

DONALD O'FINN: JUMP CUTS AT DEAN & 6TH

Berenice ("The Abbott")/BZA was there: Video artist, bar manager and anti-Eminent Domain activist Donald O'Finn is many things to many people. Beginning this Saturday, he's also de facto host of the [Found In Brooklyn](#) art show and rock concert at [Freddy's Bar & Backroom](#). (Lisanne McTernan, the Don Kirshner of Bond St, is curator.) My protege, Brian Berger, has a number of his all-Brooklyn street photographs there & if ya'll haven't been to Brownsville, Canarsie or East New York lately... They'll be hanging around the corner from the 78th Precinct in politically charged Prospect Heights. Should the ghost of Willie Sutton or even Sonny Carson enter, just be cool. It's [Donald O'Finn's](#) way; it's my way too.

Brian Berger: For those who don't know, what are the differences between a video artist and a filmmaker?

Donald O'Finn: For better or worse, I intentionally remain rather ignorant of both genres. I am trained as a painter, with a MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, and spent 15 years as a very serious painter, though I have been making these re-purposed video things since 1982. The video was always secondary to the painting until 1998 or so, when it took over and I stopped painting. I stopped because the video is a more fully expressive medium for me, strangely enough.

Video Art traditionally has been linked to performance and installation art. The sheer term "Art" separates a product or an intention from anything necessarily commercial, mainstream or popular... it has a selective audience.

Brian: You're originally from California-- were you familiar with the films of Stan Brakhage or James Broughton [the gay poet, filmmaker and avowed influence on Brakhage]?

Donald: I am most familiar with Stan Brakhage. I am in a media performance band where we mix and mash video and audio live, called rev.99. A couple years back we created a piece on Brakhage that we performed live at New York's Anthology Film Archive, as well as the Hirshhorn Museum of Art in DC.

Bruce Conner is, of course a influence, but painting, TV, and my own visceral instincts are my main influences. I actually sort of think of myself as an "Out Sider" artist, existing outside of mainstream Art influences. The videos are far closer to painting or poetry than to film.

Brian: Were you effected by or interested in punk at all & if not, what musics of your youth, young adulthood were you exposed to?

Donald: Yes, punk to a degree, and I do believe punk has had more substantial impact on contemporary art and art processes of any other kind of music. In my youth I listened to Funk, but when Disco hit I turned to punk.

Brian: Your work is known for it's "pulp" iconography (sorry if that's reductive); what are some of your fave fims, novels, material objects?

Donald: Favorite literature.....everything Kafka has written, Edgar Allen Poe, Cormac McCarthy, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. As a child I loved H.P. Lovecraft. Until a few years ago my favorite reading material was always TV Guide. I'd wait for it to show up in the mail, and when it did...I'd plan my week. But since TV Guide went big I haven't touched one, seriously. They destroyed, arguably the strongest pop culture designs ever, in terms of it's scale, logo, over all composition, the relationship of the image (usually a portrait of some kind) to the written word..... it was always marvelous. I once did a life size painting of my self standing nude in shadow, with my weekly concerns scripted out in words in a column to the left, put a big TV Guide logo in the corner, and called it "Self Portrait as TV Guide Hero"

Brian: Where have you lived in Brooklyn?

Donald: With the exception of a year in huge loft in Dumbo/Brooklyn Heights, I have always lived in the Slope.

Brian: while I would still describe Prospect Heights as ethnically diverse, Flatbush Ave itself has lost some of its funk; I remember when Blasas, the Nigerian restaurant on Vanderbilt at Pacific, was a big deal to city Afrophiles– it didn't last long, alas. Knowing populations are fluid, identity complex, how do you feel about how things are changing? As a parallel, as bar manager, have things evolved in terms of your need to, uh ... "educate" younger customers or is their a process of self-selection in which dipshits (my word) go elsewhere?

Donald: Yes, I've seen the neighborhood change a lot, when I first moved here in 1989, 5th Ave was the line of demarcation between marginally safe and not safe at all, 4th Ave was very dicey and I worked at O'Connor's Bar then, right on 5th Ave.

We have a no assholes rule here at Freddy's, and we actively enforce it. With the increase of children in the neighborhood we've had to adjust and educate. Running a bar is always a selection process, encouraging some to come deeper into the fold, and others to stay peripheral. A lot of the young men specially don't know how to "be" in a bar. Many of us old school bartenders have spent many an "after hours" hour talking about writing the book on how to be in a Bar.

Brian: *Kelo versus New London:* how did you feel? Also, if you can recall, bring us back to the weeks when the arena– just an arena– was announced?

Donald: Kelo vs New London...very scary, I have been told that there are over a thousand eminent domain case happening in this country right now, more examples of the Have-a-lots taking from the have-nots and have-littles. It is horrible how we are transferring all the right away from individuals and giving them to institutions.

We found out about it watching TV, no one ever even contacted us for at least a year, if not 2 years. It was very emotional, but the way this community has bonded together for the good and righteous fight has been astounding, I am very proud of everyone involved in this struggle.

Brian: Have any of the New Jersey Nets come into Freddie's? Marty Markowitz?

Donald O'Finn: Nope, we only get the cool people. And we don't need them just check the reviews.

Brian: If I want to support Haiti in some vague way, I drink Prestige beer; how do support a video artist?

Donald: I would say Buy videos, mine are cheap right now, but very soon, with gallery representation they will become expensive. Also check out any stuff on line, I can be found at:

www.donaldofinn.com