



Tony Fitzpatrick

A BROAD SWATH

Tony Fitzpatrick

VREZ BACHOUMIAN
GALLERY

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—MK KOZIK

Why have I never done paintings about myself before?" asks Tony Fitzpatrick, turning over my question to his mind.

"I guess, working as a journalist, I always thought of myself as an observer." Fitzpatrick is also a poet, actor, DJ and an ex-beer, ex-JD, ex-Catholic, ex-bachelor. His path has been one of exposure, experience and digestion; the residue of each incarnation remains.

Such a zigzag trajectory, albeit marked largely by excess, has largely precluded formal education or being steeped in classical tradition and has frequently resulted in his being labeled "an Outsider," a perceived pejorative moniker that seems like a red cape out of the corner of Fitzpatrick's eye.

"You can get a really good education by living life in a certain way. I think that the fact that I kicked

around, and got kicked in the teeth a few times and went through some shit, was responsible for making me a very religious artist as far as what I wanted to do and how I was going to do it."

Fitzpatrick's work bears this out. Manufacturing valves of direction, honesty and a plain-spoken way, his graphic work, like that of Obit Serbin, Julie Galen and Sue Coe, trades in a raw, cartoony style of outline and minimal modeling, with images speckled together by patches of text and poetry.

While Fitzpatrick's former appetite for material was attuned to the shadows and the unremembered martyrs that dwell therein, it has now, for the most part, taken a subordinate role to iconography gleaned from all the classic way stations of the impressionable years: the ranch house, Mutual of Omaha's "Wild Kingdom," the post-war graphic style that resonated in those days.

The images, together with the scrawls of text that join the compositions, represent the compilation of Fitzpatrick's lexical legacy, the putting in order of the affairs of his vision's version of the world. One suspects an *On the Road* mentality in their generation—an abandonment of guile and a trust in organic creation's ability to speak elo-

quently and get impressive feelings just right without belabored hearts and flowers. Don't get me wrong, there are hearts and flowers in a variety of these new paintings and etchings, and there are babies and birds and baseball, too. With Fitzpatrick's hallmark aggression toned down, his work takes a riskier line. Without the anger, the pieces are more vulnerable, but they are never meandering.

Baby Boom

To reconceptualize Fitzpatrick's recent reorientation, then, seems as simple as a switch from offense to defense, from the outside to the inside, and he will be the first to tell you that fatherhood changes you. These paintings, drawings and prints tackle the adjustment of no longer being the center of the family sun, but being a branch with its own roots. Someone to tell your stories to?

"Baseball cards, with their facts and figures on the backs, were my first exposure to history. Baseball is one thing that all sons can talk to their dads about. I've been a lifelong White Sox fan, which is the same thing as being a lifelong masochist." It's the ordering that attracts Fitzpatrick, the Negro

League players, the Latin American players that "had come into the game racing" just to have a chance. *Sholess Joe Jackson*, *Denny McLain*, *Pete Rose*—these guys Fitzpatrick has memorialized in a series of oil and acrylic paintings on panel that provide stats and color on the arms and hills of the players.

Another grouping of pieces in the "houses," incomplete or even shaped panels that, though "in therapy and not intentional," examine the sexual memories of his suburban childhood that he is sanitizing by codifying. These grimy panels primary images—a white Oldsmobile, a black ladder, a bull tattooed with a map of Texas and roasts—these are all from the realm of memory and poetry.

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In *Fighter Plane in the Snow of the Pilot*, Fitzpatrick reconstructs the story of a neighbor, a World War I fighter pilot who built in his back yard a replica plane to which he would retire when drunk. "One Dawn, come on in now. All the Germans are dead," his wife would say. The whole block knew what he was going on and would shake their heads long neighbor. Another day a neighbor's dog came down all riled and had become deathly and dangerous and was being shot down and that outside the shot, Fitzpatrick remarks that, "we find out one thing—nobody's living."

Like the former "battered" dog, bulls, strippers and men and women that Fitzpatrick has narrated previously, these stories aren't fairy tales but they are emotional in that they place a moral, but essential truth in a broad swath of life. Fitzpatrick's "books of God" or the "hard copies" of his spontaneous book of poems and images are his poems and books. His passion plays are all remembered by a quote: *Flannery O'Connor*, "The broken vessels of mankind and the dead by which we are possessed."