

INSIDE: NIGHT OF CHAMPIONS EP FEATURING RANDO YAT,
EDISON ROCKET TRAIN, BUMP-N-GRILLER, COYOTE MEN 2, THE GOBLINS

CARBON 14

#20

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ALSO INSIDE: AN ALL NEW EDITION OF
KING YEELYEEDA'S CHEESY FUNTIME PAGES



SUNNY BLICK * THE CRAMPS * MARK ANTHONY LACY
MAMIE YAN DOREN * JUSTICE HOWARD * DEAD MOON
ART * MUSIC * SMUT * WRESTLING



SUNNY BUICK



With every issue comes the question, "What's going on the cover?" One day a few months ago when I was waiting for Larry to come home from the PO Box, I asked myself that inevitable question. We've been fortunate to have many, many great artists grace our covers and pages over the years. Sometimes I find them, sometimes they find me; sometimes it's a little of both. That day when Larry returned with the mail I discovered, among the tour postcards and junk mail, a package from Sunny Buick. Coincidence or karma? Who knows. All I can say is the questioned was answered within a minute or two after looking over the slides and you can see why for yourself over the following pages. Making art is pretty much a round-the-clock affair for Sunny, whether at her "day job" tattooing at Goldfield's Tattoo Studio in SF or at home chatting on the phone and you can see how much detail, care and thought goes into each piece. And as seems to be a non-intentional re-occurring theme with the artists we feature—particularly the ladies—she's a real cutie. She recently launched a website www.sunnybuick.com so anyone interested in seeing more of her work can take a look there.

—Leslie

I'll start with the dumb question first: did you start drawing and painting when you were very young, like most other artists?

Yes.

Was it something you found out about at school or did you discover it on your own?

I think it was just in my genes or something because my grandfather, my mother, my sister—everybody in my family has artistic talent. The earliest memory I have of my talent was in Kindergarten, people were already saying stuff about my art and giving me lots of praise for it. And then through school I experienced a lot of being singled out, like, 'Oh, she's got artistic talent, let her do this project.' It was always something I got attention for.

Did you go to an art specific school?

No. I feel like I have enough technique. I mean, in a way that's kinda better, to be self-taught. I was so all over the board in college; I wanted to study dance, then I wanted to study video, so I didn't really take too many art classes. Sometimes I feel like I should go to art school to learn how to oil paint, or the technique of the masters but a lot of people say that kind of ruins you.

What was your major?

Creative art.

That's a broad arts major?

Yeah.

I noticed on your list of exhibits that around 1997 you started showing a lot.

Yeah. I had been focusing on getting a job tattooing and doing a lot of other stuff just to establish myself. At that time I was able to just focus a lot of time on self-promotion. I'd already built up a lot of relationships with other artists over those years, and that's when it really started happening.

So prior to '97 is when you had your tattoo apprenticeship?

Yeah. I was, financially, just getting into my niche and just starting to have the time to sit down and paint. Before that, I was going through school, dealing with life, trying to work and pay off bills and stuff and never really having a lot of time to sit down and paint. Then, once I was established, I had an art studio and started doing tons of stuff. The more I got into other shows, the more art I was doing—cause I wanted new pieces. I started getting into new shows, so the work started piling up and people's interests started picking up.

Do you enjoy showing?

Oh, yeah. It's my new high. I love meeting other artists. That's my favorite thing about a show, talking technique with people whose art I've noticed or know of. It's exciting to hear what people think of the work. The night of the opening is so worth all the time



you put into it. I get really nervous, for a couple hours right before the opening I get butterflies in my stomach, wondering if everyone's gonna like my work or ignore it. I read your mission statement, which is one of the most intelligent and well thought out mission statements I've ever received, and I'm curious if you think that maybe when people see your art in the gallery that they're not getting some of that?

I don't know. I sometimes don't realize what I'm doing until a couple weeks later but usually everything I'm doing is about me and what I believe in. Even though I sometimes think I'm just painting a pretty picture, it's really, really deep. My last show I had some really great comments, I only had one criticism—and I don't even know if it was really a criticism but—Ron Turner from Last Gasp Books said, 'I know you're saying something with these paintings, Sunny, but I don't know if I like it.' [laughter] I said, 'I know what it is, Ron, they're too virtuous for you, that's why you're uncomfortable!' And some other people had some insight into what I was doing. I was talking with people through this whole process. I actually did 27 paintings in one month, and it was all based on one painting I did that was so different from any of my other stuff that I knew I had to go further in that direction. I had something like 10 paintings spread out on my kitchen table, and every painting gave me a great idea for the

next one, and I was writing notes and doing sketches while painting and just working on a bunch at the same time.

Wow.

I was talking on the phone—because I love talking on the phone and painting—about some of the symbolism; I was using keys as symbolism. And my friend said, 'keys are like locking something away,' and to me the key is the unlocking, like the key to wisdom. And that was really cool because I have a tendency to wear my heart on my sleeve and tell everybody what's going on with me, and it intrigues me that some people are able to keep stuff to themselves and keep it bottled up; I never really understood that. So I was adding phrases to these paintings about "keep it to yourself," and this thing I was going through at the time was coming out in the paintings. I had these clouds, and someone said, 'Those look like beach bubbles, but I don't know what they're saying.' And I said, 'Actually, someone was talking to me, but they weren't saying anything, they were just stringing me along.' So it was interesting, when you look back and see what I was going through—it just came out in the symbolism; and that's really exciting when stuff like that happens. But I don't

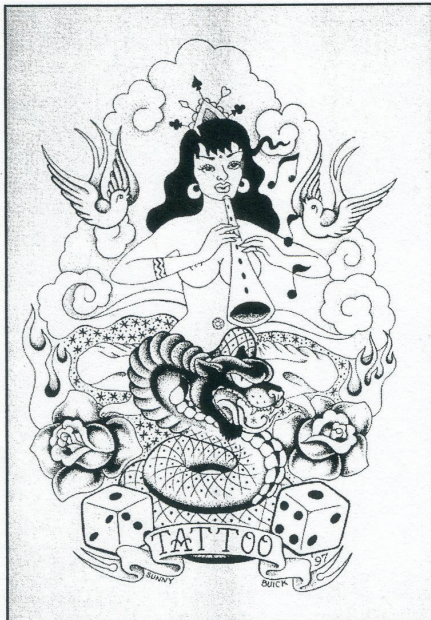
know if other people get it. I mean, the fact that the guy said he didn't know what those bubbles were saying and all of a sudden that unlocked something for me. But I think people just like to look at something visually, and maybe it's speaking to them on a different level.

Maybe they don't realize it until later as well. Some people would say their regular job doesn't help their art, but it seems that yours are complimentary to each other.

I'm so lucky that I do what I do. I'm glad that I concentrated such a large effort into doing tattoos because I'm constantly asked to stretch my artistic ability, I'm always drawing stuff I would be interested in drawing. And I've gotten to the point in my relationship with my boss where he lets me use the tattoo studio as my art studio. So a lot of the time at work I'm painting or making something, and that totally intrigues the customers. And the more shows I do, the more articles that get written about me, people think, 'Oh, I wanna get tattooed by her.' It helps that I'm able to do art all day long and it makes me stretch my artistic ability, but also it completely shows up in my work; I can't get away from tattoo imagery. Sometimes I think maybe that's not so good, but it's what I'm good at.

How did you get involved in tattooing?

My sister had a tattoo, and I was hanging out with some other cartoon artists when I



was really young—and it had always been in my mind, 'How could I make a living at art?' Because everybody at school will tell you you can't make a living at art. You should study English or math or whatever. Have something to fall back on, as they always say.

It was very discouraging. So I was sitting around with these artists and this one guy said, 'Oh a friend of mine just started learning how to tattoo, it's a great way to make money doing art. And don't you think that skin is the ultimate canvas?' All of a sudden, bells and whistles went off in my head. I was thinking along the lines of the masters' paintings, which have survived hundreds of years, and then how humbling it is that your artwork is on someone's skin, it's gonna die. And that person carries it around, it's so personal. All of a sudden, that was the moment where I was like, 'Oh my god!' It was right at that time, too, when Ed Hardy was putting out all these incredible books. I was looking at these pieces of art people were putting on their skin and I was just blown away. So that definitely started me thinking about tattooing. Then I was obsessed with it, that was what I wanted to do, and I had to really claw my way into it. It took ten years of asking around and just doing my thing, going to college, and finally I got in there. How did you come into your apprenticeship?

I had asked Henry (Goldfield; owner of Goldfield's Tattoo Studio) before. Actually, a friend of mine bought equipment and was tattooing out of his house. I called him up and said, 'I've always wanted to do that,' because I figured that was really my only choice at that point. I'd already asked Lyle Tuttle, I'd known him since I was 16, and he was kinda discouraging. I didn't have a whole lot of tattoos because I didn't have the money to get them, so I finally was like, 'OK, I'm gonna have to do what some of these other people are doing.' Even though it's not respected; you just buy equipment and start working out of your house. So I started with this guy and I did



one tattoo at his house. It was pretty cool and I was surprised at how well I did. Then I got my own equipment—my mom lent me the money—and I started doing it out of my house. I spent a whole year painting a set of flash. I had asked Henry for a job right away and he was really gruff with me. I think I was overly sensitive at the time and thought I could never work for him. He has a reputation for just throwing people out—[laughs] he's really cool—but at the time I thought I'd never be able to work for him. So I just kept on doing it and working on this sheet of flash, and I heard through the grapevine that he needed employees. So I went up to him at an art exhibit and I

was super respectful; I said, 'I think it would be an honor to work for you, I brought some of my work, would you like to see it?' And he said yes. (I had gotten more tattoos at that point, and I was dressed in this really short skirt outfit.) So I got my art and showed it to him, and he asked for my number. He called me right away. I think, when I look back on it, it was right when I was ready; I wasn't ready before that. It was like a lot of things in life, it was meant to be. He's the person—I can't see myself working for anyone else because it's an old fashioned parlor and he totally does it the old school way, which I gained a lot of respect for while doing the apprenticeship. He's really an artist, he has a passion for sign painting, a lot of the things I want to learn—he knows a lot about history. He's taught me about storytelling, which I think is really important... just to get your client through the tattoo and also in my work.

You're obviously very artistic, but when people come in and say 'I just want a flag.' Do you do that? Oh yeah. That's what I'm not really into a lot of the time, simple stuff; I'm constantly doing tattoos of stuff I didn't even draw. I really like when somebody brings in a mooka [sic] print. I'll just tape a color Xerox on the mirror and look back and forth. It'll change a little bit, it'll become my own, but it's kinda neat just to try to figure



top: "Corn Mash and Porkin'" acrylic on canvas board 10x 13, 1999

left: "Anchor My Love" acrylic on canvas 24x36, 2000

right: "Cowboy's Dream" acrylic on canvas 24x36, 2000



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left: "Trying So Hard To Be So Good" acrylic, 8x10, 2000

right: "Piggybank Girl" acrylic, 8x10, 2000

below: "Untitled" acrylic and collage on wood, 12" round, 2000

next page: top: "Take These Prayers To Heaven" acrylic and mixed media, 12x16, 2000

bottom left: "Prayers To Heaven, Series 1" acrylic and collage on wood 6x8, 2001

bottom right: "Prayers To Heaven, Series 2" acrylic and collage on wood 6x8, 2001



what exact shade of maroon is in that crevice. I mix it up. I think I learn a lot about colors just by copying art onto people, that's really fun.

And you've done your own original designs on people as well.

Oh yeah. A lot more lately now that people see my artwork around and see the tattoos I've designed. A lot of times I'll draw something and the client doesn't come back, so it'll end up a painting because I just have to get it out of my system.

I'm also curious how being female has either helped or hindered your entrance into the tattoo world.

It helps me a lot and it also hinders me a lot; in the lowbrow art scene too. I'm trying to break into this boys club. I don't know what it is about me that constantly wants to break into boys clubs. [laughing] Maybe it's the challenge. It helps me to be a woman because there are definitely those people who want a woman's touch and feel more comfortable with a woman. It helps, in the shop, to have one woman working there because, as my boss says, 'It keeps it from smelling like a locker room.'

Are you the only woman in that shop?

Yeah. I don't think they'd do well to have more than one. It's really hard too, sometimes, because they sit around and talk—and they treat me like one of the guys—but they'll be talking really badly about women and I'll get really defensive and feel like I have to stand up for my sex; I'll go home kind of repulsed. That's hard. And it was hard just breaking in because there's so many talented people out there and there's not many women in the tattoo business.

Do the female tattoo artists network with each other?

Not really, we're not really tight. I curated an art show, and it was a good way to meet all the women who were tattooing in San Francisco, but since that point I haven't hung out with a whole lot of them. I don't really hang out with tattoo artists. Sometimes I get really bored talking about tattoos. I wanna hang out with other painters now. And I'll probably get sick of that, too. [laughter]

When you curated the art show of the women tattooists, was there anyone you approached who said they weren't interested in being in an all-female show or were they all receptive to that idea?

No, everybody was good. The guys I work with were kinda mad, they were like, 'How would you feel if it was an all-men's show?' I said, 'That's been happening

forever! I think they just wanted to be in an art show... they were messin' with me too. I don't know. I talked to this curator of a big museum here in San Francisco, he was a professor of mine in college, and I said, 'If you have any women's shows coming up soon, let me know.' And he said, 'Now, Sunny, you don't want to get yourself painted in a corner with that, only showing with other women.' And that made me stop and think; it's the truth. I want to be a part of the whole picture not just the women thing. I do think you get some special attention though, just because you're a female; but at the same time you really have to work harder to get respect.

Do you sketch your paintings first?

Yes. I get a drawing ready and mess around with the drawing until I'm really happy with it. And still, when I transfer it to the canvas, it still changes. I do a lot of changes once it's on the canvas, but I don't draw right on the canvas.

So you paint from the sketch.

Yeah.

How do you do the mixed media things? I'm looking at the "Prayers to Heaven" series.

Yeah, that's the one that started everything. I just prepare a background surface, then I'll do sketches on other pieces of paper and just transfer them.

What is on the background surface?

Those are little—I think they're money for the dead, you get them in Chinatown.

Whatever they are, they say, "Long Life" and have some blessings and stuff on there. It's like an incense paper you're supposed to burn at a funeral. I don't know if it's offensive but I use it. Those pieces do have to do with death so I thought it was appropriate. I also thought it was really cool because the background was ready to go. I could do all these layers and do each painting really quickly. I did 27 in one month's time.

That's a huge amount.

Plus I was working full time and painting a banner with my boss. But a lot of them were really small; I sold a lot of them because they were really affordable.

Is it easier when a piece is small? I would imagine it's still as time-consuming as doing a 36" painting.

I can't do a painting of a woman really small. I get weirded out, I just like to have lots of room to put eyelashes in [laughs]. I like to do women really big. The smaller stuff is good because you can do it quickly and someone can afford it, but I really like working larger.



I love the "Sailor Girl" and the "Cowboy's Dream" and the different pin-up style women you draw. I'm gonna do a whole series like that with the airbrush. Hopefully do 12 and maybe put them together as a calendar. I was talking with some artist in LA about airbrushing, and it's really frowned upon in painter's circles because it's mechanical, it's kinda like cheating.

Like using the computer?

Yeah.

Have you ever done anything like that?

No. I'd really like to learn Photoshop because it seems like it might save a little bit of the cut and paste chaos when you're trying to put a bunch of images into one thing. If I'm doing a painting that has a bunch of images and I draw it all out and then I'm not happy with the composition, it's difficult to start from scratch. If it was on the computer I could just move things around without having to redraw the whole thing again. Earlier we were talking about that art statement, I don't know if we skimmed by that, but that was really hard for me to write. It took me three years to write. It's hard to talk about something so personal. The first draft I just handed everything to the world on a plate; it was too easy. I just wanted it to be so that it would make people look at the artwork again.

Maybe in a different way?

Yeah.

Did you feel cleansed in some way after you finally wrote it?

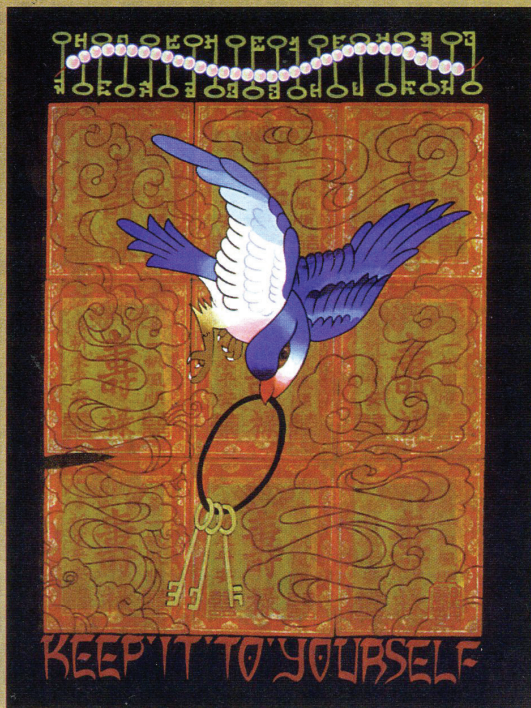
After I got it done. It was the key element in sending some packages off. A requirement, really, for museums and higher end galleries. They expect that, they expect something short they can read. It makes you seem serious, I think. Because so many critics don't know. They're just coming up with a whole line of bullshit, and it's all about—sometimes I feel that if you can just talk a really good line of bullshit about your artwork then that's your key into the big museums and stuff. Like these abstract paintings, they say they means all this deep stuff; yeah, right! It's funny, Larry and I went to the museum last month and we stood for a long time in front of this one giant canvas which just had a stripe on it, and I'm like, 'I'm trying to get it. But it's just a canvas with a stripe on it. I'm sure it means something to someone but it's not meaning shit to me.'

I can't get impressed by stuff like that. What I get really impressed by is somebody who spent so much time alone in a room just blending and putting different things into a painting. That's what really impresses me.

So you have no qualms about selling your artwork.

No, some stuff I really want to hang on to. I'll put a little bit higher price on it because it's gotta compensate me. Because I'd rather have it hanging on my wall longer. But I don't like having it pile up in my storage. I get better as time goes on and I don't want that embarrassing stuff to be there.

It's OK if it's in somebody else's house.



Yeah, it's OK. It helps buy me some pork chops.

What artists do you admire, past or present; people that maybe have influenced your work.

The two big influences on my work are Tibetan art and Mexican folk art. As for artists, Mark Ryden is a current guy. Freda Khalo, Diego Rivera, all the surrealists—I totally want to be a surrealist, I want all my stuff to be surreal from now on. Max Ernst, he was a collage artist... I like Japanese artwork.

Are there any specific tattoo artists who've influenced your tattooing, besides the people who taught you?

Yeah, there's young guys out there that are doing the traditional stuff in a new way, that influences me a lot. I like Ed Hardy because he's been able to balance fine art, publishing and tattooing. Do you separate your tattooing from your other artwork or do you see it all as one?

There's conflict between the two. I really need to spend more time painting, like to be able to do a one-woman show at some point. And I don't really see myself as an old woman still tattooing, but at the same time I don't want to be alone in my house or my studio painting because I get so much from my interaction with my customers. I help them and they help me just with life's issues. I love when I make a connection with a customer,

like a spiritual connection, and maybe make a difference in their attitude. If I was a painter working at home, alone, and the only contact I had with people would be an art opening or something, that would be really hard. It's good that I can paint at work.

Do you think there's still a stigma attached to being tattooed even though it's become much more popular?

It'll never be mainstream. I was talking to my friend yesterday about lowbrow and how it hasn't been accepted by the mainstream and that's a good thing, because the same thing happened with the impressionists. And he said, 'Tattoos and lowbrow are like two limbs on the same body.' And I said, 'Yeah, they should keep that connection strong because tattooing will never be accepted in the mainstream, and if we can keep it that way it will be a powerful movement that will change art. And I'll be a part of it!' [laughs]

You said you sometimes paint when you're talking on the phone?

Yeah, I love to do that.

Does the course of the conversation affect what you're painting?

Totally. Like the key situation—I was talking to this girl, it was my close friend, and I never would have looked at the key as locking something away, if you hold the key you have the power. So I was totally intrigued by this withholding notion, and that ended up in the painting. Later on I had to explain myself. At the bottom of the painting in big red letters it says "Keep it to yourself," and I was like, 'I don't really do that! Just wanted to tell ya, I don't keep anything to myself.' But I had to write it down because I wish I could.

If you're not talking on the phone will you be listening to music or do you have the TV on in the background?

No TV. I know somebody who paints and watches movies at the same time. I can't do that. But music totally influences me. And it's a



good way to go through my record collection cause otherwise I'm not gonna sit around and listen to records, [laughing] that's not very productive.

Yeah, you've got 27 paintings to do in 30 days.

Yeah, I have to be productive at every moment.

This has nothing to do with your art but I have to ask you about your girl in the fishbowl credit on your resume, is that literal? Were you a girl who performed in a fishbowl?

Yeah. There's this beautiful club in San Francisco. It's been open since the '30s but it changed location and the place it is now is from the '50s. So the whole theme of the nightclub, it was a huge dinner club—they have these etched glass doors that have a naked girl riding a fish, and they have this huge marble statue in the lobby of a girl riding a fish, which is totally beautiful art deco. And they have all these oil paintings of mermaids in the ballroom... it's this incredible nightclub that hasn't changed a bit. And in the bar they have a 25 or 50 gallon fishbowl that has a little cave in the center which turns around on a motor. It has a little window in it and inside the little window there are two mirrors on an angle. And then under that, in the basement of the club, there's a bed that turns around on this motor. And you lay on this bed with black velvet and your image is projected into the fishbowl. So you look like you're five or six inches long and you're swimming in with the fish. The owner of the club and some magi-

cian came up with the illusion. It's pretty creepy down in the basement, you have to go through the club in these catacombs.

So you're down there in this little room by yourself.

Naked. Uh-huh. And claustrophobic.

For how many hours at a time?

Well, I did it for four years. I took over for this woman who'd done it for 20 years, she became a councilwoman in Oakland; I took over for her so I'm considered the girl who took over for Donna. Ever since then it's been mainly rockabilly girls who've done it. I retired because I was getting too many tattoos. I wanted more tattoos and it wasn't paying enough. Although I really liked the title and everything.

That is fascinating.

It's pretty cool that I did that. But I didn't have to do it for hours at a time. You're supposed to do it for 10 minutes, on the hour and the half-hour. So I'd throw my clothes back on in between, go upstairs, drink and dance. I got to see some

of the greatest bands; Korla Pandit, Combustible Edison, I met Nina Hagen. The whole swing movement was exploding right when I did it, so I got to see all those bands and dance.

Wow. What a job. Have you ever done any album or CD art? Has any of your stuff been used for that?

No, I really wanna do that. I think that would be a great way to get my stuff out there or more recognized. I'm waiting for that, I've been actually telling people I wanna do it—so it should come.



top: "Miss Serenitiki"
acrylic on canvas
22x22 2001

left: "Pre-Menstrual Tiki"
acrylic on wood
9x14, 2000

right: "Annie Get Yer Gun"
watercolor and ink
10 1/2 x 13 1/2, 1997

