

2003

Remembered City: Prints and Drawings by Tony Fitzpatrick

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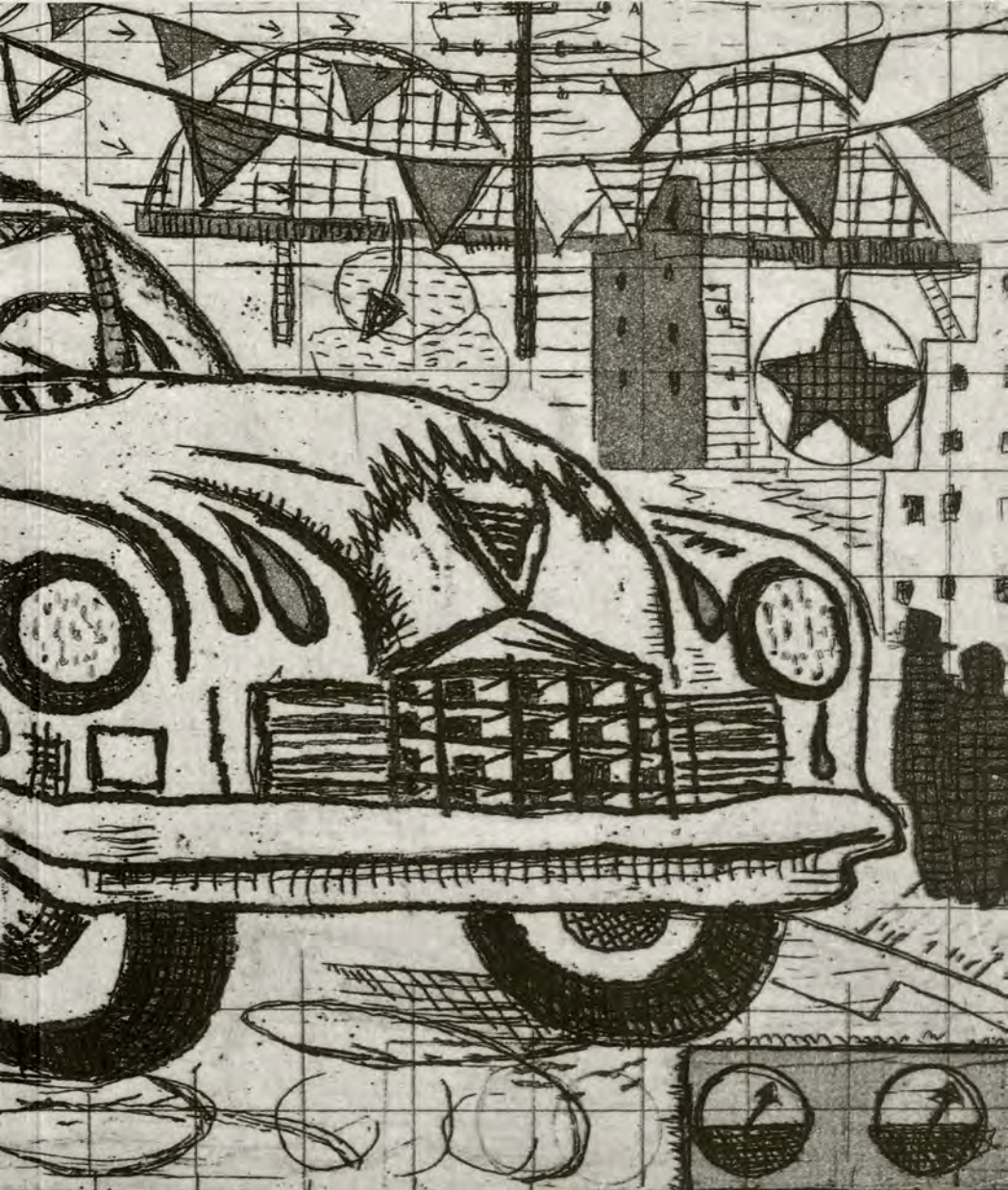


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Remembered

CITY

Prints and Drawings by

Tony Fitzpatrick

DePaul University Art Museum Chicago, Illinois

Remembered City

Prints and Drawings by Tony Fitzpatrick

12 September - 26 November 2003

DePaul University Art Museum

2350 North Kenmore Avenue

Chicago, Illinois 60614

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Vehicle, 1999, etching Collection of the artist

Preface

Through its collection and its programs the DePaul University Art Museum takes a particular interest in Chicago: the environment, its communities, and its artists. The history of the university itself is closely identified with that of the city. The “little university under the El,” as it was first known, provided higher education to the sons—and from early on, the daughters—of numerous immigrant families, those populations who were so important in forming the character of Chicago. Having grown up as the city grew, DePaul’s social identity nonetheless remains entwined with individual stories of struggle in the rough and tumble of urban life.

Tony Fitzpatrick, a Chicago graphic artist and printmaker, approaches his subject matter from a similarly deep-rooted sense of place. Chicago is in his bones, and he acknowledges directly its gritty and painful sides, but he is never a voyeur or a sensationalist. His images are honest, sometimes brutal, and sometimes startlingly beautiful. They can be searing political commentary or wrenching personal history or astute historical perspective or all of these together. Taken as a whole, his work speaks in a distinct voice to the complexity of the city.

Tony Fitzpatrick has collaborated generously on this exhibition, and we are grateful for his patience and his friendship. We thank Studs Terkel, whose extraordinary interview with the artist skilfully and gracefully probes his personal history, and Elizabeth Seaton, whose essay provides artistic and historical context. Laura Fatemi, Assistant Director of the museum, has curated the exhibition with great finesse. We acknowledge with gratitude the support of the Illinois Humanities Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Illinois General Assembly.

Louise Lincoln, *Director*

Introduction

My first encounter with Tony Fitzpatrick and his work dates to the early 1990s in Lawrence, Kansas. Speaking to a standing-room-only crowd at the Spencer Museum, Fitzpatrick was a compelling orator, and I was struck by the wrenching frankness I saw in his images and heard in his voice. Visually the works were jarring; his subjects were murderers, drug addicts, and prostitutes, and his environment was a gritty and unforgiving city. Not easy to look at, they both repelled and fascinated me. Not all his works comment on the city's bleakness; a starling, for instance, was exquisitely rendered in a series of prints, and he spoke reverently of his grandmother's affection for a bird that for her symbolized hope. Fitzpatrick's ability to find beauty in the mundane is one of his trademark qualities.

Tony Fitzpatrick's work cuts through the borders of age, gender, and region. Although many of his images are of urban blight, they also tell of personal defeats and struggles. The viewer identifies with Tony's fallen heroes, whether it be the disgraced baseball pitcher in the print *Our Joe*, or the lonely ghostlike figure in *Woman on a Bridge*. In response to the latter image a collector of Fitzpatrick's work remarked "that woman on the bridge is me." Even the scrappy mongrel in the drawing *West Side Kind* evokes our sympathies for the underdog.

Chicago is the constant reference point for the artist. In the *Remembered City* series, Fitzpatrick takes the viewer on a journey through its streets, going back decades into his and his city's history. Some of the prints in the series are taken directly from *Bum Town*, a group of drawings and poems that refer to the relationship between artist and his deceased father, Jim Fitzpatrick. The *Remembered City* series is ongoing, and the theme allows infinite exploration.

Fitzpatrick's use of personal experience, combined with historical references, sets him apart. The city's turbulent history, and his own, are retold through historical episodes, personal remembrances, and vivid imagination. He is the chronicler of the city, a role he shares with writers Nelson Algren and Carl Sandburg, both of whom he cites as influences. The collection of stories told by this third-generation Irish Chicagoan in a unique voice and style continues a long history of writers, poets, actors and painters. Again transcending more conventional roles, he brings both word and image to the task of making art from human history.

Laura Fatemi, *Assistant Director and Curator*

Tony Fitzpatrick's
- AN ESSAY BY ELIZABETH SEATON -
Chicagos

THE DEAD BOY



Trigel McKinney: I was born on and died on a Sunday.
He shoted his friend on some Craak profits.
His friend "Rock" shot him twice and killed him. Trigel McKinney
was 11 years old -- and death followed him every day. The next time you
read about "The War on Drugs" remember
to hug your kids and carry them home.

SUNDAY'S CHILD

Cities, of course, do not make art; that task will always be reserved for the men and women who live within them. But cities do make contexts, create the specific systems of response, and they do provide the particular intellectual, cultural, historical, financial, and sociological backdrop against which art will always be produced. – James Yood¹

Tony Fitzpatrick has deep roots in Chicago. He was born and raised in and around the city in a large middle-class Irish Catholic family. His art is indebted to many Chicagos: the one he knew growing up, parts of which have disappeared; the Chicago he discovered during a troubled young adulthood that exposed him to the intractable problems of the city; and the Chicago he observes through the eyes of a mature artist and father of two children. And that is just the physical city. Chicago's visual culture has also affected the character of his art, and been enriched itself by his art and art enterprises. Then

there is the literary Chicago of Carl Sandburg, Upton Sinclair, Nelson Algren, and Studs Terkel—writers Fitzpatrick speaks of respectfully and often—as well as the theatrical and cinematic Chicago in which he works occasionally. These, too, inform his art and the poetry and essays he produces, sometimes in combination. Through his work, he is our guide to the city, our Virgil, albeit burly and more outspoken than the original classical Latin poet portrayed by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*. The Chicago he confronts us with is sometimes hellish, a cement world crowded with grim, punished characters, and sometimes like purgatory, where things of beauty such as birds and flowers and nostalgic imagery like a boy playing baseball suggest the possibility of redemption.

At the center of the exhibition *Remembered City* is *Bum Town*, a collection of etchings and drawings and a poem Fitzpatrick produced between 1998 and 2000. The series is a good example of the way the many “Chicagos” Fitzpatrick knows have informed his work, from its subjects to its format and its exacting technique. *Bum Town* followed *Dirty Boulevard*, the 1996 group of drawings depicting the harsh world of drug and alcohol addiction and its main characters: drug pushers, prostitutes, crack mothers and babies. Included among the images is *The Dead Boy* (fig. 1), showing Nigel McKinney, an eleven-year-old African American boy who “shorted his friend on some crack profits” and received two bullets in his small body.² This was a tour of the depths of hell. *Bum Town* takes the viewer through an area of this realm that is less deep, but

inhabited by sinners nonetheless. The poem and related images were inspired by Fitzpatrick's youth, when his father, a burial vault salesman, circled around South Side Chicago in a late 1950s champagne-green Oldsmobile, introducing him to the innocent and less innocent shades inhabiting it as counterexamples for his son. In *The Divine Comedy* analogy, son is Dante and father Virgil; they appear throughout as small, darkened figures. In *Vehicle* (fig. 2), the two stand in the lower right. The Oldsmobile bears tears of sweat or sadness and a flaming nose, appropriate for a trip through a kind of misery. Multi-storied buildings stand below a Chicago River bridge. A Texaco symbol and plastic flags recall the gas stations and car lots the two passed along Western Avenue. Other drawings and prints in *Bum Town* feature historical people or contemporary figures with whom James Fitzpatrick acquainted his son on routes between funeral parlors: gangsters, boxers, and ballplayers; prostitutes, stray dogs, drunks, and train hoppers.

These are romantic types, but also souls whose actions brought or threatened to bring them to a sudden end or circular fate. The gangsters were of course shot dead or imprisoned. The heavy drinkers became an embarrassment or killed themselves. The "bums" hopped one freight train after another, never finding a place to stay. White Sox player Shoeless Joe Jackson was another cautionary tale. In the print *Our Joe* (fig. 3) he kneels in the batter's box, his position a reminder of his historically high batting average (.356, the third



highest in major league history). Below the ball player lie train tracks that Fitzpatrick and his father rode over during their city tours and that symbolized for the artist's father the path one might choose in life. Shoeless Joe chose the wrong one the moment he conspired with gamblers to throw the 1919 World Series to the Cincinnati Reds. Fans still seek to disprove his involvement, but his knowledge of the game-throwing has indelibly besmirched his career.

Fitzpatrick seems intent on documenting what some would like to forget about the city. In the poem *Bum Town* he writes about the Back of the Yards, the neighborhood below Pershing Road (39th Street) and east of Western Avenue where Chicago Union Stock Yard workers and their families lived in cottages and tenements during the late nineteenth century. Their descendants still lived there during Fitzpatrick's youth in the 1960s, even though meatpacking was moving to rural areas and the yards were in decline. Smells from the U.S. Steel South Works all the way down on 89th Street at Lake Michigan mingled with those of the stockyards, Fitzpatrick recalls in the poem: "Blood and meat and iron carried on the breeze like new curses." In *The Music of Slaughter* (fig. 4), he portrays a bull awaiting slaughter, its hide drawn to look like the limestone and brick stockyard and meatpacking buildings. Vignettes in the background question humans' intense demand for the meat of cattle (in the lower left, Fitzpatrick has portrayed steaks growing on trees) and its environmental consequences (the corn that made the bull fat, like the dandelion next to it,



devours the nutrients of the soil). The energy expended to bring steaks to the table compares to that of mining and cutting diamonds, Fitzpatrick suggests by including the gems in the upper right. And the slag—the refuse of smelted metal or ore—in a pile below the bull's hind legs, reminds us of the bloody waste generated by meatpacking. Slag piles appear throughout Fitzpatrick's imagery as an emblem of the city's other wasted resources, including some of its people. He reminds us of what we try to push away from our noses or out of our vision: the death associated with meat consumption, the sordidness of poverty and drug addiction.

The *Bum Town* prints and drawings are modest in size, as are almost all of Fitzpatrick's works. A small composition with a central object surrounded—sometimes claustrophobically—by related elements has become a common form in his visual expression. The works seem appropriately paired with text, especially in this case, and with their tightly arranged, carefully hand-drawn components, they are somewhat like medieval manuscript illuminations. The artist credits the format of his work in part to the wallet-size Catholic holy cards depicting saints surrounded by martyrdom symbols that he encountered as a young boy. Then, he saw them as “someone's art” more than spiritually inspiring images. But the religious weight and occasionally gruesome character of these cards, which are distributed at funerals and on holy days, obviously had their impact. Other examples of so-called low art, including tattoo shop snakes





and naked women, comic strips, especially Chester Gould's Dick Tracy, and horror movies—the “wallpaper” of his youth, as Fitzpatrick describes them—affected his drawing style and sometimes work their way directly into his imagery. As he matured as an artist, Fitzpatrick also turned for technical and spiritual inspiration to the more scathing of the Old Masters, including Francisco de Goya and Honoré Daumier, and the German Expressionists Otto Dix and George Grosz. Grosz's merciless depictions of another city—Berlin between the two world wars—has particular resonance to Fitzpatrick's Chicago projects. As Fitzpatrick has, these artists made careers of picturing the darker side of society. And they, too, expressed themselves especially eloquently in the print medium.

Fitzpatrick has had no formal art training. He drew constantly as a boy, sometimes showing his work to a friend's father who was an artist. In his young adulthood, he did some tattooing and in the early 1980s this ex-boxer who had been working a series of dead-end jobs began to produce paintings of hard-bitten characters, including serial killers, on small black chalkboards that before he knew it had lifted him to recognition in the New York art scene. His opening of the World Tattoo Gallery (its name recognizing offbeat artmaking) at 1255 S. Wabash in the early 1990s further established him as a major player in the visual arts with an outspoken disdain for the mainstream art market.

Despite his untutored upbringing as an artist, Fitzpatrick has produced a body of work that stylistically is far from isolated within Chicago art history. The work exhibits many characteristics of the “Chicago School in Art,” also known as Chicago Imagism. The core roster of Imagists emerged in a series of Hyde Park Art Center exhibitions beginning in 1966 and were a discernible force by the early 1970s. Their work shared an interest in the human figure, often in densely filled cartoonlike settings; a rejection of artistic convention and an embrace of outsider and nonwestern images; strong color and a healthy dose of whimsy. Even their use of representational imagery constituted a rejection of the still-dominant mode of abstraction, and their audaciousness was both an artistic and a political statement.³ Although Fitzpatrick doesn’t identify himself with the Imagist group and did not work or exhibit with them, his work resonates in ways with their dark subject matter drawn from low-brow sources, frenetically busy compositions, and irreverent, anti-intellectual attitude straightened up a little by an attention to fine draftsmanship and finished form.

Since the late 1980s, he has channeled his designs into printmaking, a medium he “made a left turn into” in 1989 when he was invited by Jack Lemon and Steve Campbell to make prints at Chicago’s Landfall Press south of the Loop. Landfall’s founding by the Tamarind-trained Lemon in 1970 was contemporaneous with the rise of the Imagists and a place several of them worked. The ability of the medium to accommodate drawing, to be produced in

multiples (and therefore be less elitist) and the collaborative environment at Landfall, and other presses Lemon would help nurture or his printers would establish, appealed to the Imagists.⁴ At Landfall, or places like Teaberry Press or Plucked Chicken Press, these artists learned the intricacies of printmaking techniques while enjoying the support of printers who could handle the hard work of carrying out an edition. At Landfall, Fitzpatrick found the same circumstances—and also undoubtedly Lemon’s reputed desire to help artists develop printmaking with the “look of drawing” with the figure typically at its center—irresistible himself, making nearly two dozen plates until he began to feel as if he was monopolizing the shop.⁵ In 1992 Fitzpatrick invested in a large, new Takach etching press from Albuquerque. At the time, Lemon didn’t understand why he didn’t just use Landfall’s equipment. “I don’t think he realized just how many prints I intended on making,” Fitzpatrick said: more than 200 images so far.

Fitzpatrick hired Theresa Mucha, a young Art Institute student who was taking a printmaking class and working at a coffee shop he frequented in Printers Row, to become his master printer. She quit her schooling and cut her teeth in the role under the guidance of Campbell, who came into the studio once a week to work with them both. Fitzpatrick called the operation Big Cat Press.

Fitzpatrick’s working relationship with Mucha was unusual and groundbreaking within the Chicago printmaking scene, where artists usually worked with presses



like Landfall that invite artists and help sell their work or completed editions alone within private studios or school facilities where they taught. Very few artists, and especially those so new to the medium, partnered up formally to produce prints together, much less to attempt to subsist on them as Fitzpatrick and Mucha did.⁶ At the same time, Fitzpatrick generously invited artists to use his facilities and collaborate with Mucha (Chicago's best-known painter, Ed Paschke; another member of the Imagists, Gladys Nilsson; and Montana artist Wes Mills among them), a decision that while vitalizing often prevented him from pursuing his own work. Mucha described some lean years when she had to recycle paper and Fitzpatrick had to focus on selling drawings to make ends meet, but the enterprise was successful, especially after the two moved the press to the current location in Bucktown at 2124 N. Damen Avenue, a recently gentrified area.

Printmaking has become Fitzpatrick's primary mode of expression, although he describes himself first as a draftsman. His slightly larger and heavily penciled drawings are usually works in their own right rather than sketches, but in terms of theme and iconography they feed into his printed imagery, which he draws directly onto plates that are usually prepared with a hard-wax ground by his printers (Fitzpatrick scratches the design into the ground with a sharp metal tool). The printers then etch them in acid baths and run proofs of Fitzpatrick's plate reworkings (sometimes up to 60) until everyone is satisfied with the

final impression. Mucha printed *Bum Town* and most of the images in this exhibition; for several series she worked with apprentice and Art Institute-trained artist Adrienne Armstrong, who has now taken over at Big Cat as master printer. Armstrong gets support from associate master printer Stefanie Kohn, formerly of Riverhouse Editions in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

Encouraged by Campbell, Fitzpatrick and Mucha began producing four-color etchings that eventually became another hallmark of Fitzpatrick's work and a major contribution to the contemporary Chicago printmaking scene. *The Secret Birds*, a 1994 series, represented the first substantive color printmaking project undertaken by the two. By the time Fitzpatrick began to conceive of *Joe's Garden*, a series of flower images inspired by the garden of his friend's father, the painter Joe Hasiewicz, they were quite comfortable with their chosen process of producing separate aquatinted⁷ plates for each color, using Charbonnel or Daniel Smith inks, printing each plate in rapid succession on a wet sheet of high quality rag paper. In the 1995-99 *Joe's Garden*, flowers of the pesky, poisonous, or unheard-of variety sprawl and coil through the picture space in a somewhat threatening manner. Their leaves are a deep green and petals a deep blue-purple, mustard yellow, and dark red. The ancillary designs are in less concentrated but related colors and the backgrounds are yellowed as if burned by sunlight for several decades. The overall effect is of Fifties-era garden magazine pages gone mad.

The dandelion appears in the later *Bum Town* series as a symbol of neglect along train tracks or cracked sidewalks. In *Dandelion* (fig. 7) it is in bloom, and almost pretty. To the upper left of the dandelion hangs a small image of the plant going to seed. Its stem is attached to a heart, a reminder of the flower's power to possess physical or emotional territory. The emotional landscape here is the decade in which Fitzpatrick was born, a time of comforting visions, such as a child playing baseball and a dancing couple the artist likes to think of as his grandparents, and less comforting pictures, including the symbol for nuclear energy, which could bring destruction if used unwisely, as a hand with a match implies. This and a few other series Fitzpatrick created during the last decade are more hopeful in their feeling, if still surreal in their style. They include the tender drawings of Michele and Max from the 1993 series *Son of a Sailor* and the recent *Max and Gaby's Alphabet*. In these works, Fitzpatrick presents shadowed corners of beauty in Chicago.

The artist lately has been producing prints inspired by places far from his native city. The *Autumn* series that Armstrong printed last winter visualizes the fall colors and fauna of Montana's Bitterroot Valley, where Fitzpatrick had a ten-day residency in the fall of 2001. Away from the streets of Chicago, Fitzpatrick was profoundly affected by the beauty there. On one occasion he found himself alone and lost in the woods, "a really scary thing" for someone used to an urban grid. He relocated his trail and later began a series of abstract composi-



tions of the animals, plants, and insects of the valley (fig. 9). Armstrong, who accompanied Fitzpatrick to Montana, could draw on the same visual memory to achieve the artist's goal in this group of prints of "chasing new color."

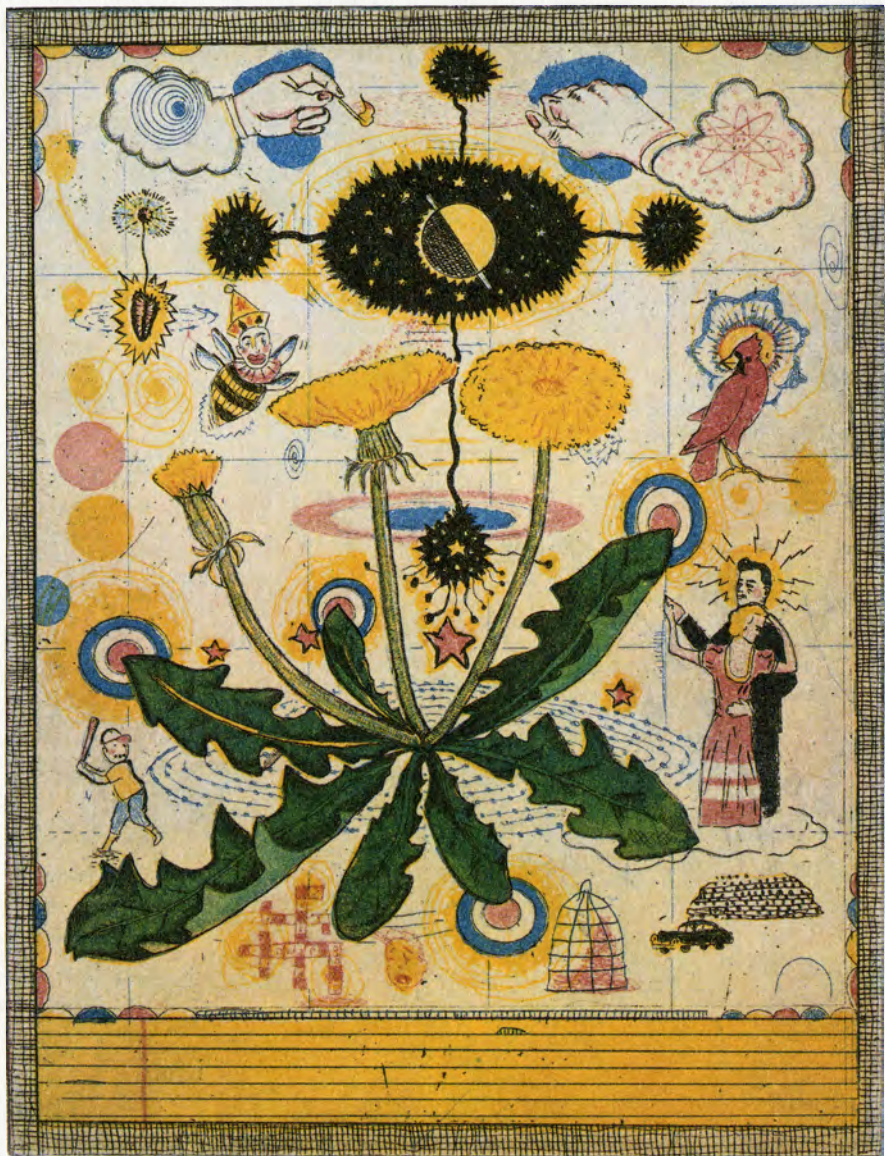
There are other projects away from Chicago Fitzpatrick would like to complete. As many artists before him, he would like to go to Maine for inspiration. But even as he branches in other directions, the artist continues to produce Chicago-centered work. A drawing on his table recently was of the city's "working girls" and he has just produced a print series on the resilient Chicago pigeon. Measured by his solo exhibitions, Fitzpatrick has perhaps received more recognition in other cities, but it seems unlikely he will abandon Chicago. It seems equally unlikely that, in the long term, its cultural historians and patrons will abandon him.

- ¹ James Yood, "Sighting/Citing the Site: Second Thoughts on Chicago Printmaking, 1968-1996," *Second Sight: Printmaking in Chicago, 1935-1995* (Evanston, Ill.: Mary and Leigh Block Gallery, Northwestern University, 1996), 41.
- ² Fitzpatrick read about McKinney in the Chicago Tribune series, "Killing Our Children," tracing the histories of children who had been murdered in the city in 1993.
- ³ On the Imagists see Yood, 32.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ "A Conversation with Jack Lemon and Pauline Saliga," in Judith Kirschner, *Landfall Press: A Survey of Prints (1970-1977)*, exh. brochure (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977), 5, cited in Joseph Ruzicka, "Landfall Press: Twenty-Five Years," *Landfall Press: Twenty-Five Years of Printmaking* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1996), 42.
- ⁶ Author's telephone interview with Theresa Mucha, 9 July 2003.
- ⁷ A process that involved Mucha's preparing the plate with a fine coat of melted rosin dust, Fitzpatrick defining the area with a paintbrush dipped in liquid asphaltum, and then Mucha etching the exposed plate to produce a finely mottled area that would print as a solid region of color.



Figure 6 – *West Side Kind*, 2003, graphite and colored pencil Collection of the artist

Figure 7 (right) – *Dandelion*, 1996, color etching Collection of the artist





Resting Beast
The
bull of Chicago
resting
and
waiting
to be
slayed
for the heart

THE HEART—promises the most brilliant fortune, and the most exquisite bliss that this world can afford; but the fortune can be changed by the other...

BAREHEADED,
SHOVELING,
WRECKING,
PLANNING,
BUILDING,
BREAKING,
RE-BUILDING

CONCRETE
MUSCLE

ILLINOIS

Everybody: is you and me
and all OTHERS, what
everybody says is what, all
all things, Oh-oh what to
it WE ALL SAY?

ON THE
DAY
AND
UNDER HIS
RIBS
THE HEART OF
THE PEOPLE



Figure 8 (left) – *Resting Beast*, 2003, mixed media Collection of Lew Burton
Figure 9 – *Jerusalem*, 2002, color etching Collection of the artist



Figure 10 - *The Lost Man*, 1997, etching Collection of the artist

Tony Fitzpatrick
- AN INTERVIEW -
Studs Terkel

Terkel *In your little book called Bum Town, I realize that you are writing about a city of ghosts: Chicago as remembered by you as a small boy, and it also echoes your father's life. The poems and images reflect your love for the city and its ghosts. How did the book come to be? I suppose your father plays a role in this.*

Fitzpatrick A huge role. When I was a kid I would frequently get dismissed from school for various infractions. Both of my parents worked, so in between getting me from one school to another school, I would go on those days with my father to work. And my dad's job was driving around the city from funeral home to funeral home, selling burial vaults.

Terkel *Your father dealt with funerals, the deaths of people.*

Fitzpatrick He was in the funeral business his whole life – from the time he was eleven years old. His father died and he went to work sweeping out Thompson Funeral Home at 79th and Ellis as a boy, and through high school worked in and learned the funeral business. Became an embalmer and an undertaker, a funeral director and later on a burial vault salesman. So, my dad's job was driving around the city and calling on each funeral home. As a kid my landmarks for the city were Zimmerman Sanderman Funeral home in Bum Town, Pizer at 68th and Stony Island, Thompson at 79th and Ellis. Those were my roadmap for the city. After I wrote *Bum Town* I began to realize that it is a book of ghosts. I think that the city was talking to me through my father.

Terkel *Why did you call it Bum Town?*

Fitzpatrick Well, it's where my father told me I would end up if I didn't straighten up. The neighborhood around 115th and Kensington down near Roseland and Pullman was called Bum Town, because in the thirties and forties when men still rode the rails, they would either get on or off the train there. That part of Chicago was a huge hub for the railroads. So that neighborhood picked up the moniker Bum Town. My father would tell me if you don't straighten up, if you don't listen in school, you are going to wind up in Bum Town.

Terkel *You mention Chicago as the city of railroads, so does Carl Sandburg who must be one of your literary ancestors, as is Nelson Algren.*

Fitzpatrick Very much.

Terkel *These two guys wrote of our city long before you were born. And they wrote about the city as it was way back then. Writing about our city they wrote about the archetype of an American city. The people who came here mostly worked with their hands: the horny-handed, from Eastern Europe and the Deep South and the Mediterranean and south of the border; black people from sharecropper country, poor whites from Appalachia, all came here.*

Fitzpatrick Because there were jobs.

Terkel *They were the non-celebrities who were celebrated by Sandburg and by Algren.*

Fitzpatrick The people who lived behind the billboards.

Terkel *And now celebrated by you. In one of your poems you mention the Depression, and a story about your father.*

Fitzpatrick His brother Raymond died trying to hop a freight train during the Depression, and I think my father never left Raymond behind. The fiftieth All Star game, in 1983, was in Comiskey Park; my Dad bought two tickets and I wanted to go with him but he said “No, I’m already going with someone.” But he sat next to an empty seat. The empty seat was for Raymond, because Raymond was at the first All Star game in 1933. And weeks later he died trying to jump the freight train. And once in a while I would catch my father – he would be coming out of a funeral home and kind of talking to himself. I would look around and try to see who he was talking to. And I always thought that he was talking to his brother. Shortly after Raymond died, my grandfather died of a broken heart. He began drinking heavily and a year later passed on.

Terkel *You spoke earlier of your father driving an Oldsmobile.*

Fitzpatrick Yeah the Olds... I included Raymond in *Bum Town*, because I kind of think of him as my father’s other half. Another witness to the city, and one of the ghosts that the city carries with it. We sometimes think of people when they pass on that they are gone, well, my father was not really gone to me. I still see the world through a certain prism: I know that Riverview was an unseemly place, because he told me, “Stay away from Riverview. That’s where all the beatniks hang out.” I know not to take the El late at night, because he told me so. There are still these remnants of how I see the world because of my father. And I think very much the way

He rolls the Olds
Slowly
Along the South Shore
Tracks.
Squinting his eyes
He looks for the smoke
That becomes his brother
Raymond.
Up ahead a small boy
With one leg
Sits on a switchman's box
Eating from a sticky
Carton of Cracker Jack.
My Dad's lips move
Without speaking
As he carries Raymond
To the car.

I look at the boy
In the back seat –
His skin is as white
As alabaster
Under a shock of black hair,
His leg is
A ragged stump,
Hastily sutured
Decades ago,
When Raymond died
Trying to hop
A freight train.
The small ghost
Does not speak,
But breaks into
A crooked grin
As he holds out his
Cracker Jack
To me.
“This is your Uncle Ray –
Sometimes he comes with me.”
I nod my head
And smile back at
Raymond.

he saw the world was through the terrible losses of his brother and his father. My parents were deathly afraid of us getting a house near the railroad tracks. Both of my parents, my mother as well, but especially my father. If he caught me hanging around near the railroad tracks, I'd get a beating.

Terkel *Because he always thought of Raymond. These poems and etchings are really a tribute to your father. Your memorial.*

Fitzpatrick Yeah, they are. They are the city speaking to me through my father, Chicago becoming my home, because it was my father's home. It was how he saw the world. He could only see the world through a perspective of being a Chicagoan.

Terkel *Was your father born in Chicago?*

Fitzpatrick Oh yeah. He was born and raised on the south side of Chicago.

Terkel *Your father drove ambulances, Olds, and hearses; your father always drove something concerning death, as well. Death rides along with life. But your father seemed to take it as a special assignment.*

Fitzpatrick He considered himself a servant. He served what he used to describe, and I never understood it, as the dignity of the dead. He thought that people—first of all, he used to tell people that cremation was a sin against God, because he sold burial vaults.

Terkel *He had economic reasons.*

Fitzpatrick He also thought that people when they're carried to their final

resting place it should be done in as dignified a way as possible. He said, "I take people home."

Terkel *Talk about the connection between your etchings and your poetry. This etching of a bull, for instance, has a Picassoesque touch.*

Fitzpatrick One of the bulls comes out of the stockyards – when I was a kid my father used to talk about his father who was a tool- and diemaker and worked on the machines in the stockyards. And whenever we would drive by you would smell the stockyards, and if the wind was blowing the right way you could smell them all the way down to 72nd and Racine. Everybody thinks that bad smell comes from the manure, it doesn't. The smell is from the blood. My father would ask me, "you know what you're smelling?" I'd say no, he said, "you're smelling fear and it's what nourishes us."

Terkel *The fear of the cattle about to be slaughtered.*

Fitzpatrick He says we're smelling fear, and when you have your hamburger, your Burger King or there's this place we used to get hamburgers from called Cock Robbins, he'd say, "think about the animal who gave its life so you could have a hamburger."

I remember one time we were driving by and they were pulling a tiny bull, a dwarf bull, across the street and whenever there was a dwarf they went to slaughter because they couldn't be used for stud. I never forgot watching these men pull this animal across the street. We were parked,

On the fourth of July
I lie in a blanket
And the sky rips open
With fire
And white tendrils
Of hope.
My dad lights
His cigar with a
Road flare
And tells me
About Okinawa -
Tracers and bullets,
Sailors and marines -
When he thought
Every night was
Independence Day.
Only to wake up
The next morning

And see bodies strewn
On the beach,
Mile after whistling mile.
Marines and sailors
Felt the sea
Roll and swell
Under their legs.
Lengthening shadows
Mocked them from
The deck of the
U. S. S. Noble.
My Dad and every other
19-year-old
On this ship
Wanted only to be beyond
The bloodshed,
The blank, dead faces,
Our guys,
Their guys,
In the blood and sand
He couldn't tell one
From another.
My Dad looked up

At the rockets,
A red one burst
Around his head
Like a nimbus
Of bloody light
And his shadow
Falls across my face
Like a shroud
Made from ghosts.

you know, right next to the Union stockyards and they were pulling this animal into the run. And it never left me—the combination of my father saying “you’re smelling fear” and by extension, you know, when you’re having a hamburger you’re eating fear.

Terkel *And this poem, “On the Fourth of July,” is also related to prints?*

Fitzpatrick It’s about my father remembering World War II; he was a sailor in the Pacific when they invaded Okinawa. My father, you could not get him to a war movie. He absolutely loathed war movies. He hated the idea of war movies. Because he said it’s just nothing that could ever pass as entertainment. In the weeks before my dad died he told me about Okinawa. He had skin cancer and in the final weeks he was on a morphine drug and he had hallucinations. And he kept seeing a Japanese soldier out in the hallway. And he said, “He keeps standing in the door and smiling at me.”

Terkel *That was the enemy.*

Fitzpatrick I said what do you mean, he says there is an oriental man out there, a soldier, who keeps smiling at me. And I asked why, why do you think that? And my father said, “I think he’s forgiven me.”

Terkel *You speak of a “white-haired poet,” I assume Carl Sandburg: I sense you’re part of that tradition.*

Fitzpatrick Sandburg was also a poet my parents both loved because

you could understand him—he spoke about beauty in a common man's language.

Terkel *In that very poem is the term “the people.”*

Fitzpatrick The people, yes, the people know what the land knows and I maintain that in Chicago we know ourselves by the sounds we don't want to hear. I think what I tried to get is sense of the city that we don't put on the billboards and in the brochures – a sense of the people that live in the city. I have chosen to raise my children in the city because I think they will be from a place where everybody is not just like them, you know, my daughter just had a slumber party the other night. And there was a girl from the Southside and there was a Korean girl, a Jewish girl and it was like she had a slumber party of the UN. Everybody was there. And where I grew up everybody was just like me.

Terkel *You're saying that there has been progress made in spite of all the horrors.*

Fitzpatrick Yeah, I think we are winning.

Terkel *You think we are winning. It's the people “yes” not the people “maybe.” I am remembering your poem about the white-haired poet, perhaps it's more than a tribute to your father: it's a love letter to the city of Chicago.*

Fitzpatrick I hope so.

The white-haired poet said,

“The people know what
the land knows.”

That’s not true of this city.

This city knows itself by

Its noises,

like those whistles

Only dogs can hear.

The city hears the cries of

Battered wives, the wailing of

Underweight babies

And the euphony of

Children circling an opened

Hydrant.

This city knows it can hear itself

In sirens and tow-trucks,

Broken bottles in the mewling

Of strays.

The needing,

The wanting,

And the pleading,

Thrum in

Every window.

Under the constellations

My Dad buys me an Italian ice

With lemon peels I can taste

The sun in.

The smelt are running

Off Montrose Harbor.

My Dad points to the North Star

And shows me how boats

Box the compass

Around it.

Under the dock the smelt

Are a whirl of silvery light -

As indecipherable as

The tails of

Comets.

