

Art Intimidation

Kent Jones

In the mid seventies I lived in West Hollywood in The Lotus Apartments, a heritage building that looked like a Chinese temple with dragons on the roof and fancy carved woodwork on the entry gates, windows and doors. It was nestled in mature gardens and, although it was built in 1928, there was underground parking for each tenant who occupied the 14 one bedroom apartments. Located at 1216 North La Cienega Blvd, not fifty feet from Sunset Blvd., its location and character have made it a desirable place to set up camp in the Los Angeles area for many people over the years, but certainly for aspiring actors and the like. It was and still is a folly, like many landmark apartment buildings in West Hollywood--The Ronda is another one just a block away and El Palacio sits next to The Lotus on the corner of La Cienega and Fountain Avenue. Although I hated Los Angeles, I really enjoyed living in that amazing building with its views all the way past the Fairfax district almost to the airport, and the perpetual cooling breeze that blew up La Cienega from the Pacific to the Hollywood Hills meant you didn't need air conditioning, even in August. My apartment--B2--had eight foot bay windows flanking a twelve foot arched main window in the living room to take in the view.

I also liked the other tenants I got to know at The Lotus. A friend of a friend, interior designer Jay Steffy, the originator of the ultra-comfy potato chair, lived there and was responsible for helping me secure an apartment largely to prevent his rival, who was next in the queue for an apartment at The Lotus, from moving in. Jacques Cousteau's secretary for his TV series lived downstairs. Joe Saushay, a clothes designer, lived across from Cousteau's secretary. And Carole Mallory, actress, super model, author, interviewer and friend of the stars, lived directly above Joe and across the hall from me. A set of huge entrance doors led to two apartments on the ground floor and two apartments on the second floor, separated by a generous landing. This "entrance door to apartments" arrangement was repeated for access to two more sets of four apartments each at two other places in the front of the building.

Carole was a character. Originally from small town Pennsylvania, I think she took a liking to me since I was from small town Ohio, right next door to Pennsylvania, so we could communicate and understood things that

mid-westerners do. People from those places didn't turn up often in West Hollywood.

She had earned a degree in art education and taught in Pennsylvania for a couple of years before becoming a stewardess for Pan Am Airways, where she soon found herself on routes that took her to exciting destinations in Europe, including Paris. In Paris she began a modeling career while still employed with Pan Am and appeared on the cover of many fashion magazines beginning with French Vogue, as well as Parade, New York Magazine, Time, Newsweek, Cosmopolitan, and so on. She was famous as the model in the English Leather cologne campaign "All my men wear English Leather or they wear nothing at all", and Faberge's "Tigress" campaign. She appeared in several films and TV programs including *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* and as Kit Sunderson in the original 1975 version of *The Stepford Wives*. Carole was romantically involved with Claude Picasso, son of Pablo, for seven years in New York City after a brief marriage to kinetic sculpture pioneer Ronald Mallory.

In Hollywood, Carole knew everybody. I met Andy Warhol at a party in her apartment, and Polly Bergen, Rod Stewart, Peter Finch, Faye Dunaway and others. She knew everybody but was never stuck up about any of it. Small town Pennsylvania had left a mark.

When I lived in England and worked at Petersburg Press as an artist's Master Printer, I met a young woman named Karen Amiel. She worked at Marlborough Gallery on Cork Street. I remember her telling me once that, at Marlborough, the sales people--all female--used what they called "the intimidation factor" to get foreigners to buy art. According to Karen it worked best on Americans. They would wander into the gallery and start to look around only to be ignored by the sales staff--certainly not an American sales technique. After a period of time they would get so insulted and cranky an exchange with the staff would ensue and to make their point, they'd buy a whole wall of art, or more, and feel vindicated since they were so important, and had been so ignored. Some psychology and tricky sales techniques were combined there.

I also remember Karen saying that no matter how important you were, or famous, or rich--whatever--the scariest place for anyone to go, particularly by yourself, was an art gallery, and one that involved the display or sale of contemporary art was the scariest of all. Think about it--you would be entering unknown territory and someone might think, or realize, you were unable to understand what you were encountering, hence you could look

pretty dumb, pretty insignificant. The sales people at Marlborough worked that aspect of human nature to manipulate buyers as well.

One afternoon I got a phone call from Carole asking me to come over to her apartment right away as there were two people she wanted me to meet. I put the phone down and went across the landing and knocked on her door.

Carole opened it, grabbed my hand and dragged me into the apartment. There she introduced me to an elderly couple--a very elegantly dressed older woman and a rather plain, sheepish older man. The woman was gracious and all smiles. Her eyes sparkled as she held out her hand to shake mine. I didn't quite catch her name or the older man's name but Carole's introduction went something like this:

"Kent, this is so and so (the woman) and so and so (the man)", and looking at the couple, "This is Kent. He's an artist and there's one of his prints," pointing to a framed artwork on the wall.

Carole had a lithograph of mine hanging there, a black and white abstract thing that looked sort of like clouds.

The older woman smiled and nodded. The older man looked down at the floor, blinked and looked up, smiling sheepishly, fidgeting a bit, not knowing what to say. I found it odd, and didn't want anyone to feel uncomfortable so before too long managed to remove myself from the situation and went back to my apartment. I mean, they didn't know me, and it was clear that they were making a flying visit to see Carole anyway, so I thought it best to leave them so they could talk privately.

The next day I saw Carole coming up the stairs with two bags of groceries and offered to help. I asked her to clarify again who I met the previous afternoon since I couldn't quite hear what she had said during her quick intro.

"You met Françoise Gilot, my ex-boyfriend's mother. She was Pablo Picasso's mistress for ten years and is the mother of Claude--my ex--and his sister, Paloma."

"The guy is her husband, Jonas Salk, who invented the polio vaccine."

I stared at Carole for some time, then turned and walked into my apartment, and closed the door quietly behind me.