



ANITA ROSENBERG: Down by Law

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Eric Firestone Gallery, East Hampton

August 14–September 26, 2010

Anita Rosenberg began her art education at the San Francisco Art Institute with a BFA in welding metal sculpture and then moved to NYC to earn her MFA in film directing from NYU Graduate Film School. Anita met Patti Astor, underground film starlet and co-founder of the famed Fun Gallery when she was in high school. Patti is her best friend, Jenny's big sister, and when Patti would come home to Cincinnati she would spice up their talent show routines. Patti took Anita under her wing when she moved to NYC and starred in her NYU films, "Escape to the Elkhorn" and "Bachelorette Pad".

One of Anita's great loves was Andy Witten aka Zephyr. He was King of the Line at that time because he had more trains running than anyone else. Zeph taught Anita the secret language of tagging and how to decipher the code. He called her a "tipster" because she was an uptown girl who carried her camera everywhere taking pictures of all the tags. It was through Zephyr and

Patti Astor that Anita became friends with Fab 5 Freddy, Futura 2000, Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring, Dondi White, Dr. Revolt, Haze, and Charlie Ahearn.

Anita lives and works in Hollywood. Her journey has been eclectic. As a writer and director she made two successful cult classic chick flicks: “Modern Girls”, starring Virginia Madsen, Daphne Zuniga, and Cindy Gibb, and “Assault of the Killer Bimbos” starring Griffin O’Neal and Nick Cassavetes. She then launched a global line of hand-painted furniture and accessories, which inspired her travels around the world. Anita’s mixed medium assemblage art is collected by George Clooney, John Travolta, Tom Hanks, Jennifer Aniston, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Hilary Clinton. Her work can be seen on the sets of Friends, Everybody Loves Raymond, Melrose Place and the ABC comedy The Middle. As a writer, her two published books include *The Art of Painted Furniture* (Sterling Press) and *Thursdays with Mom & Michael* (Red Mountain Press). And Anita is a certified Feng Shui expert and BaZi Chinese Astrology Master dedicated to changing the world, one room and one person at a time, just as she is committed as an artist to changing the world, one image at a time.

Rosenberg will be exhibiting two c-prints taken on the set of her film “Bachelorette Pad” along with a copy of her original book, *The Tipster Chronicles*, in “Down by Law” at the Eric Firestone Gallery, East Hampton, opening on August 14, 2010. She has graciously agreed to speak about her work here.



New York in the 1970s and 1980s was a city bursting with originality, innovation, and experimentation. Please talk about how you see the relationship between your early work as an artist and the environment in which it took hold.

From 1979-82, I was at NYU Graduate Film School where I received my MFA along with Spike Lee and Ernest Dickerson. I knew Patti Astor from growing up in Cincinnati because she was the big sister to my best girlfriend from high school, Jenny. Patti was an underground film star at that time and she took me under her wing. Patti collaborated and starred in my student films like my NYU thesis, "Bachelorette Pad", which was a 'romance comic book' come-to-life about Candy Stone – swinging single bachelorette. Patti starred as Candy.

Shortly after I moved to NYC from SF I met Zephyr at the famous FUN Gallery. We were together for three years and he is one of the great loves of my life. It was through Zephyr and Patti that I met Fab 5 Freddy, Dondi White, Futura 2000, Kenny Scharf and Keith Haring. At that time I was completely influenced by "the scene". Remember that I had arrived in NYC from art school at the San Francisco Art Institute and in NYC I was focusing on making movies not art. But I carried my camera everywhere and fortunately I photographed what was going on at art openings, at art parties and on the streets in terms of graffiti tags and murals. The one main influence for me at that time was learning about PAINT MARKERS. I have used them ever since.

Who are your artistic inspirations, and how have they influenced your ideas, aesthetics, and actions through the course of your career?

My early influences were macho welders like John Chamberlain and John Smith. My major at SFAI was welding metal sculpture. I used to collect old farm machinery from the fields of our farm in Cincinnati when growing up and I welded them into found object assemblages. At Colorado State University (where I was for one year after high school because art school did not allow you to enter right away) I took an all male welding class. When my sleeve caught fire, everyone laughed because I was a girl trying to weld. Keep in mind this was before "*Flashdance*"!

While at SFAI, George Kuchar influenced me to make movies. He was the John Waters of the West Coast and it was through George that I learned about independent filmmaking. I had taken footage of one person talking on the phone and had other footage of someone else talking on the

phone and George said, "Edit them talking to each other and dub in dialogue from a romance comic book." My kitschy film style was born! When I went to NYC with my sister to look at graduate art schools, I thought, "*Hey I have already been to art school why not go to film school?*" That is how I ended up in NYC, the place where all artists go to further their education of life.

For "Down by Law" you will be exhibiting a limited edition series of Keith Haring flip books. Please talk about your work documenting Keith Haring's subway art.

Keith Haring used to hang out at the Kiev Coffee Shop on the corner of 7th Street and 2nd Avenue right around the corner from the NYU Graduate Film School building. Actually, we all hung out there because it was the only place we could afford to eat; french toast for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The Spanish exchange student from my class asked Keith to star in his first year film running around the NYU Library. It was quite funny, because Keith was very quiet and shy.

One day in 1982 I started photographing Keith's subway chalk drawings that were popping up like crazy. One night at a party I ran into Keith and told him about the subway pieces I had been documenting. He asked me which station I lived at and which trains I rode. The next day on my route from 86th Street to St. Mark's Place there was a series of drawings with a character taking flash photos. It was me! I was so excited and posed by each of them. In those days, tags and graffiti murals were our way of talking to each other. *Before text messaging, we had tag messaging.*



Fab 5 Freddy and Patti Astor, Photograph © Anita Rosenberg

You will also be exhibiting your photographs from the making of the film “Bachelorette Pad” as well. Please talk about the creation of this film, and what it was like to shoot in New York City at that time.

“Bachelorette Pad” was the crowning achievement of my years at NYU. Spike Lee was in my class and his thesis film was very serious and my film was cartoonish and stylized using graffiti

artists as actors. When I started my thesis film none of the macho guys in my class wanted to work with me. So my girlfriend, Maryann Brandon, and I did it alone. Maryann is now one of the top editor's in Hollywood with credits that include: *Star Trek 4* and Tom Cruise's *Mission Impossible*. But back then, we were the chick crew so it was just Maryann and I making this film. We worked with Jimmy Picker to animate the Barbie Dolls; he had won an Academy Award for animation. Zephyr and Kiely Jenkins created the sets. My favorite scene was the disco we shot at Club Negril. It was a former reggae club that became the first hip hop venue in the East Village. It was here that uptown stars like Treacherous Three, LL Cool J and Rock Steady Crew got their first taste of the downtown scene.

There has been a wide array of artists to emerge from the early graffiti movement. How have your earlier experiences influenced your ideas about art, and in what direction would you like to go?

While in NYC I was invited to lunch at The Factory with Andy Warhol and Divine. Ronnie Cutrone took photographs of everyone and that day made a big impression on me because this was a scene on its way out and I was part of a new graffiti hip hop scene that was happening at that time. We were young and everything was possible. After graduation I moved to Los Angeles where I wrote, produced and directed cult classic chick flicks, "Assault of the Killer Bimbos" and "Modern Girls". I stayed in touch with everyone and when Charlie Ahearn was trying to find a distributor for "Wild Style", I took his film around for screenings.

Patti Astor has remained my dear friend as well as Fab 5 Freddy. A suggestion by Zephyr years ago took my art to a whole new level. I had taken photographs from my trip to the South of France and wanted to frame them, but couldn't find any frames that fit. Zephyr suggested I make my own frames! A light bulb went off in my head and I started building and decorating my own frames. This is how my signature style of assemblage mixed medium pieces combining sculptural frames with photography and painting came about. I owe a lot to my years in the East Village of NYC. No one knew it would last. No one knew where it would take us. Everyone has their own unique story. This is mine.