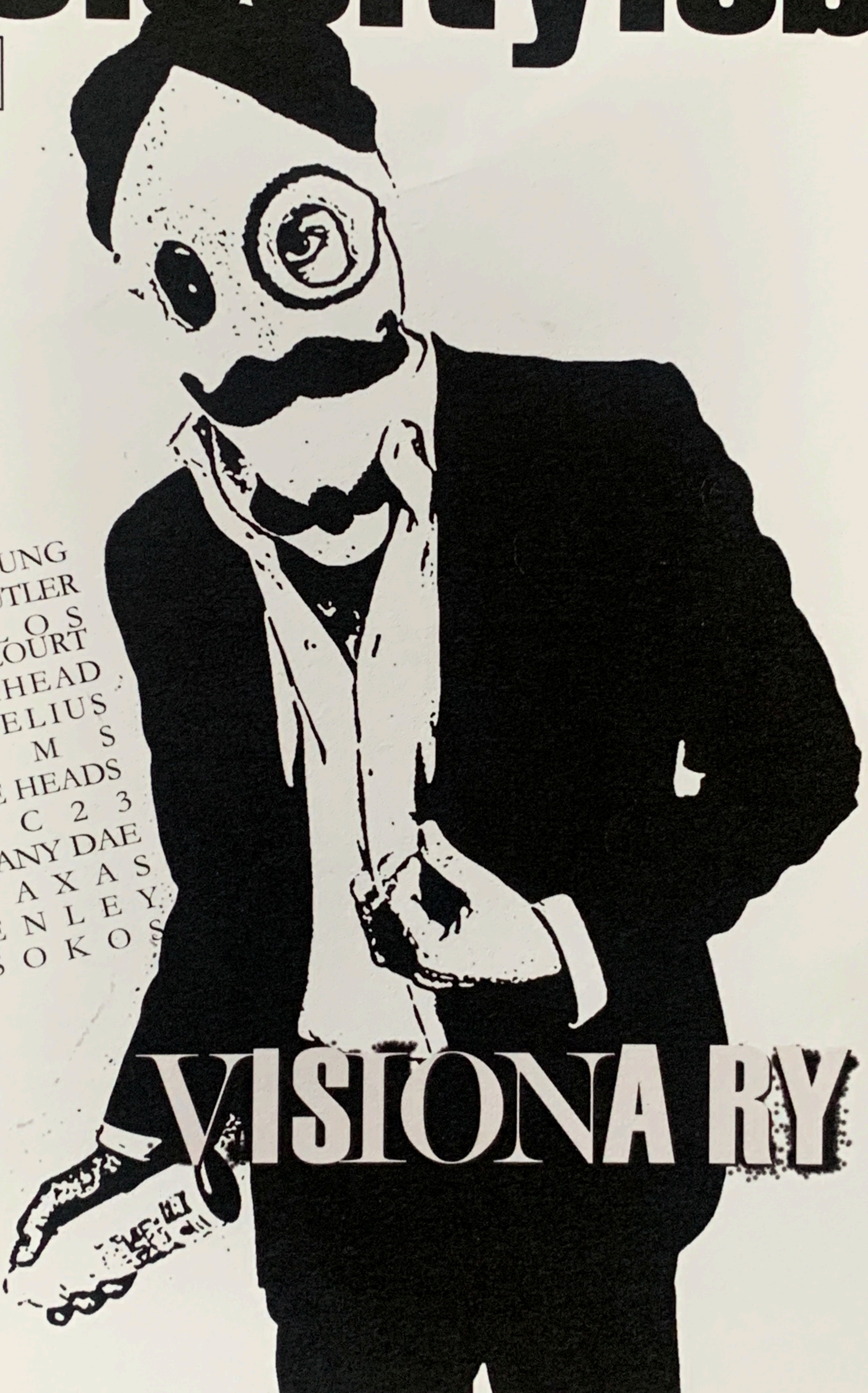


velocitylab

No7



WHITE LUNG
BRIAN BUTLER
CARLOS
BETANCOURT
CLAVAHEAD
CORNELIUS
DEMUS
FALSE HEADS
PAC23
TIFFANY DAE
PHAXAS
HENLEY
TSOKOS

VISIONARY



CARLOS BETANCOURT

Explosive, lush and bold, yet incredibly personal at the

Observing Carlos' art could be similar to stepping into them head first—I almost said heart first—where you find yrself thinking: “Am I dreaming these images or are they dreaming me?” I have felt this way as I looked into Carlos Betancourt’s work many times before. On an unusually cold night here in Miami I had the chance to tell Carlos that very same thing. At that moment his eyes reeled upward and as he took this sentiment in. And I do mean he took it in. Carlos is not one to let a comment amble idly passed him; he observes with every sense he possesses. There was a kind of calm that came over him as he processed what I said. It pleased him.

To say that Carlos is sought after may very well be an understatement. He is prolific and definitely maintains an approachable persona that transcends what he creates. I also know others are drawn to his work; earlier on the day we met for this interview he had another with several art school students. I felt honored that ours was conducted over a bottle of wine.

As soon as I began talking about his collection of work—dating back to 1987—we started discussing things that were important to us both. “Memories are a strong topic for me,” he began. “Probably the strongest. You see, it’s always there. The intensity, the depth. It is spread throughout



same time. A collection of memories. An intimate dream.

For those of us who are already aware of Carlos' work, and more so for those who are not, it was worth mentioning to him that people as well as objects appear just as importantly in his art. I wanted to know how deeply this was woven into the fabric of what he created. “Objects could very much have the same value as people,” he admitted as he fell far into thought momentarily, only to bounce back into the answer he had begun to give. “These things could be respected at the same level. Especially if placed correctly.” This gives me a little more insight into how these “things” get appropriated into a composition in one of his environments.

“The challenge,” Carlos went on, “is to make sure you elevate these objects. People need to celebrate them. I believe as artists we try to recreate that energy from memory or from youth.” Memory and youth. I started to understand at an unconscious level why I had been drawn into his work long ago.

It is up to us to create these moments in the hopes that we will in some way alter something, someone... somewhere. But it hasn't always been this easy to reach out to people and get them to reach back out to you. In a very natural way—as expected—we start talking about the past and of course the future.

"Things are so different now. So different." Carlos repeated himself so I would not lose the impact he intended to make. "Everything is just so easily made mainstream. Much more democratic, of course." He chose his words effortlessly though carefully here. Things like The Internet have made access a two-way street—or multi-lane highway. But there is danger there, as we all know. "Democratic in that you can share everything. But in that way it has become—" Generic? I ask. "Absolutely!" Carlos agreed vehemently. "Generic. Beige! Things don't happen organically anymore."

That is a word appearing often in our conversation. Organic. "Organic is key." We echoed each other's words the way one does when recanting a magic spell. We were enchanting the air around us.

"Yes, it's much more drastic," he said with an open demeanor. "In a way you don't have to depend on anyone to validate you. Sharing and putting yourself out there has become something you can do yourself. You are waiting on no one."

I agreed and shared my hope that we would return a little more of that connectivity with people, even though sharing from the other side of a screen was so easy. Whereas these objects are things that another might pass up, Carlos breathed into them another life.

"We keep objects and things," he went on with a glimmer in his eye, "and we do so to keep beautiful memories alive. As an artist I can create things without using words, and I know that if I accumulate these precious things and create authentically, I will manifest the Ultimate Thing Of Beauty."

An Ultimate Thing Of Beauty. It seemed as if he said that in capital letters. And what has inspiration looked like for him? "Initial ideas come when I am in the moment. That is where I find it important, at a time when I can create my most successful work—when I am aware of what is front of me. When I can hear when something is speaking to me."

I understood and hoped that others would get that same feeling. We spoke about that moment when something is divined to you and you alone; an idea that floats downstream in time for you to pick up on it and create something from it. Divined. That was important for both of us, too.

I asked Carlos: If we were giving out an award equivalent to a Lifetime Achievement, what would he

receive that award for? A moment passed between us. During that time, I imagined what it would be like to have become one of the objects in his artworks, standing still, encased forever in dreams.

Suddenly he responded with a word that seemed to be years in the making: "Surviving."

I made sure to give his response some room to breathe with a parenthesis of silence. From that reply I wanted to know more about his collaborations and partnerships. He had gone from surviving to thriving and it would make sense to know a little about whom he'd worked with.

"Putting yourself out there," Carlos began. "The thoughts and desires you enchant soon manifest themselves."

A perfect example of this is the recent visit to his studio by the inimitable Bunny Yeager, pinup pioneer model/photographer (known for her work with icon Betty Page). Carlos met her in the late 80s—a time when his studio, Imperfect Utopia was enjoying some pretty jubilant times. "Things happened organically then," Carlos reminisced. "It was a magical time for Miami." He admitted that he subconsciously wanted to connect with her again, even though years had gone by. And like so many things that Carlos does, meeting her again also happened naturally. He put himself out there and the chance to work with Ms. Yeager manifested itself. A most enchanting photo shoot ensued.

Speaking of the manifestation of a certain kind of magic in connectivity, there is a specific one so lasting and meaningful that it cannot be overlooked. Carlos' partnership with Alberto Latorre in these most important aspects of life—as well as in creativity—is one that is perhaps the foremost of his collaborations.



Alongside Alberto, Carlos is able to expand his work to a greater scope and take on larger, commissioned pieces. Using his skills as a trained architect, Alberto gives perspective from a unique angle and lends another artistic eye. Carlos assures me that there is much more on the horizon born from their collaboration. And I, for one, am looking very forward to it.

With all this greatness surrounding us, I decided to ask Carlos to tell me his definition of success. We let the question linger in the air for as long as it took until the answer formulated. "Success is inner peace," he replied before graciously continuing by admitting, "It has always been rewarding for people to love and enjoy my work, but inner peace is definitely my definition of success."

Before I begrudgingly—even if temporarily—ended our inspired conversation, I asked Carlos if he would entertain the idea of imagining he had a captive audience waiting to hear his advice, and what was it that he wanted to tell them.

"Don't wait for anybody," he replied frankly. "And learn to separate the business side from the creative process."

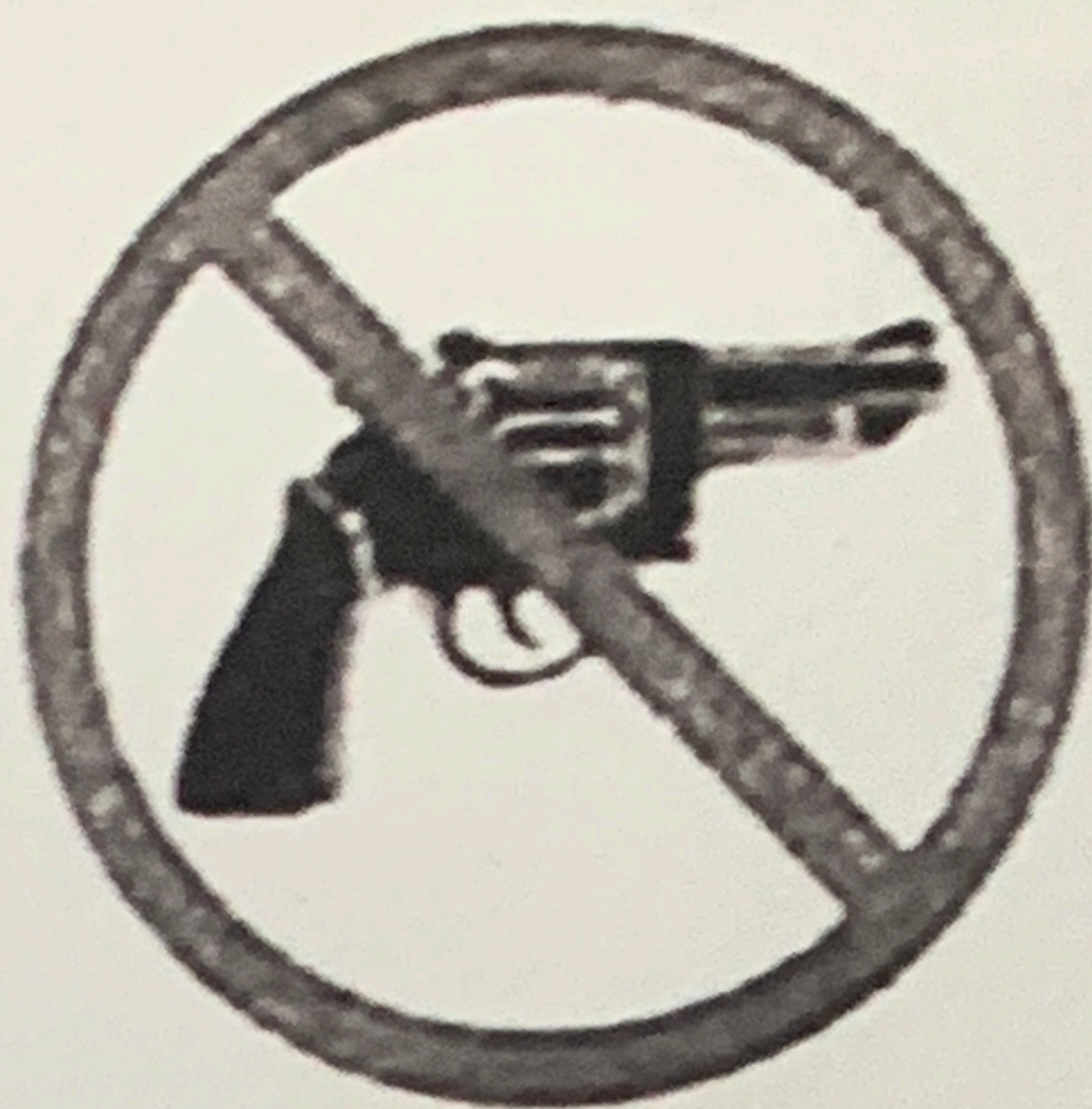
Many things in a day can inspire us. This conversation with Carlos furthers that notion and I am grateful for our time and for sharing his thoughts. I promised Carlos we would soon enjoy another bottle of wine together, and this promise is one that I intend to keep.

For more of Carlos' work, please make sure to visit his web site at carlosbetancourt.com



Previous Page: *Portrait of a Garden*, 2009. This page, top: *The Supper*, 2008. Above left: *Bunny Yeager*, 2012. Above right: *Cake Atomic*, 2011.

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