



Wendy Artin, New York City, East Village, Muhammed Ali, John & Yoko, 26" x 41", 2017

THE WALL

an ekphrastic tale

It had been dark for quite a few hours, but they still could hear the shouts and drunken songs moving away from them. Even in small streets, New York is the city that never sleeps. From a window across the way, they could see a bright alarm clock strike one AM. Then two. Then three.

“Well, that went well”

“Yes, for you. I got torn again”

“At least it wasn’t as much as last time”

“Shut up, you’ve never been torn”

“Yeah, because you’re covering half of us”

“Listen – I didn’t have any say in my pla-”

She was cut off by the roar of a motorcycle engine in the distance.

“Do you think it’s coming here?” Said the second voice, suddenly hushed.

“Be quiet and get into position” replied a third.

The first voice coughed. There was a general shushing and a moment of buzzing that sounded like a hummingbird’s wings.

The engine was getting closer, as a light appeared at the corner of the block. The vehicle turned onto the little street and stopped. As a dark figure got off, they could hear the sounds of spray paint cans rattling around. It had been a few weeks since the last addition. The rider removed the helmet and put down a bag. They all knew this would take a while, and yet it was hard to hold still. The figure did not take the spray paint out. Instead, a big piece of paper that had been folded up was removed from the bag’s pocket, along with a jar of white liquid and a paintbrush. The rider started to brush some of the liquid onto the wall, then unfolded the piece of paper, stuck it to where the glue was, then brushed over it. The biker stepped away, to admire the work, then move to examine the rest of the wall. John Lennon and Yoko Ono, half covered by a girl eating a lollipop. Below them, a round Canadian logo of some sort with a

hummingbird sticker stuck onto it. Next to the hummingbird, a fascist symbol had been drawn over the last two letters of the word "Canada". Looking angry, the rider reached for the peeling edge of the paper and tore off the part where the symbol was, leaving the hummingbird next to an upside down V shape. A drawn face peeked out where somebody else had torn the paper with the Canadian logo. On the other side of the corner, above the paper that was now drying, there was a cartoon of a young looking child with a shirt that said rebel, covering a stylized Rosie the Riveter. The rider stood back and looked at the ensemble once more. Satisfied, the helmet came back on and the bag went back over the shoulder, as the figure hopped back on the bike and drove away, the roaring of the engine slowly fading.

"Oh my gosh. Poor hummingbird" said the girl with the lollipop "he almost got torn" ~ "What is it?" Asked John Lennon, moving out of his poster and closer to the wet paper. "Careful," said Rosie the Riveter "it's still wet. You don't want to get wet, do you?" ~ "Well then, you're closer. Tell us what it is"

"Yes, PLEASE," said the girl with the lollipop, jumping up and down in her poster "is it a person?" ~ "It has boxing gloves, so I think so," said the Little Rebel, straining her eyes to look down "but it got me wet, I'm stuck" ~ "I wonder how long it'll take to dry," said Yoko-Ono "It's no use, John", she added, as he tried to get closer. "At least he got rid of that horrible symbol, I don't know how the hummingbird looks at it all day".

The hummingbird flew up to where the Lollipop Girl was, to sit down on her shoulder trying to stop the fidgeting, and John went back to his spot next to Yoko. An unfamiliar yawn made them all jump.

"Where am I?" said the same voice. "The new guy's dry!" Exclaimed the face peeking out from the sign. "Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god!" Said the lollipop girl, resuming to jump up and down as the hummingbird flew off her shoulder. "Who are you?"

"I don't know, I just got here"

“Oh, right. Well, you’ll find out as soon as tourists get excited about who you are and shout ‘Hey, this dude’s on the wall. Come take a picture of me with him’”.

“Okay,” said the new guy. Who are you?”

“Oh, I’m not a famous person. I just eat a lollipop”

“Okay. What about the rest of you?” The alarm clock beeped. 6 AM. “Everybody – back into your positions”. Everyone froze, even the new guy understood. A couple of fast-moving New Yorkers walked by, not even noticing the wall. The woman whose alarm clock had gone off stepped out of her building in running clothes, her between her shoulder and her cheek.

“Oh look!” she said to the phone while passing them “they added Muhammed Ali to the wall across from my house!”

Lily Artin Boschin
Rome, October 2017

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This piece was written as a contribution to the “Write On A Wall” charitable evening with all proceeds of a silent auction going to research in lung cancer at Massachusetts General Hospital under Dr. Alice Shaw, M.D. The event took place at Gurari Collections in Boston under the auspices of Russ Gerard, on November 4th, 2017, during the exhibition Wendy Artin - Here Today, Athens, Rome, Paris, London, New York. The original watercolor painting that inspired this tale is Wendy Artin, New York City, Muhammed Ali, John & Yoko, 26” x 41”, 2017. “Write On A Wall” was an invitation to take the watercolors of urban walls as creative writing prompts, to create an original poem or prose, a flight of fancy, from the fairly random visual elements.