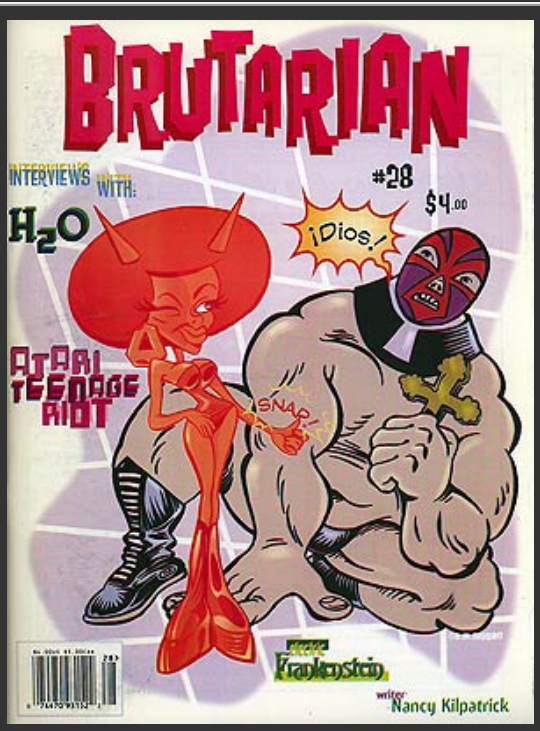
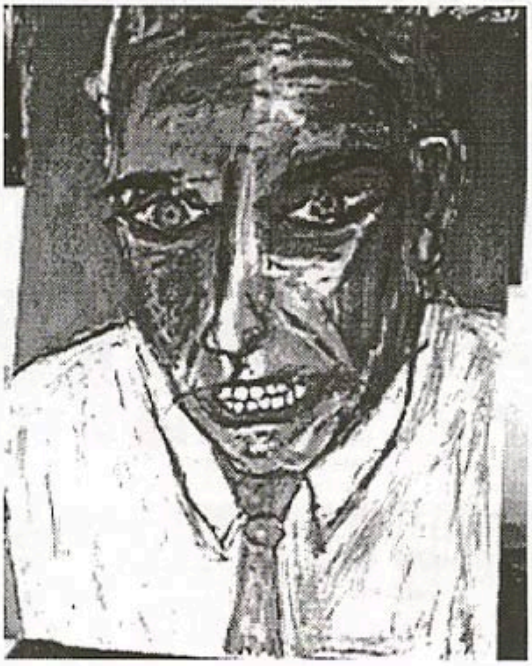
NEW PAINTINGS
BEST OF SESOW (un-Sold)
Paintings (2000-2004)
Bulgaria (2002)
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BEYOND RAW: THE VISIONARY ART OF MATT SESOW

"A picture . . ." semi-famous French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, once was heard to muse lugubriously, "all you can do is see it." Nebraska born, former Peace Corps worker, Matt Sesow, can empathize. His compassionate but wildly expressionistic paintings are all about that which is more than picture. Compositions, perhaps is the better term, compositions composed and designed as an escape from the visible. Taking the viewer to a place he or she may not wish to go as here one will find the most exalted flights of morbidity, the most extravagant caprices of uncontrolled anger, the most savage contempt for the language of art.

Matt is a true Brutarian, a self-taught painter who, despite having his work extensively shown and written about, has little interest in becoming part of the art network. Sesow appears unconcerned with communicating in the accepted tropes of the professional; he defers to no recognized code, nor to the rules of any recognized idiom. "Crude!" "Unfinished!" "Aberrant!" the boulevardier may jeer, but it may well be that Matt's approach results in a creative range beyond the normal compass of our responses . . .Perhaps not, nevertheless, Mr. Sesow has created a fascinating body of work and we thought he'd like to share his thoughts on art, the creative process and the full catastrophe philistines euphemistically refer to as "life."

Brutarian: As a youngster you didn't diddle with paint and brush, what gave birth to the sudden enthusiasm for crowding canvasses?

Sesow: My wife. She's very pretty and you understand, don't you, that when you fall for someone, initially at least, you'll do almost anything? Well, Carol, my wife had a friend Gina who was a painter and Gina would paint with her, so to make points I said I was a painter too and just began to paint with them. I began by tearing out pictures from newspapers and trying to copy on a piece of paper some of the photos that interested me.

Brutarian: So you flat out lied to your future wife.

Sesow: Well, yeah, I said to myself, "Here's my big chance," and so I began to draw. Part of it too was an effort on both our parts to save money. We asked ourselves, "How can we entertain ourselves and save money at the same time?" Still, I tried really hard to impress her and worked hard at

getting better. I also told Carol I was a poet too and that was easier initially because I had the tools: pen and paper. But still, she never questioned my abilities or claim that I was an artist. And by our third date I was watching Carol and her friend Gina, painting at the kitchen table, taking mental notes and painting in earnest.

Brutarian: So you weren't going to art books and looking at or for particular works or styles . . .

Sesow: No, I was watching my two gal friends, and clipping photos from newspapers and going from there . . .and using whatever materials were on hand. Fortunately, since Gina was an artist, there was paint and brushes. But both Gina and Carol would work very slowly; I, on the other hand, would have ten pictures done by the end of the night. Well, by early morning, anyway. Even today, I think my best work is that which is done quickly.

Brutarian: You enjoy working quickly so is all of this instinctive? Does conscious thought ever enter into the composition?

Sesow: No, it's all very conscious but it's like dreaming while awake; I follow the pattern of the dream. Although, with every single painting I do I try to go into the process with a story or, at the very least, an idea. I sit down with a blank canvas and I think of a classical or a bad situation - well, sometimes a happy occurrence, but rarely - and try to put it down. Then I let my subconscious take over.

Brutarian: Your preferred medium?

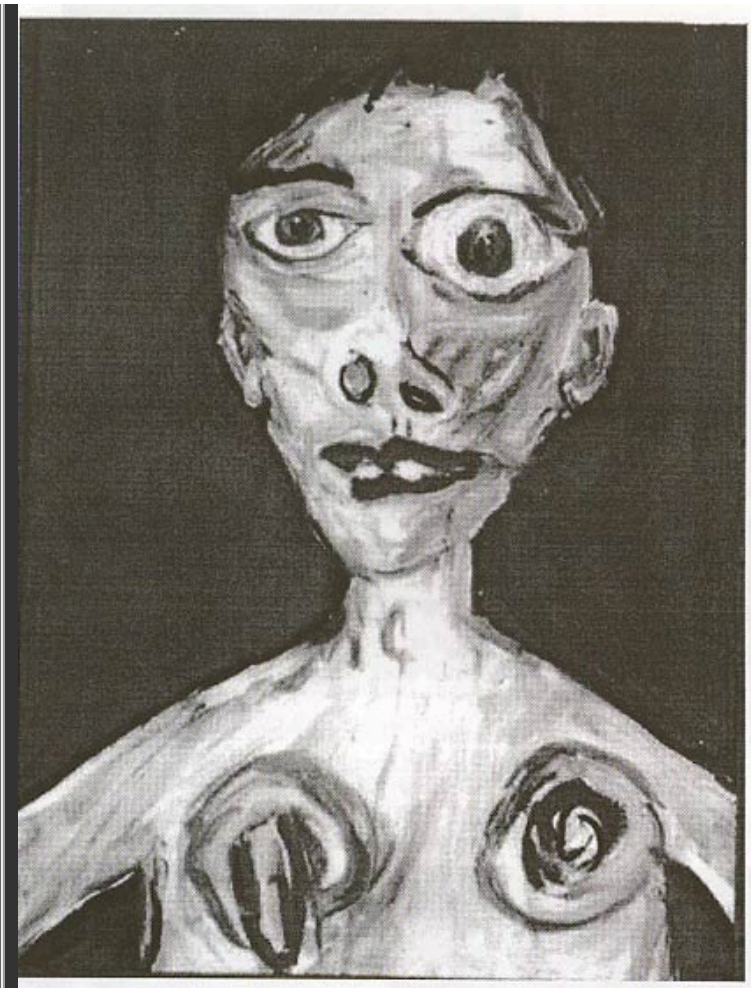
Sesow: Oil on cardboard. I like a hard surface because it doesn't give; it fights back. I love oil. The smell, the texture, the danger of it. Some of my more successful paintings though, are in acrylic. I don't know why but since I'm so unfamiliar with schools of art and method and medium that things sometimes work despite my lack of knowledge.



Brutarian: There seems to be more than an undercurrent of hostility in your work?

Sesow: Yes, there is. For me, to balance myself





out as a human being, I have to use painting to control my, well, it's not anger exactly, but a way to channel anti-social feelings.

Brutarian: Your paintings appear to be somewhat influenced by the work of Paul Klee and Otto Dix.

Sesow: Fascinating, isn't it as I know so very little about painters and painting. I'm familiar with Sue Coe and that's about it.

Brutarian: But you're being somewhat disingenuous aren't you? You know Rembrandt and Michelangelo, you know their work?

Sesow: Of course I know the names but ask me to pick a Rembrandt from the Michelangelos and I couldn't do it.

Brutarian: Do you consider yourself an Art Brut practitioner or rather, a "raw" artist because you certainly fit the criteria.

Sesow: I don't know what's the criteria?

Brutarian: Well, first of all you're an outsider, you're not working within the established network of galleries and agents and journals, etc....

Sesow: That's for sure.

Brutarian: Two or maybe this should have been number one, you have little or no training in the traditional sense and three: the techniques one associates with effective painting . . .

Sesow: Whatever that may be . . .

Brutarian: . . . you disdain or have little interest in emulating or learning.

Sesow: Like that painting in the corner, there; I used the other end of the brush simply because it felt right. I suppose too, I could use other colors but I just use what I want to at the time.

Brutarian: Your press kit calls what you do, your style, "thrash."

Sesow: I grew up with thrash music. I love the energy of it and that's what I try to generate in my



paintings. I listen to it when I paint. Husker Du, music that seeks to exercise all your senses. The Pixies really work for me although I'm not sure whether that qualifies as thrash.

Brutarian: Recent interviews find you enthused over a newfound ability to effectively transfer what's in your head to the canvas. So what's in that teaming brain of yours?

Sesow: Life experiences. I can talk about particular paintings but asking what's in the head, that's difficult. Perhaps what I meant by "transfer" was that I feel now that I'm using color and line and form to more effectively express myself.

Brutarian: As one outside the mainstream are you worried about becoming too popular and because of this trying to repeat or conform to that which brings you acclaim?

Sesow: No, I'm not worried about that. What I'd like to do is reach people like myself with what I do or have done, inspiring, encouraging those people to paint. Some critics call it trauma art because I lost half my arm as a child in an accident with an airplane but I'm not sure I'd use that term. Still, the loss of the limb has helped define me and if seeing me inspires others to paint that's fine. A lot of people want to pigeonhole it but aside from the first year or so when much of what I did dealt with that topic or that pain I really wouldn't characterize what I do as the art of the disabled. There's other things to deal with aren't there? Intimacy, politics . . . I use the pain of my loss to help with other themes, loss of a loved one, discovering your girlfriend sleeping with someone else but I wouldn't say that accident defines my work. Much of what I do is the result too of an enormous lack of self-confidence; I try and I try and then I give up and then . . . the painting's done. Every painting's a failure in a certain sense. Just one after the other and it drains the hell out of me. Yet I find myself using my lack of ability to bring out the intensity and the power I'd like to think I possess.



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