Tony Bennett pointed to a Kokoschka landscape in a book at Hacker’s on 57th Street and said he liked what Oskar did “along the periphery,” coining a term of surprising relevance. Though referring to the formal meeting of the perimeter and the periphery he innocently zeroed in on a murky netherworld where success and failure, acceptance and indifference, and Tony Bennett and Oskar Kokoschka meet. Away from the banal fuss accompanying the validated, the artists brought together under the unwieldy but somehow catchy moniker of “The Peripheterists” are in many cases low-key and unsung, perhaps less orthodox in their ambitions than most, and prodigiously gifted.

Forming a diverse and unaligned but oddly complimentary non-scene that doesn’t really register with either the hoity toity or the intelligentsia, all are fairly unconcerned with and unknown in that rarely satisfying milieu known as “The Art World.”

Much to its detriment the current arena is so professionalized and hermetically incestuous that it rarely has room for those taking a left-handed path free of facile gestures indebted to terminal cronyism. That luck, brown nosing, social standing, and ladder climbing have much to do with getting paid are a given and not particularly revelatory, but it does give rise to an urge to address that vexing situation with a gathering of mostly uncelebrated rare birds. Is it too much to ask that art can be for everybody, and challenging, at the same time? Especially that made by the living? The present A-Team gets plenty of attention, ego-gratification, codding, and legitimization, which added to their frequently hackneyed output, incurs irritation and fatigue. The lionized can be tiresome. Certainly not all eminent players are that bad but a lot of them traffic rather a bit too much in topical and fashionable tropes. For the most part this heterogeneous bunch doesn’t fit. What fits has had its rough edges smoothed out, or never had any in the first place.

This isn’t a rant about the evils of the big bad art world or a polemic, God forbid. Instead it’s a window onto a parallel universe of art without a capital “A.” It’s not about cultural production but a surprisingly rare combination of fierce independence and accessibility. On taking stock of my own collection a realization dawned that much of it is by outsiders who elude the normal definition of the term. That is, people who didn’t study, or have been committed, or are “primitives.” Most of the artists in The Peripheterists fall ambiguously outside of the parameters of that classification, as well as the high-profile contemporary scene, “street art,” or cutesy and cloying popular dreck. It should be noted that most are amateurs in the exalted sense of the word, though several do make a living from it. For them there is a curiousness of recognition and success but not in the usual precincts, and it can be argued that they reach a wider audience than many ballyhooed operators with mid-career vanity museum surveys. And in a stealth fashion, as the masses are usually unaware of who the “author” is, another instance of people not appreciating or understanding what went into what is right in front of them. Which is probably just fine.

Some went to art school, most of them didn’t, a few have shown in galleries but more than half haven’t. In a sense what they do is sort of old fashioned in that it...
self-referential and only analysis, and isn’t overly theoretical, at least in a simplistic way. It isn’t theoretical or conceptually driven, but is rooted in the shabbier variety. I met a great painter and now photographer on a ramp in Stuttgart in 1986, and spent a month in Cameroon with him ten years later. He was buying barbershop paintings, and I followed. I’m keen on his enigmatic skyward-looking bikin-clad model, and the haircut heads’ flatness and absence of guile. So different, but not that far away in the end. I loved (and still do) the Big Boys, the unrivaled early 1980s Austin, Texas punk/hardcore/Oi!/Go-Go/funk band. It’s worse than trite, but they and their ilk changed my life. R.I.P Biscuit.

If it hasn’t become glaringly apparent already there’s an autobiographical element at play because this periscope is personally familiar terrain. You wear your heart on your sleeve, so the curator sympathizes. And oddly enough the curators, whether they and their ilk changed my life. R.I.P Biscuit. An underground hero who, if the mainstream was fair, would be feted. The same goes for the naughty genic freak-outs from a twisted Belgian.

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Mark Hubbard, United States of America, undated

That calls for an accounting of cross-pollination, elusive congruences, and coincident pangs wedded to connoisseurship. For a while I took a look of photographs of empty skateboard ramps and bowls, so I dug it, courtesy by old friends of two-wheeler knowledge around. A pale green shirt, what we wear, highly personal inanimate items that cannot last forever. They are useful and go into the past. So mementos. Plans that transcend their utilitarian purpose and stand on their own. Grew up sking, so I’ve been using and admiring folded ski area maps forever. Blueprints, diagrams, designs, they lack self-consciousness and have a punk rock sensibility. That calls for an accounting of cross-pollination, elusive congruences, and coincident pangs wedded to connoisseurship. For a while I took a look of photographs of empty skateboard ramps and bowls, so I dug it, courtesy by old friends of two-wheeler knowledge around. A pale green shirt, what we wear, highly personal inanimate items that cannot last forever. They are useful and go into the past. So mementos. Plans that transcend their utilitarian purpose and stand on their own. Grew up sking, so I’ve been using and admiring folded ski area maps forever. Blueprints, diagrams, designs, they lack self-consciousness and have a punk rock sensibility.

About what art is, why people bother, disconnected from any “B-Team” can ruffle feathers. Understandably, since association with any “B-Team” can feel like a slight, though I have always thought they’re the more captivating of the two teams. There were no really hard but never became the flavor of the month. The lack of acknowledgment and kudos might have been all for the best as far as their art is concerned, though of course that can be a source of much chagrin, disappointment, and worse. To a certain extent those factors, experiences, and histories are what make this assemblage slightly raw, with an undercurrent of neurosis and obsession and a tilt toward the refreshingly ordinary angle via a-via traditional genres. Also engaging and, engaging, and quite unmindful of the pseudo avant-garde status quo’s calcified rules. Mixed together it’s just good (possibly great) interesting art that brings up passed but eternal questions about what art is, why people bother, if they walk away from it all do they remain artists, and are the most creative necessarily the ones who “make it.”

-Jocko Weyland © 2011

With work by: Nicole Andrews Brandes, Natascha Belt, Dave Brunn, Dwayne Boone, Gerardo Castillo, Rick Charnoski, Edward Colver, Ale Formenti, Renee French, Joseph Griffith, Thomas Hauser, Mark Hubbard, Chuckie Johnson, Gary Kachadourian, Taliah Lempert, Doug Magnuson, Alfredo Martinez, William McCurtin, Stu Mead, James Mejues, Gloria Park, Daniel Pineda, Randy Turner, Dennis Tufy, Unidentified Cameroonian barbershop painters, Sereno Wilson, Jesse Wine, Jason Wright. The author would like to thank Jim Supercak, who actually spoke to Tony Bennett and generously reported the anecdote that provides the title for this exhibition.