to see, Maya Harrington jettisoned her assistant Jane in order to navigate more unencumbered among just the Patrons now, easily identified by the sparkling gold calligraphed letters on their ceramic name tags. “Patrons” were those loyal customers of The Evans who graduated from the lowly Platinum Club by having bought in excess of \$35,000 of art.

There was also the very select Doges Group who “had acquired” in excess of \$250,000 each, but their number was not in attendance tonight — not altogether surprising, since most Doges were Russian mafia, drug dealers, third world dictators or Chinese officials feathering future escape nests.

Nothing laundered money quite like the purchase and sale of high-priced art. Madame Harrington’s purpose with the Patrons was to be sure to say nothing more than hello and make them feel special. Just work the crowd for now. If all went well tonight, they would be the ones clamoring for her to help them outbid others for the right to own a rare Graechus Showing.

There was a palpable ebbing of conversation in the white rooms as on signal the platoons of liveried young men descended with precision to busily clear away all glasses, bottles, food, napkins and dishes, and as the lights everywhere began to dim. Over the invisible loud speakers came the soft-spoken, vaguely accented invitation: “Ladies and Gentlemen, please proceed to the Performance Hall and accept as our gift to you on this historic occasion, and proudly wear, the Showing Banner of your choice for your favorite cause.”

At each of the entrances to the auditorium were tables upon which were arrayed corsages for women and lapel buttons for men, where at the center of each item was placed the Graechus Showing logo of a small slice of 8mm film celluloid, complete with sprocket holes, which was embedded at the top of the open loop of the familiar “cause ribbon” of the type worn by actors and actresses at awards ceremonies, that upper half of the loop symbol for

infinity. One could choose a logo-enclosing pink ribbon for breast cancer, a green one for climate change, rainbow for gay marriage, light and dark blue for saving dolphins or whales, red for revolution, brown for organic foods, white for peace or black for occupying Wall Street. Purple for a return to monarchy was considered but rejected as too esoteric and fascist.

Young and eager women in tight-fitting Evans Gallery uniforms helped guests pick out their choices and affix them to their evening wear. One prominent and elderly Patron was heard to say “fuck this shit” and was allowed to pass, logo- and cause-less.

Alvin and Helen Hargrave believed the dolphins and whales needed their support, so they wore the blue colors into the Performance Hall.

The comfortable plush seats filled rapidly. A cellist and two zither players sat in the center of the stage before a curtain and began setting the mood by playing obscure gypsy melodies. Air with the odor and faint taste of stewed apricots was pumped into the theater. Some guests got up and moved to other seats depending upon what people next to them were wearing in their corsages and lapels.

* * *

The Watson Tool & Die Company where the ball bearings were made was located within easy transport distance from the Lake Erie docks in Cleveland. Barges from Duluth bearing red mounds of iron ore provided an endless stream of earth sands to be blasted, poured and formed into tiny shiny precision-tooled balls that, when encased in oil in the moving innards of various machines, would help to kill Nazis and Japs.

Far, far from the hot, dirty, smoke-belching furnaces of Watson Tool & Die Company, Frank Watson Sr. built a massive three-story stone mansion in the middle of green acres, not only as a suitably ornate dwelling for a man of his stature, but also as a macho way of marking his territory as the top dog for miles around. Never mind that most of his wealth was inherited and his brief major-league baseball career, his greatest pride, paid him peanuts in an era before sports became mega-businesses. But that aside, he was nonetheless an astute

businessman who knew how to get things done to substantially increase the family fortune.

When Frank Jr. in turn inherited his father's wealth and position, selling the family business was swift and lucrative — there was a fresh war now in Korea — but selling the house was a different story. For tax purposes it was put into a trust, for the use of both Franks and their families until the two men and their spouses were dead, after which the house was to be converted into a retirement home for anyone who worked in the Cleveland Indians baseball organization.

The house, which Frank Sr. pretentiously called "Oak Haven" (though no oaks were ever on the property), served as the family home for the months of Tommy's birth and early infancy while Frank Jr. and Wally agonized over how to get rid of him and back on their yacht. The family lawyer who hoped to keep the Watson family business gave Frank Jr. a wind-up Bell & Howell 8mm movie camera to take home movies of the new baby. "You will be glad you have these memories later," the lawyer said.

For a while Frank Jr. made a number of movies of Wally, of the yacht in dry dock, of sunsets, the neighbor's cat, a square dance festival, and dog races, all silent movies of course, and just one of Tommy. Tommy in his crib, making goo-goo sounds to an overhead mobile of cutouts of various stylized birds, kicking his legs in enthusiasm and drooling baby happiness. This scene is preserved for two minutes of film, whereafter something must have required Frank Jr. to put the camera down and leave, since the world now seemed turned on its side and for the next six minutes the movie is of an out-of-focus close-up of a baby talcum product before the film ends in bright light from the plastic white trailer added at the end of the processed film. *Finis* and the clack-clack-clack of the take-up reel.

These movies, unearthed years later by Tommy on one of his bogus "home visits," ultimately become the germ, the impetus for Graechus and his invention of a new art form, the Showing. The Showing would consist of abrupt cuts and rearrangements of short segments of these 8mm movies in combination with separately synced and sometimes not synced reel-to-reel sound recordings of various sounds (human, animal, synthesized) that Graechus collected

“to absorb the texture and to guide towards the deeper meaning of the visuals.” That, combined with the Graechus invention of the CyclopsCam to “properly publicly display ‘philosophically’” the videos and sound tapes “in a proper synthesis” would turn the art world on its head.

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The prestigious summons through The Evans Gallery mailing list was enough to assure full attendance at the Graechus unveiling, but the “Remondo Mondo” column appearing in *The New York News* before the event guaranteed the eyes of the entire art world would be keenly focussed on this historic moment.

There was even talk that C-SPAN might cover it live.

Remondo’s Mondo

“*Art in The Trenches*”

New York, April 12, 2014

Well, my dear Mondonites, you no doubt have had occasion when reeding this column at the breakfast table, newspaper perched over your orange juice, to lunge for your linen serviette to wipe away my bile-spewing rages re the current *a**wipe dipsh*t* “art scene.” Just taking in the filth and debauchery enshrined at MOMA (now completely taken over by certainn butch Yale bitches [you know who they are]) can drive one to everlasting dispare!!

Why are we at this state?

Like all great truthz, the answr is right in front of us, dears, sticking out its purple tongue in crazed derision: the Custodians of Good Taste, the Trustees of Refinement, The Knights of Decency all died long, long

ago, to be replaced by today's promoters of the cheap putrid celluloid and HD screen: movies and Tv series rampant with vamopires, zombies, weirwolves, post-dystopik cannibals and gang war freaks, gargoyles of bad skin and rotting teeth, pierced bodies, bleeding orafices and mindless gratuititious violence.

We deserve all of this. If today's "art" tells us anythung, it is that we must devote all available energies and fora to assure the complete mass destruction of all mankind, the sooner the better.

Yet there comes a flicker of hope, something not far from Redemption knocks on the door in the person of a new hero-god appearing *deus ex machina*, as if *sui generis*, to save us all. Dear Mondonites, perhaps we lucky few can still rally and survive if we are worthy, worthy of the Silent Eye that has come to us and yet may us grant favor.

FOR THOUGH even in times of sheare mass hysteria (30 Years War, Pol Pot, Jefferson Davis, most of the XXth Century including *all* our stupoid presidents!), pockets of beauty and grace did yet survive, among certain Gifted Ones who like the reclused Irish monks of the 9th Centruy salvaged what could be salvaged from better times until the raging *f***ing Huns* killed each ogther off and superior dormangt DNAs could restablish themselves in Taste Triumphant. Then could there florish, surviving embers of creation suppressed however long: HARMONIOUS madrigals, red-raucous Titian masgerpieces, Mozartian *Sachertorte* elegances, Shakespearian sonorities.

On the anniversary of a year ago today minus a week, in depths of dark and grave despair oh my Mondeedons, did the universe once again thus open itself kindly ti me, yes just to *me*, the prospect of reborn wonder in the person of Graechus about whom in these foul pages of newsscript you have heard me rhapsodize over and over again, no doubt *ad nauseam* about this phenomenoin thrust upon me by pity8ng gods no doubt.

This dashing goateed god of the "Showing," an art "form" that explodes the word "form" to smithereens and demands its own species and genus in the Darwinian calkulus of life in all its vast spectra, this

bold of lightning that hits the oceans and spawns the dawn of a new life in a hitherto sea of inchoate amino acid possibilities.

Yes, it was he, Graechus, who boldly stormed past my secretary's outer moat to confront me in the cavern of my studio with such *éclat* and masculine *pinache* that all my flesh quivered at once at the sight of this finely muscled god dressed all in sleek Italian leathers and shiny horns of steel-clad shoulders that hinted of an eagle's wings, his long flowing cape thrashing in my direction the cold air from outdoors, still captive in the billowing vast folds of his massive manly cape. *Frissions* coursed thru my trembling body like jolts from an electric chair!!!

“Behold this!!” he shouted, then emptied the contents of his Zephyr Tourister Roller Suitcase upon the expanse of my polished oak desk which I had oiled with essence of almonds just that very morn.

\‘This\’, he announced, unveiling what looked like a huge espresso machine with a gigantic lens attached, “is CyclopsCam, the purveyor of my wonders, which you shall kn9w as my Showings!”

The “Showings” were until now a vast slippery rumor moving swiftly through the underworld of the art *cognoscenti* like wildfire, my dears. Assumptions were these mysterious Showings had all been bought up by one or more Japanese industry moguls, but I doubted that since there were no longer that many Japanesees billionaires around, sng fewer still who thought art worth owning. That was not always so among the erstwhile samurai! *Sic transit gloria mundi* (and if you do, say hello to her!!)

Graechus must have sensed my paralysis in his commanding presence, for while I remained mute and supine he assenbled a portable movie screen, placing it in a cornder sum distance away, then putting a metallic cylinder into this projector-like thing he called the CyclopsCam. He plugged the CyclopsCam into an outlet, turned out the lights and let the thing rumble into life. I already sensed this would be a moment akin to witnessing the A-bomb go off for the first time back in a place called Alamogordo or whatever the name was.

“I shall not narrate, though narrative there should be,” Graechus

informed me in a melifulous baritone, “lest I intrude on *your* personal experience of that which you see-hear-smell-feel from the CyclopsCam... it is *your* journey snf no one else’s!” whereupon the device seemed to swell and whirl some more as bright light fell upon the movie screen, angelic voices came from all around, and the faint smell of rotting fruit filled the air.

Graechus disappeared into a space somewhere behind me. “Thiknk nothing,” he commanded in a seductive stage whsiper, “and just let it happen, Señor Remondo, just let it happen. Just...let...it...happen.”

Dear Monnenites, what then kidnapped all my senses — my being, *mein Dasein!* — was like nothing ever hitherto known to me — or I daresay known to all mankind with the posibiity of a couple of uncouth overweight rich Japanese— when there *came* that transofrmational moment, that transport into something like travel in a parallel universe where ecstasy replaced air, and water became orgasms of delight and comoplete transfiguration!!

It is futile to describe it. How does one paint the colors of the soul?

You must simply go and experience this magnificence for yourself, your *own* encounter just as the Great Graechus himself had commanded me!! But do not take this from me as one of his sexy stage whsipers, defiled here thrugh this vile ink-smeared ***a***wipe news-sh*tpaper*** in your hsndsf and think of my plea as ONE GIANT F***KING SCREAM FROM MY BOWELS TO G9 TO MINNAPOLIS MAY 17 NEXT AND SEE GRAECHUS AND HIS LOTESST SHOWING FOR YOURSELF!!! DO IT, MY MONODONDOS!!!!

This will be Graechus’ fifth and he assures me finest Showing. the other Four having all, hE now confesses yesterdy in an otherwise cryptic email, been alas already sold to a certain Arab prince or emir (or *c***sucker terrorist* as far as I m concened) for vast undisclosed amounts that rrime with “bullions” but that story, even if trelated by Graechus himself, is no doubt apochryohal. (The Showing he gave me to experience was simply called “#3”). But just go there on May 17 to the Evans Gallery in Minneapolis (Iyou may find me there too, newly becaped as befits a proper homage to Graechus!) and have your own

special kind of CycloosCam LSD trip, man, oh my dears! Pax vobiscum.

—Remondo

[The Scripts newspaper organization which is the syndicator for Remondo's Mondo regrets the inclusion of the many typos and misspellings Remondo refuses to correct due to his belief that edits of whatever kind would dishonesty betray his "free-flowing spontaneity and originality." We also apologize for his profanity which, after long negotiations, we drew a line and demanded right of redaction which, by compromise, would still leave intact much of the underlying scatology. An attempt at a complete agreed schedule of profane words and exactly how they are to be redacted with asterisks was agreed to. A further fortunate fruit of our discussions with Remondo is his acquiescence in this disclaimer that must be published at the conclusion of anything he writes for us and the other syndicated publications. The views of Remondo are strictly his alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else in the The Scripts newspaper organization. Remondo Mondo T-shirts and coffee mugs are available for purchase at www.remondomondo.com.]

After this column appeared in several newspapers, including *The Minneapolis Sun Times*, there were several offers published on craigslist.com for Minneapois seeking to purchase invitations to The Evans event, going as high as \$2,500 per person, breaking the local record for scalped Super Bowl tickets.

[update: If I ever get back to this, here is not much of a spoiler: Frank Jr., Graechus and Remondo are all one and the same person. His "life's work" in creating *himself* as his one work of art was intended to make such a grotesque caricature of himself in

order to mock the pretensions of all art. He intends the apotheosis will come when he is inevitably and dramatically exposed as a fraud in a moment of great ostentation and glory.

But the more outrageous his “work of art” becomes, the greater is his success as a performance artist. Nobody has the insight or courage to unmask him no matter what he does in his three incarnations.

Frustrated, he finally decides tonight is the night, at this gathering of Minneapolis’ art elites and patrons: *he* will expose himself. Only, once again, that turns out to be just another masterful triumph.]