# FRAMING THE ARTISTS



## Artists & Art in Film & Television Volume 1

## Introduction

Visual artists who are alive and working are given very little voice in mainstream media culture. While the American public takes great interest in the exploits of actors, popular musicians, and a few select writers, visual artists are almost never interviewed, discussed, or even acknowledged. Artists are generally ignored on television and in films until they are dead, their work causes a controversy, or they have created something that is easily parodied.

Artists are far more likely to appear on news programs if they are child prodigies or if they create a minimally critical work that functions primarily as decoration or entertainment. For example, people carving animals out of wood with chainsaws, displays of ice sculptures, impressive sand castles, and elaborate food constructions arranged to look like objects or famous people are all events that have been featured by countless television variety hours.

Americans also seem to like art that can be made right before their eyes – as though work by cult landscape painter, instructor, and art supply company brand name Bob Ross is somehow more honest because we can watch him paint it in (almost) real time. A live performance with an artistic feel by a figure skater or a dance troupe commands even greater attention.

The American public rarely has an opportunity to watch a visual artist speak articulately and persuasively on prime time television – about something they have created, or about their reaction to an event that might affect their community. Film and television actors, however, are given the opportunity to be authorities on everything.

Fictional representations of art and biographical films about dead artists are common in mainstream media, despite the lack of concern with living visual artists and their projects. So what do these representations reveal to us about artists and their work?

Many depictions center on artists' unusual behavior, love affairs, or self-destruction through drugs and alcohol. Jokes about not being able to understand modern art are endless. Very few biographies of actual or fictive artists seriously attempt to consider the artist's creative process in a nuanced way.

Framing The Artists is an overview of many examples of these characterizations. The reviews that follow are but a few examples of portrayals of artists and their work in film and television. We have watched hundreds of hours of video and concede that our research has only just begun.

This guidebook and a parallel DVD and installation we have produced are the first output of ongoing research that Temporary Services is undertaking. The DVD includes clips of scenes from films and television shows that highlight some of the best and worst portrayals of artists that we have found. These clips are organized into various categories – for example, clips of fictional and real artists talking about their own work, and scenes where fictional artists behave in an inappropriate manner.

Continuing stereotypes of art and artists in mainstream media reveal to us the real impact (or lack thereof) that artists have on the world around them. The minimal presence of living, working, visual artists in these media spheres contributes to the kinds of generalizations and misunderstandings that many people seem to have about the power and function of the visual arts. It is our contention that by continually watching, cataloging, and analyzing these portrayals, artists can also gain a better understanding of their own responsibilities to their viewers and how the stereotypes hurt their ability to effectively communicate their ideas.

Temporary Services April, 2005

## FILM United States

#### 200 Cigarettes (1999)

#### Directed by Risa Bramon Garcia

It's New Years Eve in 1981 and a bunch of twenty and thirty-somethings are looking to hook up so they don't have to spend the night alone. They eventually go to the same party on the Lower East Side in New York and, in the end, everyone basically gets what they were looking for.

200 Cigarettes has a few artists floating around in its bulging cast of nutty ranting selfcentered characters. Before heading off to the party, Eric (Brian McCardie), Caitlyn (Angela Featherstone) and Bridget (Nicole Parker) stop at a bar. While in the bathroom, Bridget discusses her boyfriend Eric's art: "...then he takes me to his gallery today to see his show, and it sucks... I can't even tell you, you wouldn't believe his work. Okay, it's like big abstract vaginas or something." Moments later she dumps Eric, who she describes to her friend as the worst lover she's ever had in her entire life.

Eric storms off and arrives at the party alone. It is hosted by another former girlfriend who finally tells him why they broke up: because he is such a shitty lover. The morning after the party Eric fucks the host's friend in his studio loft – which is filled with those previously described atrocious abstract vagina paintings. Once again, he leaves a woman pissed off and dissatisfied.

When the credits roll, six artists get listed in the usual "Original artwork by" designation. So this begs the question of which artist volunteered him or herself to be the butt of the harshest joke in the film - the painter of the abstract vaginas created by the worst lover? Is there any conceivable advantage that could come from placing your artwork out in the world in this way?

#### After Hours (1985)

#### Directed by Martin Scorsese

After Hours is a wacky film about the late night misadventures of a yuppie named Paul (Griffin Dunne) whose date with a woman he meets in a diner is derailed by all manner of crazy nightmarish hijinks. Among the traps Scorsese sets for Paul are not one or even two. but three crazy female artists. There is a sketch artist (a waitress who makes Paul listen to the Monkees while she draws his portrait) and two different sculptresses who work with torn up newspaper maché. The first, Kiki Bridges (Linda Fiorentino)- the roommate of Paul's date, is a BDSM enthusiast paper maché sculptress who struts around in a bra and short skirt - inexplicably insisting that Paul take over and work on her sculpture for her while she goes to answer the phone. Just like that - five minutes after meeting Kiki, he's helping to make her art.

When the highly unstable waitress Julie (Teri Garr) gets pissed off at Paul, she turns her sketch of him into a police drawing of a burglary suspect and covers the neighborhood with flyers calling for his capture. Paul is chased by an angry mob of burglary victims. He ducks into an artist's studio where he faces his third crazy female artist - June (Verna Bloom) who apparently has seen the Roger Corman film A Bucket of Blood. She encases Paul's entire body in paper maché and plaster. When the mob comes looking for him, he's already hidden inside the sculpture and they move on (though not before the mob leader looks at the work in progress and disparagingly remarks: "Doesn't look so hard."

When the search team and artist leave, the sculpture studio is broken into by the burglars - played by the stoner comedy duo Cheech and Chong. Gee, can you guess what they steal? There is a comical discussion about art when Cheech and Chong start loading the sculpture into the van. Chong debates why they should take the heavy object and calls it "ugly", to which Cheech counters: "That's how much you know man. The uglier the art the more it's worth... It's by that famous guy Segal" Whether George Segal, the real artist whose plaster life casts Cheech mistakes the sculpture for, also plays banjo on the Johnny Carson Show as Cheech claims is something we cannot verify. Chong finally replies that he'd rather steal stereos and Cheech offers a sage nugget of wisdom: "A stereo is a stereo. Art is forever."

#### Beverly Hills Cop (1984)

#### Directed by Martin Brest

Eddie Murphy plays Axel Foley, a brash but



Trapped inside a sculpture and a movie with three crazy female artists in After Hours.

effective young police detective from Detroit who is driven to find the murderer of one of his oldest friends. His investigation leads him to the posh surroundings of Beverly Hills, California, where he finds that his dead friend was employed by Victor Maitland, an international art dealer and gallerist who surrounds himself with tough guys and shady characters.

In an early scene, Foley travels to one of Maitland's art galleries in Beverly Hills, where Jenny, another old friend from Detroit, is the manager. While waiting to talk with Jenny, Foley exhibits bemusement at the art in the gallery, especially at a particular installation involving a dinner table with rotating papiermache heads on plates. This instigates a hilarious conversation between Foley and Serge (a gallery salesman played by Bronson Pinchot). Serge reveals to Foley that the piece he is looking at was just sold the day before for \$150,000. Foley responds with a terrific peal of classic Eddie Murphy laughter.

#### Boogie Nights (1997)

#### Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson

Boogie Nights depicts a broad array of characters populating the California porn film industry of the 1970's and 80's. For a brief moment, one young starlet is shown completing her amateur painting of porn star Dirk Diggler (Mark Wahlberg). A second painting of Diggler also appears in his dream pad. Later in the film, a similarly crude portrait of a camera man hangs in the background. Though these scenes are extremely fleeting, the film perfectly nails the aesthetic of figurative works by hobby painters. Portrayals of porn actors struggling to be musicians and trying to start their own businesses are developed more fully.

#### A Bucket of Blood (1959)

#### Directed by Roger Corman

In this black comedy Walter Paisley (Dick Miller) is an awkward, socially inept, struggling artist and bus boy at the beatnik café "The Yellow Door." Walter's first attempt at sculpture ends in frustration. He unwraps a mound of clay on his kitchen table and desperately tries to create a likeness from a photo of his dream woman. He recites poetry ("A canvas is a canvas or a painting. A rock is a rock or a statue."), and tells the clay: "C'mon, be a nose. Be a nose." He mashes hunks of clay into an infantile- looking facial configuration with huge ears.

The same night Walter tries to free his landlady's cat, which gets trapped in the wall of his apartment. He accidentally kills it in the



"C'mon, be a nose" – Walter makes a sculpture in A Bucket of Blood.

process. While sleeping, he remembers some lines from the café's resident pretentious poet Maxwell (Julian Burton) and has an epiphany. He encases the cat's body in clay and puts it on display in the coffee house.

The cat with a knife sticking out of it is an immediate sensation. Maxwell calls everyone in the room to attention and announces: "As you passed through these yellow portals I am sure you noticed on your right, a small clay figure, and assumed this transfixed effigy to be the work of a master sculptor. And indeed so it is. That master sculptor is in our midst. He is none other than Walter Paisley, our very own bus boy, whose hands of genius have been carrying away the empty cups of your frustration. Mark well, this lad. His is the silent voice of creation. Within the dark rich soil of humility, he blossoms as the hope of our nearly sterile century! Bring me an espresso Walter."

Now Walter has expectations to live up to. Having created one masterpiece, he is faced with the challenge of repeating his success to feed an audience that is hungry to see what he'll do next. A collector buys the cat for \$500.00. Leonard (Antony Carbone), the café owner, discovers that the clay conceals a dead animal, but the lure of his cut of the collector's cash stops him from turning Walter in. Intuiting the disturbing story behind Walter's next work: "Murdered Man", Leonard tries to persuade Walter to stop making statues of people and animals and to go "free form." Walter ignores his advice. The murders continue, as does the praise for Walter's sculpture.

Walter wastes no time in changing his image. He dons a beret and a scarf and carries a "Zen stick." He becomes a patron of the café – no longer a bus boy. Maxwell throws a party in his honor and Leonard organizes an exhibition. Walter has his first show and the collector notes "This could bring about a return to realism." He offers that he'd pay \$1,500 for one of the sculptures. A critic tells him, with a laugh, that it could bring \$5,000 after he writes his review. When a bit of clay is cracked off the surface of a sculpture during the opening, Walter's sick secret is discovered.

Corman parodies the late 1950s art scene well. He shows a wealthy couple slumming at the coffee house, hanging onto the words of the poor Beats at their table – clearly desperate to buy their way into this romantic world. The café's owner, Leonard, dresses the part of an artist in his beret, but he is clearly just a businessman trying to make a buck off his hipster patrons. The film even includes a narc that dresses like a Beat– gathering information on the artists at the café. When a woman slips Walter a vial of heroin, a cop shows up at his door before he can even figure out what she gave him.

"A Bucket of Blood" is a predecessor to Herschel Gordon Lewis' **Color Me Blood Red** and Abel Ferrera's **The Driller Killer** – two more films about murderous artists.

#### Color Me Blood Red (1965)

#### Directed by Herschell Gordon Lewis

A beret-wearing critic named Gregorovich (Bill Harris) pans the use of color in the bitchy and socially dysfunctional artist Adam Sorg's (Gordon Oas-Heim) paintings. The critic says nothing about the fact that Sorg paints unconvincingly in about five different styles.

When Sorg's model cuts her finger on a nail and bleeds on the back of a canvas, Sorg spots the great red tone and knows just what to do. He re-cuts his model's finger and drags it across the surface of a painting in progress. Before long, a knife is sticking out of the assistant's head and Sorg is dragging her face across the canvas. Herschell Gordon Lewis ain't subtle. Gregorovich deems the finished work – an outrageously hideous portrait of a woman with a knife in her face, a masterpiece. Not wanting to see Sorg get too content, the critic cautiously mentions the old chestnut that anyone can make one masterpiece; can Sorg do it twice? You know what comes next (plus, you just read about **A Bucket of Blood** - the plot here is shamelessly lifted).

Sorg's figurative paintings are bizarre to the point of distraction and hilarity - one looks like a satanic rendition of the cartoon character Bullwinkle. A pair of faces resembles a Martian couple. One can only assume that H.G. Lewis - known for making his exploitation films on the cheap, must have raided local thrift stores or the beginning painting class at a nearby school to gather so much appalling and crappy looking art.

There are two lingering shots of Sorg's paintings being set on fire with gasoline after it is discovered where that strange red paint came from. The first scene of a canvas being torched is carried out so slowly and methodically you almost believe you're watching documentation of a 1960s performance piece.

H.G. Lewis' films are always great fun for people who can enjoy his aesthetic but this is surely one of the most absurd deranged artist films ever made.

#### Downtown 81 (1981) Directed by Edo Bertoglio

Jean-Michel Basquiat plays himself in this miserable litany of clichés about being an



Sorg (left) receives praise from the critic Gregorovich in Color Me Blood Red.

artist and living in New York's Lower East Side in the early 1980s. The film begins with Basquiat in a hospital bed. He is discharged and heads to his apartment. On the way, he walks by the Guggenheim Museum, which is prominently featured for a long forty seconds. Indulgent moments like this one abound in the film. Basquiat meets a beautiful model who promises to take care of him. Shortly after, he is evicted from his apartment and sets out to find someone who will buy his painting – his only hope for getting enough money for another apartment. A wealthy patron buys his work. The movie ends when Basquiat is in an abandoned building looking for a place to sleep. He gives a bag lady a kiss after she strongly requests it. The bag lady turns out to be a fairy godmother (played by Debbie Harry) trapped inside the homeless woman's body. The fairy godmother grants Basquiat's wish for gobs of money, which he commences to throw around mindlessly.

Basquiat's performance is as insipid as the phrases he scrawls on walls, trash bins and other public surfaces. Of note, however, is the music that often accompanies these montages of the artist at work. Much like **Wild Style**, it is worth watching this film just for the music: tons of great No/New Wave and early Hip Hop, which includes: James White and the Blacks, DNA, Tuxedo Moon, the Plastics, Melle Mel, and Suicide.

#### The Driller Killer (1979)

#### Directed by Abel Ferrera

This gutbucket New York City production features the director himself (working under the name Jimmy Laine) as the painter Reno Miller. Reno is irritated with his life. He's poor and dependent on his girlfriend for money. He's surrounded by drunk, vomiting homeless people living outside his door. A loud New York Dolls-like punk band The Roosters is practicing in his building. When Reno tries to get an advance from his unsympathetic gallerist, he is told: "\$500.00 now, and two weeks ago it was \$200.00 for your girlfriend's abortion, and three weeks later it was \$150.00 for extra material costs." The cash doesn't come through.

With money getting tight, Reno's girlfriend makes the mistake of telling him that his painting is finished and he should take it to the dealer so he can sell it. Reno flips out, ranting: "You don't know nothin' about painting! You know what you know about? You know how to bitch, and how to eat, and how to bitch, and how to shit, and how to bitch. But you don't know nothin' about painting so don't tell me when it's gonna be done." Reno grows increasingly unstable and violent. He grabs a drill and starts killing homeless people and others who get in his way.

Despite the rough filmmaking in this director's first feature. The Driller Killer contains a few solid bits of realism. The punk band sounds about right for the times and they play shows at the now defunct club Max's Kansas City - a notorious artist haunt. A gallery shot is filmed at OK Harris. When Reno's dealer visits his studio, his harsh criticism of the artist's huge illustrative painting of a buffalo is right on the money: "This is nothing. This is shit. Where's the impact? It's just a goddamn buffalo. This is far from your best work and size can't hide it. Reno, the worst thing that can happen to a painter is happening to you. You're becoming simply a technician - there's nothing there. There's no feeling. There's no drama. There's no passion."

Through this film, one can imagine what New York might have felt like in the late 70's if you were working on the fringes. The Driller Killer is generally dumped in the horror section at video stores because of its title and a few extremely bloody murders; much of it is ultimately just a highly exaggerated depiction of the strain of life in an uncompromising city and the tension that spills out of an artist trying to make his work, have a relationship, pay his rent and get by.

A minor note for those checking out the DVD: Abel Ferrera is completely whacked out of his mind on the audio commentary. It really must be heard to be believed.

#### Far From Heaven (2002) Directed by Todd Haynes

Far From Heaven depicts an idealized 1950s married couple whose relationship and life spins out of control when Cathy Whitaker (Julianne Moore) catches her husband having an affair with another man. Cathy finds consolation in her friendship with her black gardener Raymond (Dennis Haysbert). As this friendship turns romantic, her previous life disintigrates even further as she embraces a relationship that is socially taboo.

There is a scene in the film where Cathy attends the opening of a modern art exhibi-

tion. There she is introduced to the snooty art dealer Farnsworth – which (coincidentally?) is also the name of the art dealer in **Color Me Blood Red**. Minutes later Cathy unexpectedly runs into Raymond who is taking in the exhibition with his daughter. Cathy awkwardly expresses surprise that he would have known about the exhibit. Raymond responds: "Well I do read the papers" and Cathy back-peddles and clumsily assures Raymond that she is not prejudiced and "believes in equal rights for the Negro."

The two look at a painting by Miró together and Raymond gently helps Cathy with the pronunciation of the artist's name. They begin a thoughtful discussion about modern art as the camera slowly pans over the painting's surface. Raymond offers: "It confirms something I've always wondered about Modern art... abstract art... that perhaps it's just picking up where religious art left off somehow trying to show you divinity. The modern artist just pares it down to the basic elements of shape and color. But when you look at that Miró, you feel it just the same." A group of condescending bystanders - including the art dealer, laughs at Raymond's analysis. As the only minorities in the room, he and his daughter arouse a lot of suspicion - as has Cathy for even talking to them. A conservative older woman contrasts Raymond's understanding of modern art when she tells the exhibition organizer, "To tell the truth, I've always preferred the work of the masters -Rembrandt, Michelangelo ... "

This scene is a beautiful anomaly compared to so many films where people babble inarticulately about art in galleries – trying desperately to impress each other with streams of bullshit that they don't understand themselves. While there is a touch of romance developing between the two characters, their conversation about art is a thoughtful and serious exchange – two people comparing understandings despite racial, social and economic separations that people around them aggressively reinforce.

#### Ghostbusters II (1989)

#### Directed by Ivan Reitman

This is the second in a series of comedies that feature a group of former scientists who save New York City from ghouls, goblins, and the slime that they deposit on every surface. Dana (Sigourney Weaver), a love interest of one of the Ghostbusters, works in the restoration department of an art museum in Manhattan. Her boss Janosz (Peter MacNicol) is finishing the restoration of a portrait of sixteenth century evil tyrant Vigo, when the painting comes to life. Vigo shoots fire and electrical charges out from the painting to show Janosz that he means business, and Janosz quickly agrees to assist him in his sinister plan to take over the world.

#### Hannah and Her Sisters (1986) Directed by Woody Allen

Woody Allen's take on Chekhov's **Three Sisters** includes a character named Frederick (Max von Sydow). Frederick is the brooding, angry painter boyfriend of Lee (Barbara Hershey), the confused middle sister.

Elliott (Michael Caine) is Lee's brother in law, and a financial advisor to rock stars. He brings one such rock star, Dusty, to Frederick and Lee's flat to buy some of Frederick's art work. When Dusty meets Frederick, he shakes his hand with a "hip fist" motion that Frederick comically takes in stride while giving him a murderous look. Frederick is obviously perturbed at the idea that his work will be living in this man's house.

Dusty describes some of the art that he has recently purchased to decorate his home: "...Yeah, I got an Andy Warhol. And I got a Frank Stella, too. Oh, it's very beautiful. Big, weird...you know. If you stare at that Stella too long, the colors just seem to float." Dusty keeps asking for "something big", which makes Frederick respond: "I do not sell my work by the yard," in an exasperated manner. They go to the basement of Frederick and Lee's flat to see more of Frederick's work. As Elliott tries valiantly to seduce Lee, Frederick and Dusty return, arguing. Frederick refuses to sell any of his work to Dusty because Dusty requested something that would match his ottoman. Lee ends up leaving Frederick (and Elliott, for that matter) later in the movie.

#### High Art (1998)

#### Directed by Lisa Cholodenko

High Art is a drama about a lesbian love triangle involving a photographer, Lucy Berliner (Ally Sheedy) who has been out of the spotlight for ten years, her drug-addled German lover Greta (Patricia Clarkson) – an actress who worked with Fassbinder, and Syd (Radha Mitchell), the assistant editor of a photo magazine called "Frame". Syd meets Lucy in her apartment building, falls for her photos, and then falls for the artist herself.

The aesthetic of the film and the bohemian social settings of the New York lofts where much of the story is set bear a strong resemblance to the photography of Nan Goldin – whose work is included in the film. Among the numerous other artists whose aesthetic feels like it has been acknowledged and who are also knowingly included as background details: Zoe Leonard, Jack Pierson, and David Wojnarowicz.

An additional reality blur in High Art is that the character Lucy Berliner's photos are the work of practicing photographer JoJo Whilden, who includes the photos from High Art among her body of gallery work. The character Dominique is played by the real life painter and model Anh Duong who comes across as nauseatingly narcissistic in her acting role as an editor at "Frame" as she does in her real-life self-portrait paintings.

Unfortunately, despite a clear engagement with artists and their work in the conception of the film, nothing revelatory about making art or being an artist comes through in the script. Viewers who are suckers for the romantic drug scene of Nan Goldin's photographs may find the relationship drama in High Art to their liking. Lucy's retreat from the art world, which she feels "pigeonholed" her work, is acknowledged but quickly pushed aside. There is a flurry of critical theory namedropping. In one amazing bit of art-speak bullshit, Syd looks at Lucy's photos and tells her "Really it ties into Barthes' whole conception of photographic ecstacy. The way he explores temporality and memory and meaning" Lucy replies: "I haven't been deconstructed in a long time." This kind of highbrow shorthand for saying practically nothing is just as disposable at the movies as it is in grad school.

#### Love Jones (1997)

#### Directed by Theodore Witcher

Darius (Larenz Tate) and Nina (Nia Long) are a poet and a photographer, respectively, who embark on a relationship that neither are willing to describe as "love", but their friends know the difference. While this film is more of a showcase for the spaces and faces of the late 1990s South Side poetry scene in Chicago, Nina's career as a photographer takes a decided role in the flow of the plot. Will she move away to pursue her New York dreams, or stick around to explore her life with Darius? In one scene, early on in Darius and Nina's seductive dating days, Nina finds a camera at Darius' apartment and dares him to "take it off" while she snaps photos.

#### Moonstruck (1987)

#### Directed by Norman Jewison

This film is a window into perhaps the only fictionalized portrait of an Italian-American family with no discernable ties to the mob. Cher plays Loretta, a no-nonsense young widow who is preparing to enter a passionless marriage with Johnny (Danny Aiello). The next day, Loretta meets Ronny (Nicolas Cage), Johnny's estranged brother, and they fall in love.

Ronny tells Loretta that he loves two things—her and the opera, and he convinces her to go on a date with him to the Metropolitan Opera House to see La Bohème. During the intermission, Loretta spots a painting hanging in the lobby. Ronny tells her that it was painted by Marc Chagall, and Loretta responds, "It's kinda gaudy." Ronny says, "Well, he was having some fun!"

#### New York Stories (1989)

"Life Lessons" segment directed by Martin Scorsese.

"Life Without Zoe" segment directed by Francis Ford Coppola

## "Oedipus Wrecks" segment directed by Woody Allen

"Life Lessons" is the first of three segments, by three different directors, that comprise "New York Stories". Lionel Dobie (Nick Nolte) is a famous painter of the giant-expressive-canvases variety. Lionel's live in assistant and lover Paulette (Rosanna Arquette) is frustrated with her life and her paintings. She desperately wants to get away from Lionel. He clings to Paulette and tries to keep her with many acts of desperation. Ultimately his action push her to leave.

Shortly after Paulette leaves Lionel, we see him at an opening reception for his new work. He meets a young admirer who is tending the drink table. She praises his work and reveals her own aspirations to be a successful painter. Lionel eventually offers her the job of his assistant, which comes with a place to live and work, and free "life lessons". We get the sense that Lionel has extended this invitation to several young ladies.

There are many scenes of Nolte ham-fistedly pushing paint onto and around large canvases as melodramatic rock music plays. Nolte uses the same brush to make every blob. Nolte clearly lacks the finesse of a seasoned artist his age. He displays poor brush handling and murky color mixing. Similar clumsiness can be seen in **Seconds** and **Color Me Blood Red**.

Along these lines are actors pretending to draw when they are clearly just tracing a drawing already made for them: **After Hours**, **Frida**, and **The Driller Killer**. The poor acting is illustrated more clearly when contrasted with Ed Harris's studied portrayal of Jackson Pollock in **Pollock**.

#### Parting Glances (1986)

#### Directed by Bill Sherwood

Parting Glances is a thoughtful and affectionate film set in 1980's New York. Michael (Richard Ganoung) and Robert (John Bolger) are a gay couple living in the West Village. Their relationship is at a crossroads with Robert planning a long trip to Africa and Michael lending support to his AIDS-stricken former lover Nick - who is played by the young and already remarkable Steve Buscemi. Some writers have praised this film for not watering down the gay characters for a straight audience. It is also one of the earliest films to address the AIDS epidemic. Parting Glances has several interesting detours into art conversations that are worth noting.

Joan (Kathy Kinney), a figurative painter, throws a going away party for Robert that is attended by hip German performance artists Klaus (Theodore Ganger) and Liselotte (Nada). Michael asks Joan about the extroverted duo. She gives a bitchy account of their work and success. It succinctly points to many artists' frustration with the art world's penchant for creating meaningless labels and inventing stars overnight: "They're mixedmedia, performance, Neo-Expressionist, Post-Modern something or others. I can't keep track. Jesus Christ! They've been here four months. You know how long I've been trying to get a show?" The two of them look at a picture of a Vermeer painting together and have a playful conversation. Joan points to a woman's desk in the reproduction and comments "There's more painting going on right here than all the stuff in Soho combined." Michael and Joan imaginatively imitate the two female subjects' gestures and contemplate



Joan and Michael discussing a photo of a Vermeer painting in Parting Glances.

what they are thinking and doing in the scene.

As the party progresses, the performance art couple stages an impromptu piano dance routine. Klaus spots Nick - whose illness is becoming more pronounced, and he insensitively tells Joan: "I'd like to stage a piece in which all the performers are terminally ill. Can you imagine the intensity?" Joan excuses herself immediately in disgust, but the asshole has the audacity to pull Nick aside – presumably telling him about his grand concept.

As the party winds down, Nick catches Klaus off guard in a secluded area, points a knife at his neck and advises the pretentious art prick "Give old Joan a hand and get her a nice gallery show and then I'll do some singing in your next art piece. I'll be all gnarled and terminally ill. Howzabout it?" A fine early example of Steve Buscemi kicking ass.

#### Pecker (1998)

#### Directed by John Waters

In Pecker, Director John Waters' love of contemporary art moves to front and center. Pecker (Edward Furlong) is a young happygo-lucky amateur photographer who runs around Baltimore taking pictures of everything and everyone. His Laundromat worker girlfriend tells him "You're crazy. You see art when there's nothing there."

Pecker's boss at a sub sandwich shop begrudgingly allows him to put up a show of his photos with the hope that it will get people to buy food during the opening. There his work is seen by Rorey (Lili Taylor), a gallery director from New York City who is in town for a meeting with the Baltimore Museum. She goads him into trying to explain one of his photos at the opening. Pecker's friend blurts out that it's a stripper's pubic hair, which causes immediate pandemonium. Pecker loses his job while Rorey promptly buys the photo for \$30.00 and offers him a show at her gallery.

There is a quick montage of gallery names on entry windows - perhaps one of the earliest appearances of the Chelsea gallery district that was just starting to explode. Pecker's first solo show in New York opens. Rorey reads Pecker a New York Times review, which raves that he is "a teenage Weegee whose paintbrush is the broken down camera he found in his mother's thrift shop." Pecker is introduced to boring and congratulatory art writers and collectors. Pecker's girlfriend is particularly uncomfortable in the posh company of the gallery attendees. A curator from the Whitney Museum remarks "They really are something special. I mean, Pecker's like a humane Diane Arbus." Pecker's friends and



Pecker leans over the grill and snaps a photo of a customer's hamburger.

family freely commit faux pas left and right; they have no idea how they are supposed to behave at an uptight gallery opening. His gallerist notes that Cindy Sherman "the famous photographer" is in attendance and Pecker shouts out: "Hey Cindy! Thank you for coming to my show!"

During the opening Pecker's mom asks a servant for an extra tray of hors' d oeuvres and takes them outside to a grateful panhandler begging for change in front of the gallery. The two strike up a conversation about thrift stores but they are soon interrupted by another homeless person who rants "Fuckin' lousy art galleries are ruinin' this whole neighborhood! Stupid white paintings and out of focus pictures and those ugly ass sculptures!" Pecker's mom gives the man her bright blue scarf, puts a smile on his face, and invites both homeless people to her son's posh after party.

Pecker and his family take the bus home, where they read a big feature on the boy in the Sunday Arts section of the newspaper. The writer includes a line about Pecker's "delicious photographs of his culturally challenged family." His mother doesn't quite like the sound of the comment, but is unsure what the writer is trying to say. Pecker's dad blurts out: "That's just art nonsense." He points out the part he likes the best – reading that sixty-two of Pecker's photos sold for prices of up to \$1,300 each.

By the time the family gets home, a young junkie that Pecker photographed without paying has robbed them. Pecker's gallerist calls before the police have left - encouraging him to take photos of the aftermath because the Whitney has offered him a show. A Baltimore cop tells Pecker "What they call art up in New York, young man, looks like just plain misery to me." Soon a photo of Pecker's grandmother makes the cover of Artforum.

Pecker's New York success and local fame make it impossible for him to freely photograph Baltimore residents without them knowing how the pictures may be used. His work has real personal consequences and affects the people around him – something his gallerist is completely insensitive to. The film shows an artist who cares about his family and his relationships with friends more than fame and money. Pecker is a naive young artist but he's not ready to flush his values down the toilet just to make his New York gallery happy.

When Pecker turns down his biggest

opportunity and breaks with his obnoxious gallerist to save his relationship with his girlfriend, he appears on the cover of New York magazine with the headline "The Boy Who Said No To The Whitney." Instead he forces the New York Art World to come to Baltimore to his dad's bar which has been renamed "Pecker's Place." The Whitney curator charters a bus and brings the New York art crowd. There, a sweet surprise awaits them when they see which photos Pecker has chosen to exhibit.

Waters is, at this point, not just a filmmaker but also a widely exhibiting gallery artist. He namedrops publications and notions of success that other gallery artists will recognize. As an insider, Waters' critique is pretty gentle, but he does do a decent job of identifying and lampooning the values of the New York gallery elite. Pecker conveys an insiders' comprehension of the priorities of the New York commercial art world and how at odds they are with the values of people in other facets of society. Students of photography who have ever read about the invasive potential of street photography and the dynamics of power in depictions of 'the other', will find those ageold narratives well represented. More original is when Pecker finally persuades his girlfriend to see the wonder of art. He convinces her of the aesthetic properties of the rainbow of stains she encounters on people's clothes.

#### Pollock (2000) Directed by Ed Harris

This biography of painter Jackson Pollock is a sincere and well-intentioned effort by Ed Harris, who went to enormous pains to research Pollock, make the film and play the title role. Supplementary documentary material on the DVD release describes how Harris built a studio and tried his hand at painting for several years before commencing filming. He even went so far as to hire a painting coach – artist Lisa Lawley, who is prominently credited at the end of the film. It also doesn't hurt that Harris bears a strong physical resemblance to Pollock.

It is only fair to acknowledge that making a mainstream film about Jackson Pollock is inherently difficult. For many Americans, Pollock's drip paintings still embody the stereotype of modern art as incomprehensible, ugly, and lacking in talent and meaning. To watch Ed Harris painting as Pollock is almost to feel that abstract art's ass is on the line with millions of viewers who just wanted to see a good, entertaining Hollywood movie.

So how does Ed Harris do at painting? Not badly. The guy clearly put in a lot of studio time, looked at the paintings closely and took tips from painters. He looks confident and intensely engaged. He makes the execution of those paintings look like a serious endeavor. The fake Pollocks used in the film made by a group of scenic painters that the film producers once jokingly referred to as the "Jackson 5", look pretty damn good. Even with all of his rages, drunken outbursts and emotional meltdowns, Pollock appears the most in control of himself when he is working. He is often drunk (in one comic scene Pollock falls off his bicycle while trying to ride, smoke, drink, and bring home a case of beer at the same time) but he is never drunk while he is in the studio.

For all the sweat that went into making the process and finished works look strong, what Harris fails to articulate is why Pollock is an important artist and what his wife, painter Lee Krasner (Marcia Gay Harden) means when she looks at his drip paintings for the first time and tells Jackson he's "cracked it wide open." This is one of the film's unfortunate failings.

Pollock does not provide a clear sense of place or historical context. Many artists are shown (Willem DeKooning, Franz Kline, Tony Smith, Alfonso Ossorio, and others) and we see them drinking with Pollock and attending his openings, but we don't really see their paintings or learn how they contribute to the culture that Pollock is a part of. We have little way of knowing how Pollock's art related to others' except for numerous mentions of how he has somehow gotten past Surrealism and Picasso's Cubism. Pollock's relationship with critic Clement Greenberg (Jeffrey Tambor) is sketched out more fully. Greenberg was Pollock's primary critical proponent, but also a man whose judgments Pollock allowed himself to be affected by to an unhealthy degree.

Like most artist films, the artist's lover gets a lot of screen time, but here this is more justified than usual. In the film Lee Krasner makes great sacrifices to ensure that Pollock's work gets the attention it deserves. She constantly handles his business affairs, helps him to be presentable around influential gallerists and collectors, and speaks on his behalf when he is too inarticulate to get the words out.

Finally – as usual, a real working artist gets a cameo playing a historical artist. No, we're not talking about Val Kilmer playing Willem DeKooning, but painter Kenny Scharf in the role of William Baziotes.

#### Polyester (1981)

#### Directed by John Waters

A suburban mom's world crumbles as protesters demonstrate against her unfaithful husband's porn theater, their daughter sleeps around and gets pregnant, and their glue-sniffing fetishist son gets arrested for crushing women's feet outside of shopping centers. The film features one noteworthy and hilarious art parody – a send up of the idea that art can be used as a form of therapy to rehabilitate social deviants.

When their son Dexter (Ken King) – the "Baltimore Foot Stomper" - is released from prison, he comes running across the lawn in a suit, a stack of canvas-board paintings clutched under his arm. He announces to his Mother, "I'm sorry for the grief I caused you, but I'm rehabilitated now. I had a wonderful drug counselor in prison and I received psychiatric treatment. Mom, I am an artist now!" And with that, Dexter proudly shows off a few of his paintings which, of course, are giant depictions of women's feet.

#### The Royal Tenenbaums (2001) Directed by Wes Anderson

This film about a family of eccentric geniuses features a number of obsessively chosen visual details and gags. Each child prodigy, now grown up and some with children of their own, lives in his or her own aesthetically distinctive world. One of them, Eli Cash (Owen Wilson) is an author of Westerns. Two paintings - "Bad Route" and "Attack" by contemporary artist Miguel Calderon, hang in Cash's living room.

The paintings are used somewhat like the Jeff Koons puppy sculpture in **The World Is Not Enough**. They are background details that come to the foreground for a moment to create an amusing counterpoint to the tone of the scene. The paintings themselves are completely absurd - depicting shirtless masked and denim-clad tough guys on dirt bikes. In the scene, Eli's friend is visiting. He takes a glance at one of the paintings showing a group of guys pulling at the limbs of another in a fight,



Rock Hudson in Seconds. Handsome? Yes. Good actor? Yes. Good painter? No!

but he doesn't comment. The wacky fake fear of Calderon's painting is a perfect foil to Eli's own ridiculous take on macho masculinity.

#### Seconds (1966)

#### Directed by John Frankenheimer

Seconds is a powerful and intensely creepy film about a man, Arthur Hamilton (John Randolph), who pays a service to have him declared dead, surgically alter his appearance, and create a new identity so that he can leave his family and start a new life as a "reborn" Tony Wilson (Rock Hudson). named Hamilton, an uptight business executive, at first suggests under hypnosis that he'd like to be a tennis pro. As a second choice, he goes with the option of being a painter. "I guess I'd like to paint stuff." "Pictures?" "Pictures, and things..." The doctor tells Tony "Painting allows you a basic creative outlet, as well as providing an environment in which the sublimations will have free vent." Right. Thanks, Doc.

Wilson is provided with fake certificates of study, notices of his first six one-man shows, and a number of paintings that have been premade for him by someone else. We see Tony making a few first strokes on a blank canvas and adding a few lines to a Matisse-like figure drawing – which he crumples up in disapproval. Another shot shows the artist stroking away at a canvas with the camera wisely positioned so that we can't see what kind of a mess Rock Hudson is making.

Of course, all of this would be for nothing if we didn't get one shot of Tony Wilson having a cocktail party at his home and studio. This affords us with the chance to hear a drunken artist tell a woman how he makes his work. "You see, I paint naked! Mrs. Filter, it's the only way to get at the truth... see in this way, my inner essence is revealed, and I have presented a new canvas in direct relationship to my primeval state... without it's sociological trappings..." Um, yeah.

#### Short Cuts (1993) Directed by Robert Altman

Short Cuts is a series of interwoven stories about many characters. It takes place over several days in Los Angeles.

One of those characters is struggling artist, Marian Wyman (Julianne Moore), who makes figurative paintings in her home studio. Her doctor husband (Matthew Modine) mocks her work and distrusts her because of a past infidelity. At one point, while speaking to a potential gallerist on the phone, Marian makes rehearsed sounding comments composed of the kind of mumbo jumbo one often finds in artist statements: "There's a heavy physicality in my new paintings - in part because I've executed them on large panels of wood, but I'd say that they're tempered by the ephemeral use of color - I mean, you could almost say that it's beyond natural color." Her eavesdropping husband challenges: "You know scientifically speaking Marian, there's no such thing as 'beyond natural color." He comes home unexpectedly and lingers in the room while Marian is painting a nude female model - appearing to enjoy a side benefit of being married to an artist. Later he sits across from a painting on her easel and observes: "Why are they always naked? Why does naked make it art?"

#### Slaves of New York (1989)

#### Directed by James Ivory

Anyone needing a reminder about which aspects of the 1980s art scene in New York are best left forgotten should check out Slaves of New York. The film focuses on Eleanor (Bernadette Peters) – a hat designer, and her insecure and moody painter boyfriend Stash (Adam Coleman Howard). The cast is filled out with competitive fellow painters, gallerists, a bloated collector, lovers and various scenesters who populate the couple's social world. Artists in this film are primarily painters with an emphasis on pop imagery or heroic themes. One artist, Marley (Nick Corri), has absurd mythic concepts that he doesn't seem to believe himself. His works have titles like "Ode To a Hero of the Future #5." Stash takes Polaroids of cartoons off his television that inspire his tepid Pop art pastiches. None of the characters are sympathetic except perhaps Eleanor – that is if you can stand Bernadette Peters' nasal whining.

Like many of these films, a long list of unknown working artists are credited for making the works of each of the characters. Does anyone know the work of Patrick Kennedy – the creator of Stash's work? Given that movies circulate more broadly than most art, it is possible that these films are the primary form of exposure that many of these artists have had. Pretty much every aspect of Slaves of New York has aged badly – from the hairstyles to the soundtrack. Good luck making it through all 124 minutes.

#### Wild Style (1982) Directed by Charlie Ahearn

Wild Style is an unusual artist film hybrid where the main star 'Lee' George Quinones, a real graffiti writer, plays graffiti writer Zoro. Zoro has a strained relationship with Rose – a female writer in a largely male-dominated



One sculpture by Jeff Koons is more than enough for James Bond.

scene, played by Lady Pink - another writer in real life. The primary reason to see Wild Style is not for the awkward dramatic narrative but to see a time capsule of raw hip hop culture in the South Bronx. While not structured like a documentary, many who are inspired by early hip hop culture look to Wild Style as a visual dictionary of that period. The film contains plenty of shots of old-school graffiti, train cars blanketed in spray paint, stylin' hip hop fashion and best of all - plenty of great live footage of Grandmaster Flash and others rapping their asses off. Fixtures from early hip hop like Fab Five Freddy and the breakdance group Rock Steady Crew appear as themselves. The basketball match and rap battle between the Fantastic 5 and the Cold Crush Brothers is a blast.

The film contains a number of themes common to underground cultural scenes that ultimately get co-opted by the mainstream. A reporter comes to the Bronx to do a story on the artists and they argue about having their pictures taken for her article and how the publicity might adversely affect graffiti. Rose talks about trying to liven up the community and make graffiti a job. Everyone on the periphery tries to get included in the article.

The reporter takes Zoro and Fab Five Freddy to an upscale party where the two make a noble attempt to interact with art world people. Fab Five Freddy tells a museum director that he should see Zoro's work, to which he replies: "I've probably already seen it. We spent \$50,000 removing graffiti from our façade last year." Zoro and a really uptight older guy discuss hip hop in front of a Frank Stella painting. The art crowd starts to come around to Zoro and Freddy's sincerity. The party host Eva takes Zoro into her bedroom to show off her art, commission him to do a painting, and, of course, make an effort to seduce him.

Zoro sets to work on a quick painting on canvas for the collector. When he gets the opportunity to do something huge on an abandoned building that will serve as the backdrop for a big outdoor hip hop show, he gets on the train and looks out the window for inspiration. Zoro struggles to execute this massive project that is far more meaningful to him – a major set piece for his community whose art, music, dance, and spirit he loves.

#### The World Is Not Enough (1999) Directed by Michael Apted

For the opener of this film, James Bond (Pierce Brosnan) goes flying out the window of an office near the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Suspended by a rope in mid-air, Bond dangles in front of the floral sculpture "Puppy" by Jeff Koons that is sitting in front of the museum. When he eventually lands on his feet, Bond takes a bit of a glance at the puppy and his facial expression appears to say: "It's a load of bollocks."

## FILM United Kingdom

#### Love Is the Devil: Study for a Portrait of Francis Bacon (1998) Directed by John Maybury

This biography on Francis Bacon concentrates primarily on the painter's relationship with George Dyer (Daniel Craig) - a small-time crook Bacon meets when Dyer breaks into his studio to burglarize him. This film runs counter to many depictions of artist relationships in that Bacon - who lived an unusually long and prolific life despite his various indulgences - is the stable one and his lover Dyer is increasingly alcoholic, depressive, and ultimately suicidal. Bacon is shown to have a tendency toward sexual masochism in his love life but an attitude of cruelty and indifference toward George's personal troubles. The two are clearly mis-matched intellectually and Dyer has a difficult time integrating himself among Bacon's savagely witty peers.

While this artist biography typically focuses on Bacon's social and romantic life first and foremost, it is better than most at conveying a sense of where this artist takes his inspiration from and how his paintings are shaped by his life. Actor Derek Jacobi bears an uncanny physical resemblance to Bacon. He clearly studied Bacon's speech and peculiar turns of phrase closely. It is an extraordinary performance.

Bacon's oft-photographed studio is recreated well and the artist is shown in many of the situations that inspired his work: drinking at bars, gambling, seeing a boxing match, watching the Eisenstein film **Battleship Potemkin**, visiting the British Museum, rifling though boxes of clipped photos, and of course, having sex. The film repeatedly presents Bacon noticing things that will work their way into his images, such as stopping to consider a store window display, posing in a photo booth and using a tri-fold mirror that suggests image sequences in the triptychs he painted.

Bacon's estate would not allow his art to be reproduced in the film. The few fake Bacons in Love is the Devil are weak – the film will be confusing and far less effective for viewers who lack a prior knowledge of Bacon's paintings. Instead of concentrating on finished works, the film is punctuated by hallucinatory live action vignettes that are both inspired by the artis'ts work, and suggestive as sources of inspiration for Bacon's paintings.

A number of British contemporary artists have cameos mainly as various pub patrons. Included are Sarah Lucas, Gillian Wearing, Tracey Emin, and Gary Hume. Actors play the artists John Deacon and David Hockney.

Francis Bacon was the subject of an excellent 1988 documentary by David Hinton that similarly showed the artist in his social element - discussing his work and the things that inspire it. This film often feels like a faint shadow of that documentary created with actors and with a greater emphasis on an unstable relationship.

#### Prick Up Your Ears (1987)

#### **Directed by Stephen Frears**

This biographical film centers on the successful young British playwright Joe Orton (Gary Oldman) and his relationship with the more reserved and unstable writer and collage artist Kenneth Halliwell (Alfred Molina).

Prick Up Your Ears shows the difficult dynamics in a relationship between two creative individuals in the same field, and the tensions that arise when one is successful and the other is not. Orton is a more physically attractive, likable and charismatic personality. Halliwell is socially awkward and prone to irrational behavior and fits. He sometimes takes Orton's success badly and feels that the things he says in private and the ideas he feeds Orton are continually getting pulled into Joe's plays without proper credit and acknowledgement. At times Kenneth shares in the pleasures of Joe's success and happily plays his personal assistant; other situations cause him to throw spectacular tantrums. The two share an intellectually satisfying relationship. However Orton looks to promiscuous encounters in bathroom stalls and various gay haunts to satisfy his sexual needs.

Prick Up Your Ears depicts both artists intelligently and it doesn't hurt that Gary Oldman and Alfred Molina are excellent actors. Unlike Love is the Devil with painter Francis Bacon and his more rogue and aimless partner George Dyer, Orton and Halliwell are a strong match intellectually and watching the two spar with sharp wits is engaging. Their apartment is filled with books and Kenneth's collaged photos cover every inch of their walls. Halliwell has an exhibit of his dense collage works but the work doesn't generate a lot of interest and it is suggested that people may be buying the few collages that sell out of pity for Kenneth or a side interest in Orton's rising star as a playwright. Kenneth's visual art is just a minor aspect of the film, but Prick Up Your Ears is an unusually complex depiction of two creative people in a relationship that ends in extreme tragedy.

## **Television** United States & United Kingdom

Absolutely Fabulous (originally aired February 1994)

Season Two, Episode 2-2: "Death" Directed by Bob Spiers

Edina Mousson (Josiane Balasko) is a drug addicted, larger than life, selfish, hedonistic, hilarious public relations "professional" that lives with her conservative bookish daughter Safrane (Marie Gillain). This British comedy follows Eddie and her best friend Patsy's (Nathalie Baye) mishaps and shenanigans through the world of fashion, shopping, and sometimes art.

In "Death", Eddie reacts to the death of her father by getting depressed over her own mortality. She decides that she must do something to create a legacy, and goes to a gallery to purchase art—"anything that looks like it's in the Saatchi collection." She tells the woman who greets her at the gallery entrance, "Yeah, I wanna buy some art. I'm a collector." The woman looks Eddie over, and says, "Well, this is a specialist gallery. Perhaps if you knew what you were looking for, I could help you." Eddie is pissed off, and asks to speak to someone else. Another gallerist enters, and smoothes everything over, offering to bring her to see a special collection. As Eddie follows him, she says to the first woman "You only work in a shop, you know. You can drop the attitude."

Eddie ends up purchasing many works, including a clothes hanger mobile, a television mishmash that vaguely resembles a Nam June Paik sculpture, and an oversized pair of clay red heeled shoes. Later in the episode, she chastises several mourners at the gathering before her father's funeral for hanging their coats and scarves on the hanger mobile.

#### Cheers (originally aired May 1984) Season Two, Episodes 43 and 44: "I'll Be Seeing You (parts 1 and 2)" Directed by James Burrows

This long-running American television comedy followed the lives and loves of the denizens of fictional Boston tavern Cheers. Cheers is a neighborhood bar, the kind where "everybody knows your name," as the theme song told us. The main character, owner and bartender Sam Malone (Ted Danson), is a former Boston Red Sox baseball player with a womanizing attitude and regular guy tastes. His early foil is Diane Chambers (Shelley Long), a proper, sometimes melodramatic, perpetual graduate student who works at Cheers as an overeducated barmaid.

By the time of the "I'll Be Seeing You" episodes, Sam and Diane are an item-a forever bickering couple whose passion for each other supercedes the fact that they have nothing in common. In these episodes, Diane is furious when she hears that Sam will be appearing on the cover of a local magazine as one of Boston's "Ten Most Eligible Bachelors". To win her back, Sam hires Philip Semenko (Christopher Lloyd), a local painter, to do her portrait. Semenko arrives at Cheers wearing a draping, "Native American" poncho, and demonstrating a snobbish attitude. After Sam and his friends tease him a bit, he

refuses to paint Diane and claims that his work should not even be looked at by the types of people that frequent Cheers.

However, when he sees Diane, he is captivated by her beauty and begs her to sit for a portrait anyway. In part two, Semenko tries to get Diane to leave Sam, telling her that she's too good for him. Semenko convinces Diane that she could be his muse. Diane and Sam argue about it and they break up. Sam curses Semenko and all "snob freak artist guys". He and the other Cheers regulars have a heated discussion deriding most modern paintings. In the last scene, Sam is still furious at Diane for leaving him. He happens to see the portrait that Semenko has left for Diane at the bar and seemingly changes his mind about modern art-with wide eyes, he simply says, "Wow". He is impressed with Semenko's work, and, of course, hurting over Diane.

## The Cosby Show (originally aired January 1986)

## Season Two, Episode 37: "The Auction" Directed by Jay Sandrich

This acclaimed late 1980s comedy featured Bill Cosby as Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable, head of the overachieving Huxtable clan, a well-to-do African American family based in Brooklyn. In "The Auction", mother Claire (Phylicia Rashad) finds out that a painting by her greatuncle Ellis is up for auction at Sotheby's Auction House.

Claire has fond memories of the painting, and tells the family about seeing it on the wall of her grandmother's house when she was a child. Claire decides that she must buy the painting to get it back into her family's possession. Unfortunately, the estimated price is 7,000-\$9,000 - a little more than she wants to spend.

Claire and Cliff take the entire family to the auction "to learn something about art". Their teenage son Theo (Malcolm-Jamal Warner) meets a girl when they arrive, and, in an unsmooth flirting attempt, asks her to "teach me something about art." Theo's little sisters Vanessa (Tempestt Bledsoe) and Rudy (Keshia Knight Pulliam) overhear his braggadocio and embarrass Theo in front of the girl.

Claire ends up winning the auction for the painting, and pays \$11,000 for it. The family hangs the painting in a prominent place in their living room. The painting is actually "Funeral Procession", a 1950s work by Ellis Wilson. "Funeral Procession" was kept as a part of the Huxtable family's living room set, and its presence sparked a renewed interest in Wilson's work. Incidentally, Wilson died about eight years before this episode aired, and never made more than \$300 on any of his paintings while he was alive.

#### Dharma and Greg (originally aired

November 2001) Season Five, Episode 103: "Home Is Where The Art Is"

#### Directed by Ted Lange

Dharma (Jenna Elfman) and Greg (Thomas Gibson) are a mismatched San Francisco couple that fell in love and got married within hours of their first meeting. This American comedy follows the lives of Dharma, a yoga instructor and professional dog walker who was raised by hippies and Greg, a conservative and anal federal attorney who comes from money.

In "Home Is Where The Art Is", an old performance artist friend of Dharma convinces her to collaborate on his latest work. Dharma and her friend will live in an art gallery through the duration of the exhibition, on display twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Greg comes to the gallery to try to talk her out of it, and is aghast to find a huge group of men with cameras waiting to take a picture of Dharma when she gets undressed for bed. Dharma ends up deciding to leave the exhibition so she can go home and sleep with Greg instead. She is quickly replaced by her father, an out-of-shape middle-aged hippie, whose naked presence turns off the audience members. The exhibition closes a week early.

#### The Family Guy (originally aired April 2000) Season Two, Episode 18: "A Picture Is Worth 1000 Bucks"

#### Directed by Gavin Dell

The Family Guy is a cartoon that surveys the lives of a basic American working class family that lives in suburban Rhode Island. Peter, the father, is often crass and overtly macho in an animated Archie Bunker kind of way. Lois, mother of the clan, is a devoted wife with a sometimes surprising past. Their children are Meg (an oft-ridiculed slightly overweight teenager), Chris (a child-like teenager whose brain power never caught up with his size), and Stewie (an infant who talks to the other characters with a felonious British accent and a diabolical plan for world domination). Add in the family's talking dog, Brian, and viewers are treated to a darkly comic suburban family theater of the absurd.

In "A Picture Is Worth 1000 Bucks", Chris' burgeoning artistic talent is discovered. Peter and the family celebrate Peter's birthday by hanging out at an amusement park. Peter discovers that a former classmate of his owns the park, and gets depressed because he feels that he will never have a legacy to leave to the world as great as "Funland". Chris makes a painting to cheer Peter up, and makes Peter put it in his car to bring to work the next day. Peter responds by using the painting to cover a broken side window in his vehicle, just as the celebrated Soho art gallerist Antonio Manatti drives by. Antonio gushes that he "must have" the painting and meet the artist. Peter and the rest of the family soon fly to New York City to allow Antonio to do a Svengali-like transformation of Chris into a "real artist".

### King of the Hill (originally aired January 2004)

Season Eight, Episode 158: "Ceci N'est Pas Une King of the Hill" Directed by Tricia Garcia

The small, suburban town of Arlen, Texas, is the setting for this animated comedy created for television by Mike Judge (also responsible for the popular 1990s cartoon Beavis and Butthead). King of the Hill is based around Hank Hill, a conservative native Texan who is proud to sell "propane and propane accessories" for a living. His wife Peggy was previously voted one of Arlen's most prompt substitute Spanish teachers, although her pronunciation of the language usually leaves something to be desired. Bobby, Hank and Peggy's son, is an introspective and creative boy whose interests range from magic to dancing with dogs - not really the manly boy that Hank had hoped for.

In this episode, we learn of Peggy's talent for art. Hank convinces Peggy to make some sort of art to be displayed on the lawn outside of his place of work, Strickland Propane. She decides to use several discarded, empty, propane tanks from Strickland and creates a statue vaguely resembling a robot. She dubs her creation the "Probot".

Unfortunately, the city of Arlen rejects Peggy's proposal to display her Probot in a public place (the lawn outside Strickland). Soon after, a fast-talking art dealer from Dallas happens to see Peggy's Probot. He agrees to represent Peggy and she furiously starts making multiple Probots to sell in his gallery.

When Hank and Peggy travel to Dallas for Peggy's first art show, they are shocked to discover that Peggy's new gallerist represents "outsider" artists. Another artist represented by her gallery looks like a caveman and demands to be paid in sandwiches. The gallerist has been telling his clientele that Peggy is an illiterate hick who is married to her first cousin. He tries to convince Peggy that this kind of ruse will result in more sales, but her pride is already destroyed, and she leaves, taking all her Probots back to Arlen.

#### The Simpsons (originally aired April 1999) Season Ten, Episode 222: "Mom and Pop Art"

#### Directed by Steven Dean Moore

In this cartoon series about a dysfunctional family, the father Homer attempts to build a barbeque pit and fails miserably. When "Mom and Pop" hardware won't offer a refund on a wagon filled with bricks and metal pieces stuck together with concrete, Homer is forced to pull the mess home. It becomes detached from his car and lands on the hood of a gallery owner named Astrid Weller who offers to display Homer's 'piece.' Doubting his own artistic abilities, Astrid tells Homer: "Art isn't just pretty pictures. It's an expression of raw human emotion. In your case, rage." She explains to Homer's wife Marge: "Your husband's work is what we call 'Outsider Art'. It could be by a mental patient, a hillbilly, or... a chimpanzee!" Homer proudly tells her that in high school he was voted most likely to be a mental patient, a hillbilly or a chimpanzee.

Homer's failed home project is exhibited at a building called "Louvre: American Style" under the banner "Inside: Outsider Art". Homer chows down at the opening and tells his daughter the truth when he says "Lisa, all great artists love free food, check out Jasper Johns." And sure enough, Jasper Johns – a guest voice in this episode, is stuffing food into his jacket. Homer sells his sculpture to his employer Mr. Burns. Astrid hands him a check and congratulates him: "Homer, you're now a professional artist."

Following Astrid's advice that the key to his art is anger, Homer invites his kids to say things that will piss him off while he beats a pile of clay. Astrid offers Homer a solo show and he gets an ad in <u>Art in America</u>. Marge, who studied art and never had a chance to pursue it, gets frustrated at her talentless husband's instant success. Homer tries to console his wife. He tells her that he has always screwed everything up, but finally with his art, people worship him for screwing up.

The show "Homer's Odyssey" opens to the public and Astrid announces him as "the most dangerous artist on the Springfield scene." Homer fails to shock anyone with his new work – it's all just more of the same kind of failures that he produced the first time. His show is a bust.

Marge takes Homer to the Springsonian for inspiration - the sign in front of the building boasts: "Where the elite meet Magritte". Homer gets hit in the head by an oversize Claes Oldenburg pencil sculpture that threatens to erase him after he makes a comment about why a work by Simpsons creator Matt Groening is in a museum. Marge gives an articulate account of the importance of Turner's paintings. Homer salivates over a Warhol painting of a can of split pea soup with ham. He then takes a nap on a museum bench and in his dreams, he finds himself walking around in the worlds of paintings by Picasso, Rousseau, Dali, and others. It's a very funny, playful, and keenly thought out animated sequence. Homer wakes up when he has a nightmare of Warhol pelting him with soup cans.

Lisa uses the example of Christo's umbrella project killing someone to try to inspire her father to make art that is big and daring. Homer redistributes everyone's doormats, puts snorkels on animals, and then opens all the fire hydrants and floods the town to turn Springfield into Venice as conceptual art. People in the Springfield Burn Ward let out a collective sigh as the water rises to their roof. The dorky kid wearing floods (pants that are too short) feels good about himself for wearing floods in a flood. Marge gets on top of their house and makes a painting of the beautiful scene, which Jasper Johns steals when she turns her back to kiss her husband.

### **About Temporary Services**

Temporary Services is a group of three: Brett Bloom, Marc Fischer, and Salem Collo-Julin. Our aesthetic practice is inseparable from other aspects of our lives. A central motivation of our work is responding to problems we witness every day.

The distinction between art practice and other inventive human endeavors is irrelevant to us. We embed creative work within thoughtful and imaginative social contexts and create participatory situations.

The link between aesthetics and ethics is critical to our ideas and discussions. We develop spaces for dialogue. We reconfigure social formations and present aesthetic work in transparent and focused ways.

We seek thoughtful and responsible ways of both presenting our work and collaborating with others. Collaboration is an important activity to us, both within our group structure and as a pre-cursor to dealing with others outside the group.

Temporary Services makes every effort to create and participate in relationships that are non-competitive and mutually beneficial. We develop strategies for aggregating the ideas and energies of people who may have never participated in art before, or who may feel excluded from art discourses. The generosity of many individuals allows us to produce projects on a scale that none of us could achieve in isolation. We strive toward aesthetic experiences that are built upon trust and unlimited experimentation.

### **Acknowledgments**

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Front cover image: A cartoon version of the American television painting instructor Bob Ross (see Introduction) from an episode of **The Family Guy**. Back cover image: Frida Kahlo (Salma Hayek) working on a drawing in **Frida**.



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