

NYC ARTS RADIO
EPISODE 3: “You will survive this: A conversation with Rene Ricard”
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You will survive this: A conversation with Rene Ricard.

My conversations with Rene were many, but this conversation, from early 2013, was the only one we agreed to record for this show focusing on his poetry, paintings, and life at the Chelsea Hotel under new ownership.

TRANSCRIPT:

AMV (Allison Malinsky Vilalta) (Narration in bold):

Mentors are hard to come by; one who takes you in, spends time with you and teaches you something that may one day become useful. Recently, I attended a brilliant show called Fabulous You at Tiger Strikes Asteroid Gallery in Brooklyn. The concept of the exhibition was for the gallery artists to select work from their mentor, or peer, and to exhibit it next to their own. The show reminded me of all I have learned from my mentors and precocious contemporaries over the duration of my own career. We alone have the power to chose our own mentors and bosses, as a surrogate for the examples we want to follow and one day pass on to other eager rookies. This episode is dedicated to those who intend to insight curiosity and cognitive knowledge in others, especially in this unstable chaos of fact vs. fiction and post-truth.

Today, I would like to celebrate one of my friends in particular, Rene Ricard. At one time he was my boss, and during that year he became a mentor to me, a commanding influence by imparting his taste, unsurpassed wisdom and opinion of all things.

From a life fully lived, he was mercurial, sharp-witted and sharp-tongued, truly informed (he read and read and to absorb concise facts on all historical periods — he read museum catalogues from cover to cover, which is an act I now practice and promote). He was an underground Warhol movie star, art critic, painter, and poet. He is credited with launching the career of Basquiat for whom, in 1981, his essay *The Radiant Child* was published in Artforum. He had no room for BS, but he was generous, and above all - with information, he taught me his first person history of New York and more.

Rene enlightened me on the finer details of general world history — mostly through art, including social etiquette and the ways of life over greasy steak and cheese sandwiches he liked to share before starting the days work at his Midtown studio. He brought me along to parties of NYC Painting Gods and Goddesses I had admired since my own teenage move from New England to New York City, like Rene’s own.

My friend Rita Barros, whom Rene lived with and is spoken about later in this show, had arranged visiting me in Granada Spain, where I was living between 2011 and 2012; Rita, Antonio, Rosario and Rene made the trip from Lisbon. Rene was unforgettably excited to interact with the art, tromp-l’œil, architecture, food and everything in between. He made an arresting performance for the begging Gypsy’s in front of the Cathedral, where Queen Isabel and King Ferdinand are set in their tombs. If I recall correctly, as my memory will never be what his was, Rene was wearing his recently purchased heeled Flamenco dancing shoes.

Back in 2013 after years of dinners and delicious conversations at Rita's apartment in the Chelsea, we agreed to record one of our conversations in his Chelsea Hotel studio. Rene passed away less than a year later.

At the time of the conversation, and unfortunately still today, there was severe discontent in the Hotel. Artists who had been living there for over 40 years were being appallingly harassed by what can only be considered slumlords, trying to drive out the tenants with whatever means possible to free up space in the historic 222 West 23rd Street building. The plan of the new owners was to convert it into a luxury hotel however, some still have the New York fighting spirit.

I learned a great number of things from Rene, chiefly to have a fucking opinion and express it with all that you have while being prepared to back it up with authority; facts, and experience. Just listen and absorb....

RR (Rene Ricard):

My name is Rene Ricard and may I move this way.

AMV:

Yes, of course.

RR:

My name is Rene Ricard and where's the camera?

AMV:

No camera.

RR:

There's no camera?

AMV:

Just radio.

RR:

Oh, it's just audio, ok. I'm Rene Ricard, this is my studio on the 9th floor of the Chelsea Hotel. I'm in the middle of doing a painting, my paintings are distinctive because basically I'm a poet and I write them on canvases. I have someone coming in a little while to look at a painting so I have to do it. The words on it are, it's a cadmium red medium canvas and on it is written, Love: I did the homework, but flunked the exam. I just put the charcoal now, I'm going over it with the oil paint and then I'm doing some acrylic on some of the other letters. That's how I work. Look, what would you like to know?

AMV:

Well, you just brought me in here the other day and I would love to hear you read the other ones if you wouldn't mind.

RR:

I stayed with a friend at her hotel in Nevis, and it was extremely beautiful there. Nevis is an extinct volcano, you're right on its flanks, and you look over Montserrat, which is an active volcano, which tragically erupted 12 years ago. Between the two is the island of Redondo. On the clear day you can sit on Nevis and look at Redondo and behind it you can see the island of Montserrat. So I wrote, just wrote, three paintings for my friend Helen Marden (**AMV: wife of artist Brice Marden**), who was my hostess there, and here they go.

Redondo for Helen

When I write the book

Volcanos of the Caribbean

I shall write from my perch on Redondo.

I shall write on a large leaf
with the turquoise quill from the wing of the purple Caribe hummingbird dipped in lava.

ok, that's one and Nevis

Just before dawn
the big rain clouds over Montserrat
I saw it
at the top cloud's edge dawn's pink hands
then the sun itself brimming gold through the rain on the horizon.

It was very beautiful at dawn there, at sunrise. I suddenly saw what Homer saw in the Aegean and I have some messages coming in, text messages. Let me put this aside for now. OK, and here's the third one

My friend Helen, we went to Puerto Rico to see this hotel because it had these extravagant gardens. The place was so pretentious that Helen texted me from her room to my room.

It's like prison!

So I texted back, no Helen, I've been to jail - it's not like this - but I wrote her this poem:

Helen in jail
The surf pounding pounding
the Heliconia hellish hellish
the coqui screaming coqui coqui
yes, Helen, a prison but you will survive this
I guarantee

So those are my three little poems for Helen.

AMV:

What is it like living with the new management at the Chelsea Hotel?

RR:

Well, I just read a poem called Helen in Jail, we could change the title to Rene in jail because this is really hell. At the moment we have no gas for cooking, we have intermittent hot water, weirdly it will take 10 minutes to get a little hot water then it stays hot for about 20 seconds. When the law says it has to take three minutes and last 10 seconds by the way, because we just had an inspector and I found that out. There's always something wrong, they're doing everything to make our lives hell. The dust is so thick and they're working here that we have to vacuum twice a day. We are all coming down with lung problems and this is not associated with asbestos or gypsum or anything this is just plain DUST and the landlords think that they can best us. And they're doing, they bring us to court all the time, for instance, my last two rent checks have not been cashed yet, they're just hoping to hold long enough for them to bounce. They have brought people to court for non-payment, in one case, five months rent and Rick had the checks that he paid with - it's harassment and yet everybody here just wants to lay back. Nobody really wants to actively sue them and whereas they have masses of lawyers on constant retainer to do nothing but harass us. I was just in court for, I was one day late with the rent check and I was evicted illegally. But I just, you know, when that happens again I don't know what I'm going to do. But it makes it - the woman I live with, is very discouraged by this.

AMV:

Rene, we are in your studio right now. Is your studio some sort of an escape, in a way, or making work, is that an escape of what's occurring in the hotel? Or is it making it harder to be here?

RR:

All of the above, but as a poet I get to attack it as you say, head on and just deal with it. That's you know, and I'm working, and that's really all that I care about is that I am working. Rita Barros who you know is tormented by all of this I don't think has ever produced as much work in her life because this has really stimulated her, so although she has nightmares and screams at night, and I am the one who hears it she gets up in the morning and produces these spectacular works. Her big show going on right now in Lisbon, this gigantic show, is all based on the bricks here that they ripped out of the gardens they destroyed on the roof. All the gardens last fall rather were ripped out. The gardens people had spent years and thousands and thousands of dollars working on, just ripped out for the pleasure of it. Just to be mean.

AMV:

That is part of your home too upstairs on the roof, the sanctuary of the garden.

RR

Well, last year two lesbian mocking birds made a nest, laid two eggs that of course because they were lesbians didn't hatch. But it was so nice to have them buzzing us all the time, - "errrrrrmmm, ow, what did I do!" It was so crazy, but and so they ripped out the gardens. I don't think we'll get the mocking birds that have been coming back for the latest count, seven years. Seven years we've had the same pair of mocking birds and you know they produce such beautiful song, it's sad - you know it's not a question of, things change and as you get older the past was always nicer, I mean anyone can see the past is nicer when the present means wading through ankle deep piles of detritus.

Rene lived life and wrote poetry with passion and intensity. An artist print of his painting in my dining room that reads, "then love takes us to far away places," smiles back at me every day here in Barcelona. He was always right.

There are many lessons in all of this. Life is for you to find, experience and defend. We have the capacity to know what we deserve, and often have to fight for that with our voices,...with art.

I would like to thank my two friends whom, with me, complete our team of three kings, Rita Barros and Shahrzad Kamel, and of course, the Queen, Rene Ricard.

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CREDITS:

**This episode of NYC Arts Radio is made by;
Sound Designer, John Wiggins who always gets the original score on the spot and makes the whole show balance, Tim Braine, whose production notes are critical in making this show have a storyline that one can follow, and me, Allison Malinsky Vilalta, Producer and Editor.**

And thank you to Norman Vilalta for your patience and Biblioteca Agustí Centelles for recording spaces.

(Rene Ricard interview Thursday, 4/18/13,

at the Chelsea Hotel, 222 West 23rd Street, New York, NY)

Suggested Reading:

Rene Ricard

1979-1980

DIA publications, 1979

Edited by Gerard Malanga

Book Design by Bruce Chandler

ISBN: 0-933732-00-7

God With Revolver

Poems 1979 - 82

by Rene Ricard

Hanuman Books, Madras & New York, 1989

ISBN: 0-937815-30-6

Trusty Sarcophagus Co.

by Rene Ricard

Inaout Press, New York - Rome, 1990

ISBN: 0-9625119-1-9

Love Poems

by Rene Ricard with drawings by Robert Hawkins

CUZ Editions, 1999

ISBN: 0-9666328-6-9

Rene Ricard

Notebook 2010-2012

Library Estate of Rene Ricard

Published by Mörel, London, 2015

ISBN: 978-1-907071-53-9

The Last Cigarette

by Rita Barros

Ermida Na Sra da Conceição, 2010

ISBN: 978-989-8277-10-7

Fifteen Years: Chelsea Hotel, 1999

by Rita Barros

Published by Edicao da Camara Municipal de Lisboa, Lisboa Cultura Camara Municipal, Lisboa
Lisbon, 1999

ISBN: 9789729833809

Inside the Dream Palace

The Life and Times of New York's Legendary Chelsea Hotel

by Sherill Tippins

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013

ISBN: 978-0-618-72634-9

Just Kids

by Patti Smith

Bloomsbury, 2010

ISBN: 9781408810835

Don Quixote

by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

A new translation by Edith Grossman
HarperCollins Publishers, 2003
ISBN: 978-0-06-093434-7

Sweet Tooth
by Ian McEwan
Anchor Books, 2013
ISBN: 978-0-345-80345-0

The Essential Guide
Art Institute of Chicago
The Art Institute of Chicago, 2009
ISBN: 978-0-86559-229-251995

Philadelphia Museum of Art
Handbook
Yale University Press, 2015
ISBN: 978-0300207996

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/07/arts/rene-ricard-art-arbiter-with-wildean-wit-dies-at-67.html>

http://rightherenyc.com/THEYLIVEDHERE_artist.html

http://www.nycartspaces.com/gallery_history.php#point1

#ChelseaHotel #Chelsea #ReneRicard #NYC #NewYorkCity #Warhol #AndyWarhol #Basquiat
#RitaBarros #paintinggods #paintinggoddesses #BriceMarden #HelenMarden #JohnWiggins
#AllisonMalinsky #NYCArtsRadio #ShahrazadKamel #Homer #Nevis #jail #Granada #Spain
#gypsy #architecture #art #painting #studio #TSA #TSAGallery #TigerStrikesAsteroid #King
#Queen #Isabel #Ferdinand #mentor #posttruth #fact #fiction #halfgallery