



Published on the occasion of John Ollman's 40th Anniversary with the gallery, in conjunction with the exhibition:

FOUR DECADES

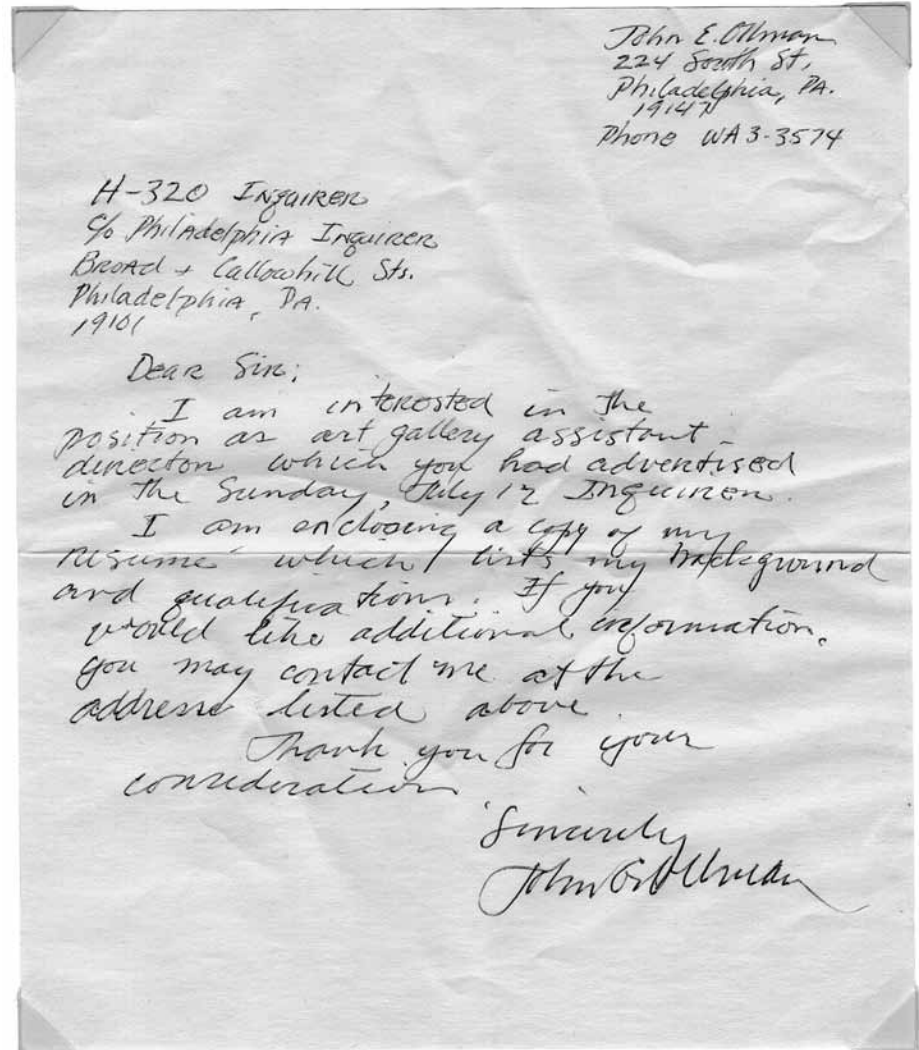
September 23–November 27, 2010

Special thanks to:

Patti Berman, Anthony Campuzano, Carrie Coleman, Don Colley, Tony Fitzpatrick, Brendan Greaves, Karen Lennox, Isaac Tin Wei Lin, Jennifer Levonian, Tristin Lowe, Ann Ollman, William Pym, Rachel Reese, Trevor Reese, Stuart Rome, Heather Shoemaker, Alex Stadler, Paul Swenbeck, Karen Lennox, Jina Valentine, Waqas Wajahat, and to John Ollman, for being forward-thinking both as an art dealer and as a boss.

Designed and edited by Claire Iltis

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c/o Philadelphia Inquirer
Broad + Callocobitt Sts.
Philadelphia, PA.
19101

Dear Sir:

I am interested in the position as art gallery assistant-director which you had advertised in the Sunday, July 12 Inquirer.

I am enclosing a copy of my resume which lists my background and qualifications. If you would like additional information, you may contact me at the address listed above.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
John E. Ollman

I first met John Ollman in the fall of 1985. It was my first year in Philadelphia, where I had been hired to start a new photography program at Drexel University. It was a lonely time for me, having arrived in a new city with no community and a daunting job ahead of me.

The first few months I was in town, I would walk or ride my bicycle all over the city to try and find my way. One night, I spotted the Janet Fleisher Gallery on 17th Street and saw a Henry Darger painting glowing on the wall through the window. I had been living in Arizona in 1980 when Darger's work was first brought to my attention through an article in a magazine, and I was instantly won over by this the artist's singular, powerful and tragic vision. And now, here in front of me was the real thing. The following day, I walked into the gallery and spoke enthusiastically to the man behind the counter about Darger, folk art, photography, painting, drawing and sculpture. I was young, had lots to say, and, to my good fortune, so did John Ollman.

John interpreted my interests and talents in ways I had yet to discover, and made certain that I saw the work of artists he admired: Don Colley, Bruce Pollock, and Marcy Hermansader, all of whom became my close friends. John introduced me to Randall Morris, with whom I travelled to Haiti in 1986, and who showed my work in his New York gallery after a near ten-year hiatus. Introductions like these gave me a community and a sense of direction in my work that has endured these past twenty-five years. John Ollman's success comes from his genuine interest in both the art, and in the artists who make it. My story could be told by countless others who have been lucky enough to be part of the Philadelphia arts scene where John has been a guiding presence. Here, in print, is as good a time as any to say thank you.

Stuart Rome



Norine Beijemann

John's ability to hang art is unmatched. Juggling nails, hangers, wires, works. No one can compose a wall of art without any measuring instruments like that man. It was a wonder, akin to encountering one's stocking on Christmas morning, to wander into work with a coffee and a coffee-cake, and find that John had almost finished hanging the upcoming show, including several works that probably weighed 80 pounds. He knew where everything went and how to make it go in the places it had to go. Watching him do this spoke of his experience—the things he had learned.

John's stamina is unmatched. Art fairs are a real pain in the ass, and we never made them any easier by getting as drunk as we did at the openings and riding that wave through the closing, tying one on each night and overcompensating for increasingly green skin by wearing increasingly flamboyant outfits in the days that followed (it was at the second TAAS fair, for example, that I believe Brendan first started wearing a pork-pie hat, initially for this reason). The art fair is a physical and mental trial, this carousel of beastly people and tense calculations in the head and most of all self-exposure, total vulnerability. And standing—standing there the whole fucking day. No one has more stamina in these occasions than John.



Watching him stand on his own two feet for the duration of an art fair, occasionally doing a little dance or leaning against a wall, spoke of his essence—the things he is.

Refinement and strength, then; a man of respectful diligence and strong stock. This it was has brought that crazy guy through 40 years in the least stable American-invented business of the last 50 years. This is true, but it is not what means the most to me.

What has grown strongest in the two-some years since I left Philadelphia is John's patience. His eye for art is one that will give an artwork or an artist as long as it needs to reveal itself. John, I think, sees art as an ongoing process, the eye as an ongoing process. This patience shook down to the way John was as a boss. He was prepared to wait for as long as

it took for me and Brendan to reveal ourselves. Who in their right mind would let me and Greaves stagger around our most loyal client's gigantic new corporate HQ in a center-city skyscraper for three weeks, hanging art with no supervision? John did. On the first day we spent most of the hours orbited the conference rooms waiting for meetings to end so we could scavenge hoagies; on the second day we stared out the windows for the whole afternoon and pretended to be lawyers before retiring to a bar; on the third day, for reasons neither of us had discussed, we started trying to do something beautiful with the collection, and began to care deeply about the work and where it went and how it hung.

I could talk about all the cool successes we experienced together and commercial victories and recognition, these bits of validation big and small and the anecdotes and the banter. But I'm happy to just say this: it was ultimately always up to us to do something good. No weird emotional blackmail, no games, no manipulation, no guilt. In John's mind, I now believe, beauty happens because it is supposed to. This is why John was so patient, and I think this is how—and why—he understands exactly what art is.

William Pym
Brooklyn, August 18, 2010



EVENT:

Karen launches her gallery and within the first 6 months exhibits the work of Bill Traylor. Sales consisted of three works to a Michigan collector and one work to her banker. The balance of the show she put in a box and sent to John, who subsequently bought all the remaining drawings. This was early 1982. Karen only bought one work for \$350 and, within six months, John coerced her into selling it for \$800. Guess who was prescient?

Karen Lennox
Chicago



August 15, 2010

"I am glad the old masters are all dead, and I only wish they had died sooner."

—Mark Twain on art, from "Academy of Design," a letter to San Francisco *Alta California*, July 28, 1867

Dear John,

This is not an easy letter to write, and the oddly apt "Dear John" salutation marks its archetypal tinge of uneasy ardor (laffs.) How to articulate these time-feelings, these work-feelings, these family-feelings? I fear that a celebrity roast, while appropriate to such a momentous occasion-forty fabulous fucking years forging the Fleisher/Ollman fiefdom-is simply not possible from a distance of over four hundred miles. And unfortunately, to air the requisite heartfelt, humorous, and incriminating details via epistle strikes me a tactic both rather lame and certainly legally unadvisable, however tempting. But it must be done, in piecemeal at least, despite these perils; too much goes unsaid in person, always, for all of us. I reckon I'll start with the egregious and end with the earnest, leaping from how you've shaped my past to your indelible fingerprints on my present.

Photographs may expose a corner of the story of your influence on an ongoing gang of young fans and acolytes, so I've included with these pages an array selected hastily from digital archives of hundreds of others. (I'm sure that Claire will pick the most representative and striking.) This grouping, arbitrarily concentrating on acts perpetrated at your lovely home in the summers of 2004 and 2005—for it must be arbitrary to be true to spirit—provides just a porthole-peak into the lifestyle of joyous degeneracy you aided and abetted by entrusting to us your mighty home. Early on dubbed "Club O," that house quickly became a seasonal site for various culinary, musical, and romantic escapades, as I'm sure you always suspected. Did you know, for instance, that Pablo once climbed to the very top of the axial tree in your beautiful back yard? That we entertained a crew of Danish rockstars there? That Will and I tried and failed to write a science fiction screenplay called "Gather, Darkness," the title appropriated from a novel we had never read, while sitting in that same paradisiacal yard listening to records, drinking, and absorbing the blessings of our astonishing good fortune in knowing you and having access to that place to think and rap and navigate the eddies of late-night, punchdrunk (and true-drunk) circles of emptiness? O the follies of youth! O if those African masks

could speak! (And perhaps they can.) But such anecdotes and snapshots are ultimately tangential, if amusing. Your generosity in all matters, domestic and beyond, did far more than stoke our youthful vices and revelry.

Here I am, recently married (Samantha and I so wish you and Ann could have joined us), sitting in the glazed dog-days heat of my Carolina kitchen, having just returned from a honeymoon in Peru, glutted by wondrous pre-Columbian textiles, architecture, ceramics. My computer sits beneath artworks by James Castle, Felipe Jesus Consalvos, T.C., Kate Abercrombie, and surrounded by traditional Seagrove pottery; my thesis on Consalvos, my PMA catalogue essay on Castle, and piles of chapbooks, exhibition catalogues, and academic and curatorial essays slumber in the living room. I'm about to start writing an essay on the Philadelphia Wireman for some genteel Swedes. Among my alarmingly expanding stacks of records are a number of those you bought in the 1960's and 1970's and gifted to me years ago. (I don't think we ever got to discuss why you were so into the Jim Kweskin Jug Band...

Was it Maria Muldaur? Understandable.)

None of this scene, none of these sentinels, this world of objects and history, would exist without you. So much of my life now, at thirty-two years, is a direct result of the years spent in your strange and wonderful employ. Certainly it was your mentorship and inspiration that led me to take seriously the possibility of writing about art and curating, to study



folklore, that brought me to North Carolina and even into my current job. You took the untenable risk of hiring Will, Jina, Claire, and me, putting us all in the same room and expecting anything reasonable or sane to happen, and you treated us like family, in the traditional sense of a proper apprenticeship. The experience of working with you offered not only a profound art education and implication in a web of outrageous characters, parties, and narratives, but likewise a true compass during otherwise rudderless years. I remain deeply indebted to you for your unstinting generosity, tolerance, and indulgence of all our whims and notions and laziness and bad behavior. Your influence on me, and your encouragement, was always cloaked in avuncular jocularity and conspiratorial nudges and winks, which made your guidance all the more powerful. I miss those spaces; I miss you and Ann; I miss the laissez-faire electricity of the F/O environment, that pervading sense of real freedom and possibility and discovery and stupid jokes. I doubt I will have a better job, all told.

What else? Enough. Congratulations, and keep up the good fight. Thank you for everything. Eat some Sarcone's hoagies and Isgro's cake to celebrate! Please send my love to Ann. Please come visit Samantha and me sometime down South. A reunion is overdue.

Cheers,

Brendan
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

"So fucking fabulous!"
In the words of the Man Himself.



Dear John,

Thank you.

With love,
Jina Valentine



This isn't really a story, but when I started working at the FOG, I really wanted to know about how galleries worked and what they really did and how artists and gallerists and art collectors got along together. In retrospect, I'm pretty sure gallerists like John are a rarity. By this I mean, that the concerns of the artist and of the development of the oeuvre (conceptually, and fiscally) precede all other interests. Work ought to be sold for what it's worth, not as much as it can be sold for, for example.

When John comes over for drinks you might want to whip up a batch of devilled eggs because he really loves them.

My devilled eggs are the best.

Halve one dozen hard boiled eggs and remove the yolks. Place in a bowl with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Hellman's mayonnaise, $1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs French's yellow mustard, 2 Tbs Heinz dill pickle relish + mash until smooth.

Season to taste with $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp.

STUFF EGGS.

Garnish with crumbled bacon + chopped chives.

DON'T LOOK BACK!!



alexander stadler 2010



OUR JOHN



John at gallery X MAS 1975





I first met John when I was an undergraduate at Penn. Walking past the window of Fleisher Ollman Gallery (then on South 17th Street), a cobalt blue dog caught my eye. I went in not knowing anything about galleries, and a welcoming gentleman came over to me remarking, "Isn't that great? Do you know Bill Traylor's work?" Half an hour later I was no longer a stranger to Bill Traylor! I realized years later how generous John had been with his time to a mere undergraduate. Neither one of us could have imagined at that first meeting that we would continue our dialog for years to come. Over the years, John and I have continued to work together on exhibitions and projects. In 1996 when I was running the John McEnroe Gallery, John Ollman offered me two great Traylor's which I ended up acquiring for John McEnroe. I have always valued John's advice, opinion and recommendations. I am grateful that John brought the work of James Castle to my attention when I was a director at Knoedler and Company. I am proud to say John Ollman is not only a fine dealer, but a mentor and a great friend.

Happy 40th Anniversary John!

With fondest regard, Waqas



I don't know anyone with a better eye than John Ollman.

For everything—Years ago I spent a lot of time in Philly with John and Ann and got to watch John's acumen up close. There was a store called Wanamakers that carried really wonderful clothes for men—John would keep an eye on a pair of Armani Slacks, or and Ungaro Jacket—and he's wait for it to not sell and eventually hit the sale-rack, where he would swoop and acquire the desired swag for about one-third of the price.

John is dapper as hell—me and Don Colley used to tease him by calling him 'Johnny Armani'.

John is patient. I know this because over a dozen years I tested that patience on an almost daily basis. What I've always loved about John was his sense of the Journey—the searching intellect that separates him from other dealers who are simply merchants. John does the hard thing—he provides context, history, and definition. His deft stewardship of the Consalvos collages is a prime example of this. He is that rarity who has also helped nurture a host of careers over his four decades as a dealer. I've not ever met an artist whose career and life were not made better for having John for a dealer.

This past year we lost Janet Fleisher—an elegant, open-hearted lover of all impulses creative—who provided the atmosphere—and John was the architect of this fine gallery's evolution.

Some years ago, John and I had a bitter parting of the ways—it was largely my fault—not all—but mostly.

Every once in a while someone will ask me if I have regrets—and actually—I don't have many, though the ones I do are significant.

This is one of those.

What I've regretted was not having the grace to share some thoughts with John before we went our separate ways.

Thankfully, it seems now I have the opportunity to do this.

The first thing I want him to know is that he has dignified this business for 40 years. He stands, humbly, head and shoulders above the mutants who occupy this profession. John lends this enterprise gravity and humanity.

The second thing is that he made me better—taught me how to demand more from and for myself—and for this I will always be grateful, and should have said it sooner.

Finally—on the occasion of his 40th year as an advocate for art and artists—he is in my heart, and always will be.

Much love,

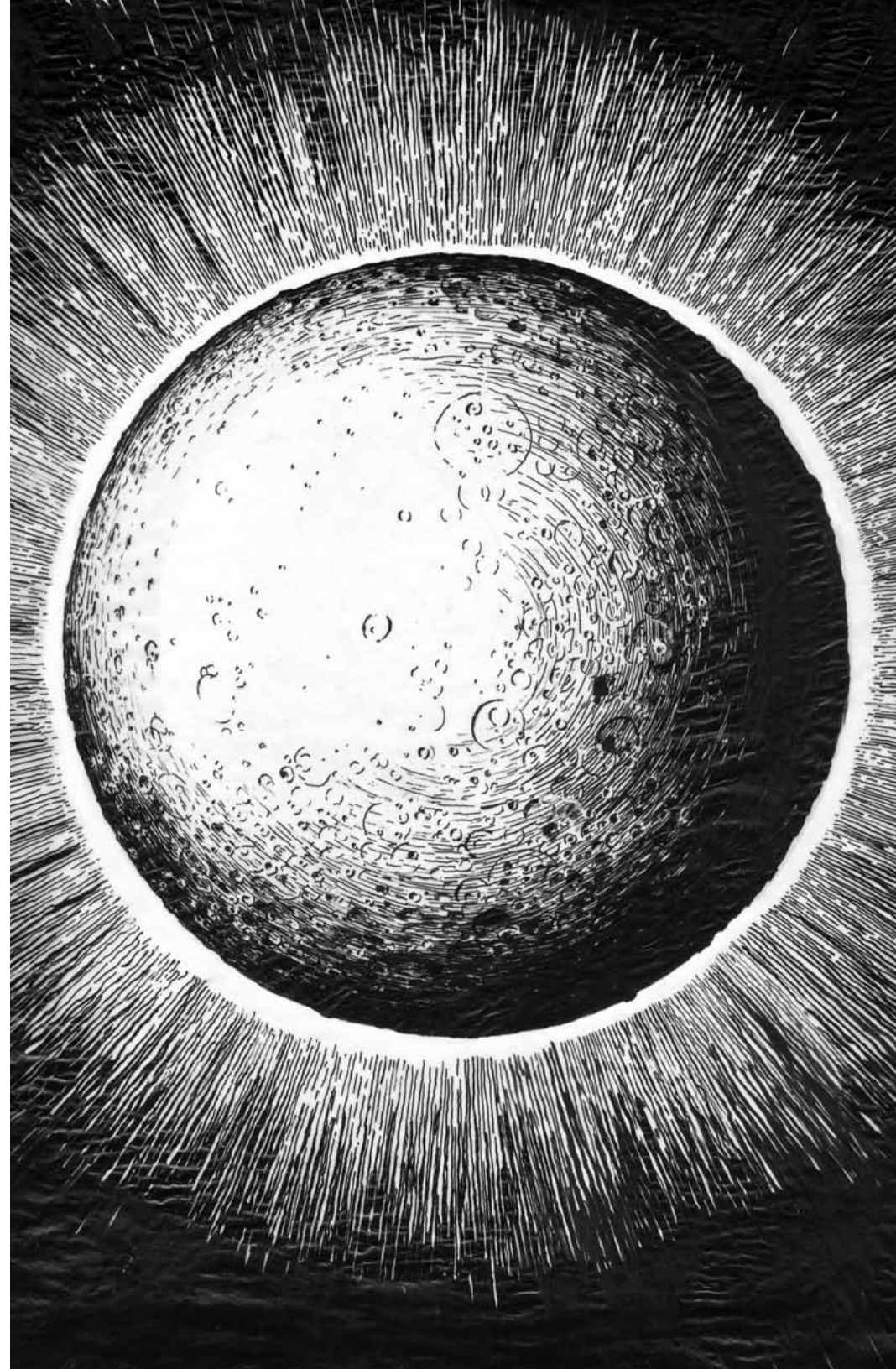
Tony Fitzpatrick
Chicago, 2010

IN THE FUTURE

If I were running for president, one of my main platforms would be a renewed effort to clone John Ollman. Because I would be president, I would ask the scientists to slip me a few on the side. I would start with a few John's that are just like the original so I could make sure we got it right. Now this is the future I'm talking about, so we could probably make them grow up faster or slower. So then I would get a teenage John to treat like a son and teach him about art. You know I'm going to make a baby John, because that would be really adorable and the teenage John could help take care of him. My best John would be my age and I would call him up and ask him to play basketball, but we would both probably be too busy. I would hide the original John somewhere in an underground bunker like a vast secret library. Because this is the future I would be in constant mental communication with the real John and, in fact, he would be the real president and I would be just a puppet.

—Paul Swenbeck

Tristin Lowe





(A. C. Jobin)

A stick, a stone,
It's the rest of a
It's a sliver of gl
It is night, it is c
The oak when it
The nod of the
The wood of the
A scratch, a lump
It's the wind bl
It's a bean, it's
And the riverba
It's the end of t
The foot, the gr
The beat of the
A truckload of
The shot of a g
A mile, a must,
It's a girl, it's a
The plan of the
And the car tha
Afloat, adrift, a
A cock, a quail
And the riverb
It's the promis
A point, a grai
A blink, a buzz
A pin, a needl
A snail, a riddl
A snake, a stic
A fish, a flash,
And the riverb
It's the promis
A stick, a ston
The rest of a s
A sliver of glass, a life, the sun,
A night, a death, the end of the run.
And the riverbank talks of the Waters of March,
It's the end of all strain, it's the joy in your heart.

(A. C. Jobin)

Aa stick, aa stoone, it's the end of the rooad,
It's the rest of a stump, it's aa little alonne,
It's a sliver of glaass, it is life, it's the sun,
It is night, it iss deathh, it's a traap, it's a guunn.
The oak whenn iit blooms, a fox in thee brussh,
The nod of the woood, the song of a thrush,
The wood of the wing, a cliff, a faall,
A scratch, a lump, it iss noothing at all.
It's the wind blowing free, it's the end of a sloppe,
It's a bean, it's a void, it's a hunch, it's a hoppe.
And the riverbank talks of the Waters of March,
It's the end of the sttrain, it's the joy in your heart.
The foot, the ground, the flesh and the boone,
The beat of the rooad, a sling-shot stoone,
A truckload of bricks in the soft morning light,
The shot of a guunn in the deead of the night.
A mile, a musst, a thrusst, a bump,
It's a girl, it's a rhyme, it's a cold, it's the mumpss.
The plan of the houusse, the body in bed,
And the car that got stuck, it's the mud, it's the mud.
Afloat, aadrifft, a fflight, aa wing,
A cock, a quail, the promise of spring.
And the riverbank talks of the Waters of March,
It's the promise of life, it's the joy in your heart.
A point, a graain, a beee, a bite,
A blinkk, a buzzard, a sudden stroke of nightt,
A pin, a neeedle, a stinng, a painn,
A snail, a riddle, a wassp, a staain,
A snaake, aa stick, it is Johnn, it is Joee,
A fish, a flassh, a silvery gloww.
And the riverbank talks of the Waters of March,
It's the promise of life in your heart, in your heart.
A stick, a stoone, the end of the looad,
The rest of a stump, a loonesome road.
A sliver of glasss, a life, the sun,
A night, a deathh, the end of the run.
And the riverbank talks of the Waters of March,
It's the end of all strain, it's the joy in your heart.

Antonio Carlos Jobin's 1973 composition via
Art Garfunkel's 1975 recording roughly
transcribed by Anthony Campuzano
for John Ollman late summer 2010



Don Colley



John,

I sincerely thank you for my time spent at Fleisher/Ollman. It was not simply a job but a family, a comforting environment filled with familiar quirks and many laughs. Congratulations on your forty years; I'm glad that I could share a few of them!

Love,

Heather Shoemaker
San Francisco

Dear John,

I felt so fortunate to move to Philadelphia and immediately find a job at Fleisher/Ollman Gallery. Before moving to Philadelphia, I met the curator of the PMA in Virginia and he named Fleisher/Ollman Gallery as the best gallery in Philadelphia. You and Ann were so welcoming to me and Dave—you gave us an instant family. It was so nice to work with someone so passionate, honest and caring about the art AND the artist. I am still amazed at how you introduced self-taught art into the modern art world. You have built incredible collections for clients and museums. Thank you for your dedication to the field and for being such a thoughtful person.



Happy 40th Anniversary!

Carrie Coleman

To John,

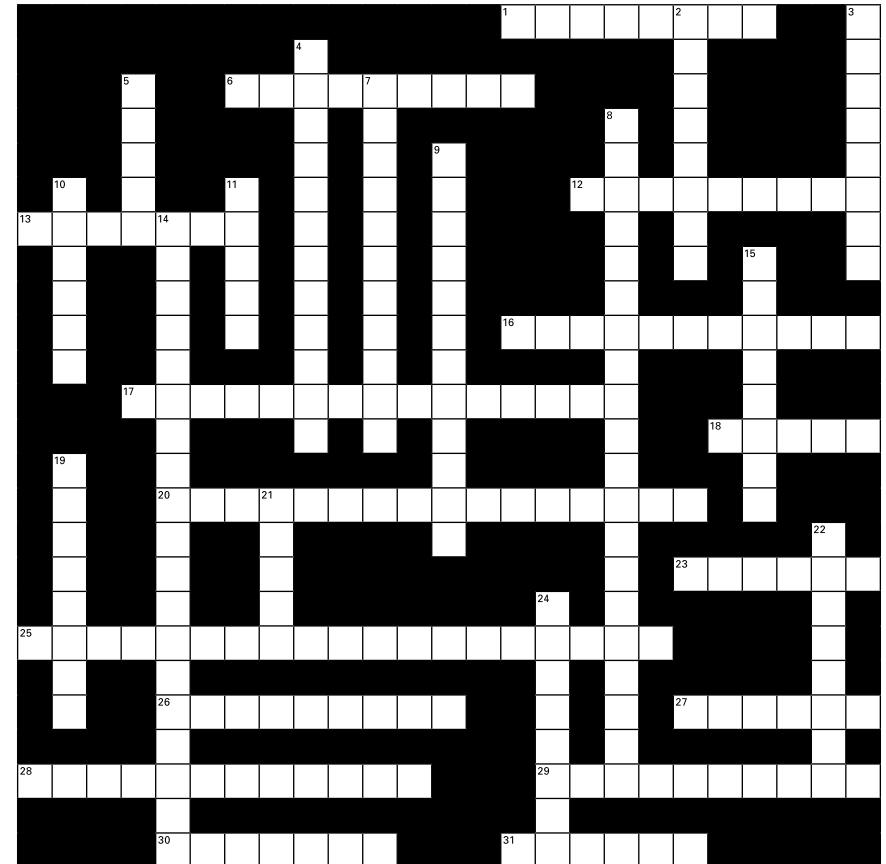
I feel very lucky to know you..what a special person you are. You welcomed me into your gallery, introduced me to all your friends and family. I admire and respect your passion and loyalty to the arts and all that you believe in. I learned so much from you... thank you. Congratulations.

Here's is to another 40 years... the art world is lucky to have you!

All the best to you,

Patti Berman

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Chicago artist who accused John of stealing from her
- John's favorite place to hang art at art fairs
- If John could own only one piece of art
- "Thank you very, very, very much _____"
- Actor whose resemblance bought John a free dinner at Ed Debevic's
- John's favorite Chicago restaurant
- What John brought back from Boise after spending time with the Castle collection
- Original name of the gallery which became The Janet Fleisher Gallery, and then Fleisher/Ollman
- John's favorite day to work an art fair
- Philadelphia's version of nkisi power objects
- Nickname for Felipe Jesus Consalvos
- John's model for his success
- Ringling Brothers driver turned artist
- Name of doctor who discovered Ramirez
- Painting John most regrets selling
- John's former art fair drug of choice

DOWN

- The only challenge John has not mastered
- John's other true calling
- "Your boyfriend is really a _____"
- What John once swore to take up again in old age
- A favorite art destruction movie in which Daryl Hannah performs with fire
- John's favorite line from "Working Girl"
- A favorite film about a rabid helper monkey
- Post 2000 greeting
- Subject of John's favorite window display on 17th street
- Favorite Tony Fitzpatrick quote
- John's favorite cocktail
- John's role at John and Ann's famous parties
- John's favorite tool (besides his rake/hoe/garden shears)
- Favorite 804 S. 10th street party shoes
- The only (Maine) crab John eats

