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counterculture history, conspiracy theory & reviews

In Praise of Flick Ford

by Steven Hager



After the Soho Weekly News folded, I went looking for a new place to publish my landmark 1980s uptown-downtown journalism. Ah, yes, the tawdry East Village in the 1980s, a time and place that someday may be as widely celebrated as the Summer of Love in San Francisco, because it was equally revolutionary and exciting.

My first book, *Hip Hop*, had disappointed me as it looked rushed out and I guess it was. For my next book, I wanted to work more closely with the designer. I noticed the *East Village Eye* on a newsstand and that caught my eye because I loved the new wave art direction. Soon, I met the publisher Leonard Abrams, and the art

director David Allen, who had two other art directors he loved working with, Flick Ford and Brian Spaeth. The illo (above) was drawn by Flick, a portrait of the two of us, based on a photo from the *East Village Eye*.

I was living on the Upper West Side, where I still reside, a former reporter for the *New York Daily News*, hanging out mostly with friends from Illinois who had all penetrated the upper ranks of the corporate media world. But suddenly I shifted gears and started hanging out in the East Village almost nonstop for ten years.

I'm shy, so I like extrovert buddies who can start a conversation. Larry Green was my sidekick in high school and he always reminded me of a young Fred Astaire. Very suave and he loved to dance. I remember thinking: odd, a dude in the dance club, but then Larry told me it was the easiest way to meet hot girls.

Well, Flick reminded me of a young James Cagney and he could entertain and sweet talk the opposite sex better than anyone I knew, excepting Chef Ra, and Flick became my sidekick for the next decade. He certainly had a style all his own and I radically adjusted my look just from hanging around with him.



Flick, Brian and I would go on to form the Soul Assassins, a legendary band from the period. We all worked at *High Times* at one point, and now we've gone in different directions, although I think all three of us are doing our best work right now. I'm tremendously impressed with Flick's latest book, *Wild, 75 Freshwater Tropical Fish of the World*.

I didn't catch on to Flick's obsession with fish until one day when out of the blue he got a small tank for his apartment. I returned a few weeks later and his apartment was filled with huge tanks, fresh and salt water. It's safe to say the fish were talking to Flick. And what do you think they were saying? Save me?

Of course, that was 30 years ago. Today, Flick is widely recognized as one of the world's greatest fish painters. He travels the globe catching fish so he can watercolor them straight from the water and then he mostly returns them to their habitat. *Wild* is an attempt to document the earth's freshwater phenotypes. I guess you know life began in water so these fish

are some of our oldest ancestors. And many are disappearing and have been replaced in captivity by flashy hybrids, which is cool, except what happens when all the original phenotypes are gone? In case of emergency, it's up to the conservationist to capture, protect and preserve these phenotypes and that's really what *Wild* is all about: inspiring a new generation to respect the natural order by honoring the ancestors of the earth. This is not just a book of paintings, however, but an encyclopedic compendium of vital information and includes maps of origin and instructions on captivity.



Here's Flick's Rainbow Trout from the Upper Missouri. You can't really do these images justice with web shots, however. The fish literally jump off the pages and many are so colorful you wonder why anyone felt they needed to be enhanced through breeding. Even more astonishing are the prints and original watercolors Flick carries when he's on tour. Since that tour is hitting upstate New York next week, I thought I'd give you a heads up on a rare opportunity to meet a colossal talent in person.

Dec. 7, 2013 – Catskill, NY
Dec. 9, 2013- Kingston, NY
Dec. 14, 2013 – Woodstock, NY
Dec. 15, 2013 – Albany, NY
Art exhibition: Jan. 11, 2014 – Woodstock, NY