

# Dither

Possibly a fanzine by Ross Chamberlain  
for Apa V #14 for December 1994

Ross can generally be reached at 2200 S. Ft. Apache #7227,  
Las Vegas, NV 89117-5714 ☎ (702) 228-2850 or 228-2600

Mass., and visited him in his studio over a store on the main street. He was just as sweet and self-effacing as everyone says he was, deep-voiced, and slightly pigeon-toed. He had a painting of Boy Scouts on his easel for one of his annual Scout calendars, and he showed us a lobster trap he'd used in painting a *Saturday Evening Post* cover—one of his most controversial covers, in which a fisherman was plodding home, tired after a day's work, with the lobster trap on his back, and, inside, a mermaid. Though nothing naughty showed, it was clear she had no clothing over her top, and this was enough for some people to complain and cancel their *SEP* subscriptions...

When we left, he gave us each a little 8-page reprint flyer of *Post* covers which he individually autographed for us. He made mine out to "Russ," which was always something of a disappointment to me... But I kept it; it's inside a large book of his *SEP* covers I acquired years later when I worked for a book wholesaler in New York.

Some time after that visit, when I was home in Monterey, Mass., much closer to Stockbridge, there was a gallery showing of his works, including a number of attempts at different schools of art, such as cubism and impressionism. I liked them well enough, though then as now had little enough capacity to judge their quality as Art. Up close to the actual originals of some of his *Post* cover paintings, however, I was overwhelmed. One was the fairly well-known one in which one looks through the window of a closed barber shop to a lit back room where the barber and friends are having an animated conversation. The detail and the colors and shadows and light are so evocative of the moment and the place; almost photographic, but transcending anything a photographer could have achieved.

I don't know if I've been especially influenced by Rockwell, except maybe in the kind of humor I like to try to put into my drawings. I did one once, as an Apa F cover if I remember right, that was

SO THE TOPIC is supposed to be Art this time, hey? Art Who? Carney? Linkletter? Garfunkel?

I've never been completely sure what Art is. This may distress some of you who think I'm an artist, but in many ways, my attitude has long been summed up by "I don't know a lot about art, but I know what I like."

Norman Rockwell, whom I idolized in my youth, never claimed to be an artist, but an illustrator. I met him once, in '54 or '55, when I was of high school age—too young to have much insight into the differences between Art and Craftsmanship (nor have I totally figured that one out yet, which may in itself be part of the difference). I was one of a group of five or six students and a teacher; we drove down from Williamstown to Stockbridge,

deliberately meant to be Rockwellian in nature, and I wish I had a copy to include here. A cyborg is laid out on a stretcher being carried by two bored ambulance attendants as a doctor and technician argue across him where he should be taken. The drawing wasn't highly detailed, but I thought I caught some of the sense of his style in it.

When I was 14, in Texas, I answered one of those "Draw This" ads for the Art Instruction School and returned the test they supplied. A salesman came by, and allowed as how I was younger than they usually accept, but in my case... So my folks put out money they could ill afford (as I much later understood) on the course for me, and I think I sent back maybe four or five of the lessons, in pen-and-ink and other forms, before lazing out... After a while they stopped sending reminders. Somewhat later, when we were in Massachusetts, I answered the "We Are Looking for People Who Like to Draw" ad from the Famous Artists School, and in essence much the same thing happened. I started with the Commercial Art course, but after a while, with no lessons sent in, we switched it to their Fine Art course, which was all about oils and acrylics and the like. Although it took much longer than it was supposed to, I finally finished that one, and still have most of the paintings. Only one of them is here, though—the rest, but one, are in storage in Ohio. That remaining one, one of my favorites (of a waterfall, Looking Glass Falls, near the town where I was born in North Carolina) was lost when I failed to take it with me when I moved out of an apartment on Staten Island; the next day when I realized it was

missing and went back to inquire, it had been thrown out. Was I pissed! That was a bit of a lesson in humility that I suspect was sorely needed at that point!

Since then, I've rarely done much in the way of attempts at "fine" art; I have a number of canvas boards and the like, but no oil or acrylic paints.

Most of my subsequent work has been drawing in various media, including mimeograph stencils and ditto masters...

And, more recently, using computer media. Which makes me think it's time to get on with mailing comments. It's Saturday morning, and as usual I'm running late.

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**APA-TIZER 9** - Ken "Under the spreading chestnut tree, the village smithy stands..." Gone are the North American chestnut trees as one of the victims you discuss; I've seen a skeleton or two in my earlier years, but that's all. This is the season for chestnut vendors on the sidewalks of New York, the smoke from their carts wafting gently into the suddenly teary eyes of the passerby. I assume they're imported. Mel Tormé wrote of "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire..." etc. I've never quite understood the fascination some folks have for chestnuts, which to my mind are vastly overrated as an edible item. I've been known to *tell* an old chestnut or two...some of which were probably blighted in their own way. But then, haven't we all...

I wonder if ethical dilemmas can be satisfactorily resolved by hard logic, which is essentially a mathematical construct.

**POW!WOW #13** - Joyce We never had a dog while I was growing up, and I did discuss most of the relationships I had with other pets in the same mailing. I have a definite recollection of a large golden retriever putting its head on my knee at some point in recent memory, but that memory is too faulty to include the circumstances. This was not a dog like Daisy who had to be won over, however—this one was more of a MisterRogers kinda dog: "Won't you be my friend?"

My sister Elinor and her longtime roommate and friend Marge had a yappy little cockapoo named Charlie that, as I recall it, learned to like me pretty quickly ("Any friend of my humans is a friend of mine"), and I learned later actually mourned sometimes when I left after a visit. They were living in Connecticut then, when I was in New York, and I got up to visit maybe three or four times in a year.

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TWO mailing comments. That's not too many—it's *way* too few. But it's well after one o'clock on Saturday afternoon, and I still have to shower and change and make my way to Bridgeglen... So, this is another set of excuses and apologies to all of you whom I've neglected—Arnie, Marcy, Ray, Aileen, and Tom. I'll try to do better next time. ("Yeah, yeah, we've heard *that* before, Ross...")

❄️ *Happy Holidays!* ❄️