

Skateboarding is Not a Art

Ted Barrow recently made a T-shirt that reads “skateboarding is not a art”. You can almost hear him say it in that sardonic, bitter old dude persona he’s cultivated online. But I wonder if what sounds like a condemnation of skateboarding might be more of a provocation. This is, after all, coming from a guy who wrote for skate magazines, skated in videos alongside legendary pros, kept a “Proustian” sounding skate blog, and at this point has spent around 3,000 hours poetically reviewing (exceptionally average) skate clips on an Instagram account that’s amassed 40.6K followers.

Read differently, the statement “skateboarding is not a art” feels less like a condemnation of skateboarding and more like a bro-y philistine guarding skateboarding from art’s pretensions — but Ted most certainly loves art. He teaches art history at The Cooper Union and is working on a PhD on Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent.

If you follow @feedback_ts, where Barrow critiques Instagram skate clips, you also get regular and compulsive updates on his thoughts about art; art and skateboarding always providing a new lens or language to draw something meaningful out of the other. There aren’t many people waxing about the evolution of Mannerist wedding portraits and how that’s analogous to nuances in the way a younger generation skates, or comparing Winslow Homer’s lifetime of painting moonlit couples to one’s own wavering relationship to skateboarding as they age. So why is Ted, of all people, so sure skateboarding isn’t an art?

Maybe he thinks we’re too quick to use the word “art” to describe any activity worthy of love, devotion, or reflection. Or maybe Ted is a purist who’s uninterested in questions of art’s ontology, and “skateboarding is not a art” to him because he doesn’t need it to be reducible to anything else. Skateboarding is enough. Sure, skateboarding may be art-like; it eschews fixed playing fields, score keeping, and rules in a way that keeps it closer to modern dance than football; it’s had a contentious and sometimes embarrassing love affair with subversion, popular culture, and the media; and, like art, it gives kids a toolkit to interface with community, architecture, and authority. But all those things are incidental and hopefully far out of mind when one is actually skateboarding.

When we sat down to talk to Ted on Montez Press Radio he wasn’t that bitter guy we knew online. As it turned out, he was incredibly open and eager to have a meandering conversation about the Renaissance, modern architecture, the historical walking tours he gives around NYC, and whether or not those things have anything to do with skateboarding. We also talked about how our love for art and skateboarding have changed as the imperatives of adulthood and professionalism come head to head with the wonderfully ‘unproductive’ act of actually engaging with these activities. It also turned out that Ted is less a dick than a critic, and he reminded us of the undying necessity of criticizing the things you truly love.

TB: Theodore Barrow

TL: Thomas Laprade

KJ: Keenan Jay

TL We’re on with Ted Barrow, PhD candidate at the Graduate Center, CUNY in New York City. Ted has a hugely popular Instagram account, @feedback_ts, where he reviews skate clips in the character of a curmudgeonly older guy who rips kids apart.

TB A slight exaggeration of myself.

TL But what Keenan and I like so much about the account is all the art history that makes it in. There’s this language of criticism we’re familiar with in the arts that makes it in there

with your shit-talking of skate kids. You’ve done a lot of interviews where you talk about skateboarding but I haven’t heard much about your other endeavor as an art historian, so we’re thinking maybe we could talk about the crossover here. And to introduce Keenan, he’s a great guy, he’s a good listener, he’s an artist and skateboarder, and he works at Kai Matsumiya, a great gallery.

KJ I’m an armchair skateboarder.

TB That’s a great way to put it. [Laughter]

TL Maybe to start, you could tell us about your almost skate career.

TB Okay. Well, I started skateboarding in 1987, and I think I was about ten or eleven years old. And the year prior to

that I went to a Montessori school where I had been encouraged to be as weird as I wanted to be and then all of a sudden I'm thrown into public school and I suffer an identity crisis. I start trying to fit into TV, like tucking my pants into my socks, I had no friends, a pet mouse. My parents were like, "we've gotta do something for this kid." So they sent me to a summer camp in California. I would skate to and from the beach, so I came back to Texas as a skater. In terms of wanting to be sponsored, entering contests, getting sponsored—lasted about three years, from 1988 to 1991. I wasn't having fun so I quit skating and then in '92 I was like, "I miss skating, I love skating, I just want to skate for fun." And I did that. And so, that honestly is the extent of a formal career, or of thinking about skating in that way.

KJ You were skating bowls before that, but by '92 it was totally different, right?

TB Yeah, it was street. There was a kind of insane learning curve of having to learn how to kickflip and all that shit. I secretly wanted to get sponsored but I also kind of knew profoundly that I wasn't good enough.

KJ But you were filming too, you were in [the video magazine] 411?

TB Yeah, that's a bit later. If I look back on it, there have been waves where I just skate for fun and then every now and then I'll skate with some good skaters and get some footage in a video.

TL We have a friend who has a pet theory that the evolution of street skating is owed to the fact that camcorders became so accessible around '91.

TB Yeah, I think that there's a couple things. Definitely the fact that you could just all of a sudden film your friends and make it a video. I think the H-Street videos, or the early ones like *Shackle Me Not* and *Hokus Pokus*, those really mobilize that transformation. They were poorly filmed but it was the best skating—and it was the best skating because film was kind of expendable. But also a lot of those big skate parks that were built in the boom of the early '80s started closing down, so kids had no choice but to skate street.

TL I love to think about that kind of technological determinism in skateboarding. I think what you're doing right now, by doing these constant reviews of short clips that are both spectacular and so mundane at the same time, in that very social media way, is talking about another moment in history where the technology that we use to share skateboarding has a huge influence on the stylistic shifts and the way we access and think about it.

TB I'm really interested in that too and I think it's probably just because I spend a lot of time looking at skateboard media. Like I said before, skateboarding gave me a code. I read every magazine, I watched every video. And my biography sort of aligns with there being more videos available. So, all of a sudden it went from companies having videos every six months to *411* every two months to *Logic* to all these other outlets and then the internet and now it's like—

TL Now it's all about the 10 second clips.

TB Now it's all about the clips! And you have these people that don't really care about the traditional skateboarding sponsorship route and are super popular and maybe making money and don't need to be pro. It's a really interesting moment, at least for me and for people of our generation to see what's happening. And not with disapproval! I'll pretend that I disapprove but it's like, of course, skateboarding has always been

about access to information, and media has always driven it. So the faster kids get to see their favorite skater do something ridiculous the better for skateboarding, you know?

TL Yeah, skateboarding is unlike other sports in that there aren't boundaries set by playing fields and our architecture varies from city to city, especially as skateboarding catches on in developing countries, so our ideas of what's possible keeps changing too. We depend on media to register these changes. I blame Instagram for nine-year-olds being so much better than me now because they can scroll through their phones and be like "that other nine-year-old in California is doing it so I guess I'll go try it," whereas I had to wait for next month's issue of *Transworld* to even get the idea that it was *maybe* possible to try something like that.

TB Yeah! I think Stacy Peralta wrote a story [mentioned by Lain Borden in *Skateboarding in The City* (2019 edition)] about the first time someone carved frontside over a light in a pool and how people didn't know that was possible until someone did it. Then there was a video, or no, a photo sequence of it. So now, all of a sudden, anyone who sees that magazine knows that it's possible to carve a frontside. And that's how video accelerated progression. I remember my friend Will talking about the *H-Street* video, he was like, "Dude, imagine your best day skating, but someone had a camera." And that's kind of how Instagram is, in a way. I mean, good and bad. There's also, unfortunately, a lot of fluff, a lot of bullshit, and a lot of mediocre shit too, that's in my wheelhouse.

TL That's your expertise, yeah.

TB Yeah, so I think that that's also kind of an interesting thing, that there's this leveling that's happened now where kids can't really tell what's really good and what's bullshit and not terribly progressive.

TL Right, but that question of what is *progressive*, I don't really know what that means. I think there's a big shift happening right now. We grew up in a time when there was a linear progression of skateboarding where it got technically harder and harder. When Keenan and I were in high school the thing was more and more stairs. Whereas now the changes in skateboarding are more self-referential, it's about what stylistic gestures and fashions from the history of skateboarding you can put together in an interesting new way. That's all paired with a deskilling or weirdening—think no complies and Fancy Lad—which might be a reaction to the commercialized virtuosity you get from Red Bull pros. I think this is all pretty owed to the fact that kids these days are just looking at and obsessing over the history of skateboarding at all times.

TB I think they're looking at all these different historical moments at once and so that linear, teleological thing of like, "well now we don't skate like this anymore" is lost on them. In some ways that's good! On my account I've been focusing a lot on these sort of decadent moments in the history of art, like Italian Mannerism in the mid-sixteenth century, because I think that's an imitative style. It sort of takes all the innovations of Raphael and Michelangelo and Leonardo, but it's also so superficial. Right now, kids dress like 1992 but they do tricks like 2002. And they don't really see the difference and they don't really need to see the difference.

TL Is skateboarding having a postmodern moment? [Laughter]

TB We're having a Mannerist moment. Overly stylized, weird influence, and kind of empty, but also really beautiful, you know? It's never been a better time to be a skateboarder

because you can be any kind of skateboarder and you'll be accepted and that's awesome, but it also doesn't mean as much to be a skateboarder right now because you don't need to fight for it. In some ways that's good—

TL I love this analogy of going through a Mannerist moment, maybe let's get back to the Theodore bio and talk about how you became an art historian.

TB Yeah, okay. Well, at the end of high school I was at another moment where I was like, "maybe I'll move out to California and try skateboarding," and then I shattered my right ankle. So, I spent a summer in bed recuperating and my father, who was a painter, was like, "why don't you start going over to Philip's house and just paint with him, hang out in the studio?" And so, I spent part of my summer hanging out with this really cool artist Philip Trussell, who lived in this tiny one-bedroom apartment packed with books and paintings and just painted from the time he woke up at 1 in the afternoon till 3 in the morning. You know, lived very simply; made amazing paintings; one of the smartest, most open, friendly people I'd ever met. He would speak to me, an eighteen-year-old with my head up my ass, like a peer—he was amazing.

TL Shoutout.

TB Yeah, shoutout! Every time I'm in Austin, which isn't often, I'll come and knock on the door of his studio and sometimes he's there, sometimes he's not...I hope he's still alive. But, at any rate, if it weren't for him and that kind of comfort in an art studio, I would not have taken an art history class in undergrad, but I did, and I knew within my first midterm, this is it, you know? I was just like, "I love this material, and it's also totally useless." Skateboarding taught me this ethos of like, "don't make a career out of it, have fun." Just do it 'cuz you love it, that's the only reason you should do it, and do it all the time. And I found myself feeling that for art history. Studying wasn't an effort, I loved talking about it, I loved the ideas. It sort of opened up this world. In spite of the fact that my father was an artist, he and I never really talked about art, so it was like, I finally got to figure out what my dad and his friends were talking about when they were talking about art.

KJ You never had aspirations as an artist?

TB Ehh, no. One of the things about growing up with a father who—he made art his whole life which is really inspiring—but he didn't sell a lot and he didn't really play that game of promoting oneself or buddying up to galleries or changing the way that he made art to be better. And I respected that, but I also saw the frustration and the kind of heartbreak of that. I realized after a while that art history was something that I enjoyed purely, but it was also something, unlike skateboarding, that I could maybe turn into a career. I love writing about skateboarding, but skateboarders aren't big readers. And I also like writing and thinking about art, and there are careers you can pursue if you write and think about art.

TL Wait, did you write about skateboarding for a while?

TB Yeah, yeah, I would write stuff for Slap or Thrasher, I had a blog where I wrote about skateboarding.

TL What's that blog?

TB It was, what was it called? It was called *Remembrance of Things Whatever*. How completely Proustian and wannabe *Big Brother* New York...

KJ That's amazing.

TL Proustian skate writing...



Agnolo Bronzino, *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*, c. 1545

TB If you look it up right now it's probably turned into either porn or recipes. But I kind of hit a point where I—and it's happening with this too—where I started writing only about skateboarding, and then little by little it would be like, oh, there's this big Courbet retrospective at The Met, I'm gonna write one thing about Courbet that has nothing to do with skateboarding, and then all of a sudden I found myself in my blog, in like, 2007, writing a lot about art in a skateboarding blog. Skateboarding's a pretty physical activity but is also super aesthetic, and art can be a kind of immersive aesthetic and intellectual activity, and I like the way that those two things kind of dovetail in my life.

TL You don't think that skateboarding could be an intellectual activity?

TB I don't think it should be. It's fun to talk about skateboarding, and it's fun to debate and theorize, but that doesn't matter when you're trying to do a crooked grind. You have to clear your mind.

TL I would argue a painter would say the same thing.

TB I agree, the painter may be acting in this zen-like state of an empty mind when they're making art, but they're making something that other painters have to respond to, other artists have to talk about, and audiences have to look at and contend with. Art is sort of outward directed, in my view of it. Skateboarding is inward. Like, we skateboarders can talk about it, we know what we're talking about, but people who don't skate should not, and do not, know about skateboarding. You know, they're never gonna know the difference between a crooked grind and a backside noseblunt and they're not really gonna care that that bench is used that way.

TL One of my favorite posts of yours was of this really goofy guy wearing these crazy colors, he's doing the dopest tricks, and your narration is like, "To the rest of the world, we all look like this."

TB When my girlfriend's dad is like, "Oh, you skate?" he's imagining this. This rainbow swag lord.

TL But it's all absurd, right? Like the fact that I insist that my board, this piece of wood, has to move in this way and not this way, it's totally absurd. And I think a lot of times making art feels that way to me too, where it's like, "this is totally fucking meaningless." But within that we have our own codes and a way of communicating about something greater than just abstract shapes on canvas. One of my favorite things that you've written is about Watteau. You talk about him as a weirdo outsider artist to make a point about this kid's skating. You write, "Watteau was always an outsider. He got his start painting second-rate theatre scenes for a

middling audience. And although he would eventually be admitted to the Academic Royale, perhaps we can thank his alterity for his obstinate refusal to cater to the fantasies of his now exalted audience. Here we are faced with a theatrical scene yet there is little narrative. Dramatic gestures with no logic. What makes an artist like Watteau so compelling is this intransigent refusal to answer obvious questions. Looking closely there is something bothersome about the bombastic elegance of the central actor's costume when you consider his grotesquely bowed legs and thin ankles. If you ever wanted a picture of the untenable absurdity of the resplendence of the old order, this is it. Like this painting, your clip is an equally absurd, empty gesture with no logical narrative. Unlike Watteau however, you perform these meaningless gestures in utter ignorance.” [Laughter]

TB Yeah, I think it's fun to take something like the *Fête Galante* in eighteenth century painting and then compare it to skateboarding as if those two things can be compared. Which I really don't think they can, not even in my mind! As much as I'd love it—love it—if that had anything to do with what this kid was actually thinking. Also, my take on Watteau is completely subjective, someone else would be like, “no, he didn't think that, he's not an outsider, he was an insider, they created a category for him to show at the Salon.”

KJ I want to talk about how you arrived at the artists that you're interested in, because it's pretty specific. Skateboarding overlaps with art a lot, but not necessarily with premodern art.

TB It's like how I inhabit the world as a skateboarder, it's what I was thinking about when I was in my early twenties, those Mannerist and Italian Renaissance artists. I was a kind of horny, ignorant twenty-year-old and I was just like, “woah, there are these perverted pictures of Cupid kissing Venus...” I hate to say it but it was a very gauche and underconstructed kind of interest in shock value. But now I write about Florida watercolors, particularly by Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent.

KJ Oh yeah, this is your dissertation, right?

TB Yeah, my focus is on the Gilded Age. The Hudson River Museum, where I work, has this beautiful 1870s Gilded Age mansion as part of it with period rooms. And so, when I'm in my more serious hat, as an art historian, I'm really interested in this moment of change—you could argue the Thomas Piketty thing, that we're in another gilded age, there's the very wealthy, and then there's everyone else. So, I like that approach now, looking back at the period between the nineteenth and the twentieth century before World War I and seeing how certain ideas and approaches to say, Florida, the tropics, whatever, were established then and how they endure now.

KJ Homer and Sargent, they're both kind of kitschy painters in a way. They both had careers in illustration, right?

TB Homer started out as an illustrator. I think that traditionally in American art history they have been the two poles. Sargent is brushstroke and Homer is line. Homer is narrative, Sargent is bravura, portraiture that is superficial. I think that's how they've been characterized. And that's that same battle between the ancients and moderns, between Rubens and Poussin that was kind of the debate of the French academy. Delacroix or Ingres. So, I think that that binary needs to be collapsed a little bit with these two artists and I'm working on eroding that while they're in Florida, because they ended up painting very similar scenes. Sargent is a lot more narrative

than people give him credit for, he's a lot more ironic—he undercuts his subject at every chance he gets. And Homer is also a lot more complex, it's not just about telling a story, it's sort of projecting his own subjectivity on it. Calling them kitschy kind of sticks in my craw. Sargent has definitely been characterized as much more kitschy, but Homer, within his lifetime was sort of regarded as the American old master.

KJ What's your relationship to contemporary art?

TB It's more difficult. I mean, I love it, I go to galleries all the time and I see shows and have friends that are artists, but I often find that I'm a little bit out of that conversation unless I know the person putting on the show. In some ways, I sort of think it's too... I approach it like I approach TV or any other sort of thing that's kind of contemporary, like, I don't know if I need to learn everything about it because I'm experiencing it, it's part of my time. As a historian I'm really interested in kind of learning more about the Gilded Age, learning more about Florence in the 1540s, whatever. But here it's like, I know that person, I know who they know, I know who they went to school with, I know why this looks that way. Or there's enough information on the gallery sheet where I can kind of piece it together. So, I'm not anti-it! I mean, I always get these very well-meaning questions being like, “so, do you only like classical art? What do you think about so-and-so?” And I'm like, A) that's not classical, B) no, I definitely like other shit too, I just think it's more entertaining and more of a challenge to make that broader 500 year comparison to skateboarding than talking about this artist—who probably did skate!

KJ Well, I'm much more familiar with contemporary art, so the Robert Indiana story you wrote, which I didn't know, was really interesting.

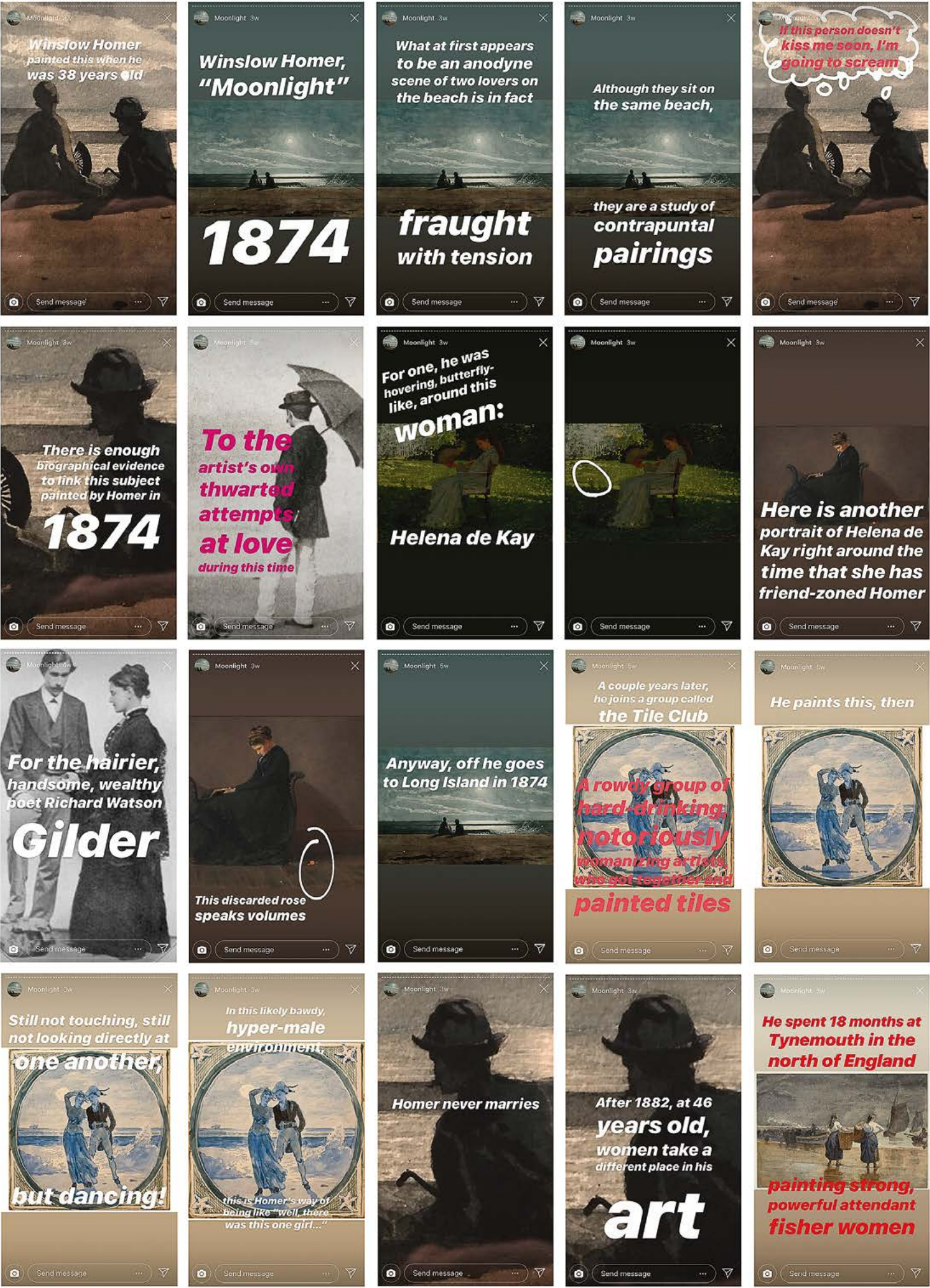
TB Yeah! So, we showed this suite of prints at the Hudson River Museum from Robert Indiana, and you know, everyone knows Robert Indiana as the *LOVE* guy but I don't think a lot of people understand where he began. I started researching him and I was just blown away. He was living in the South Street Seaport area and incorporating stenciling—and this is coming out of this old, lost nautical history.

KJ I'd never seen those before. They're so strange.

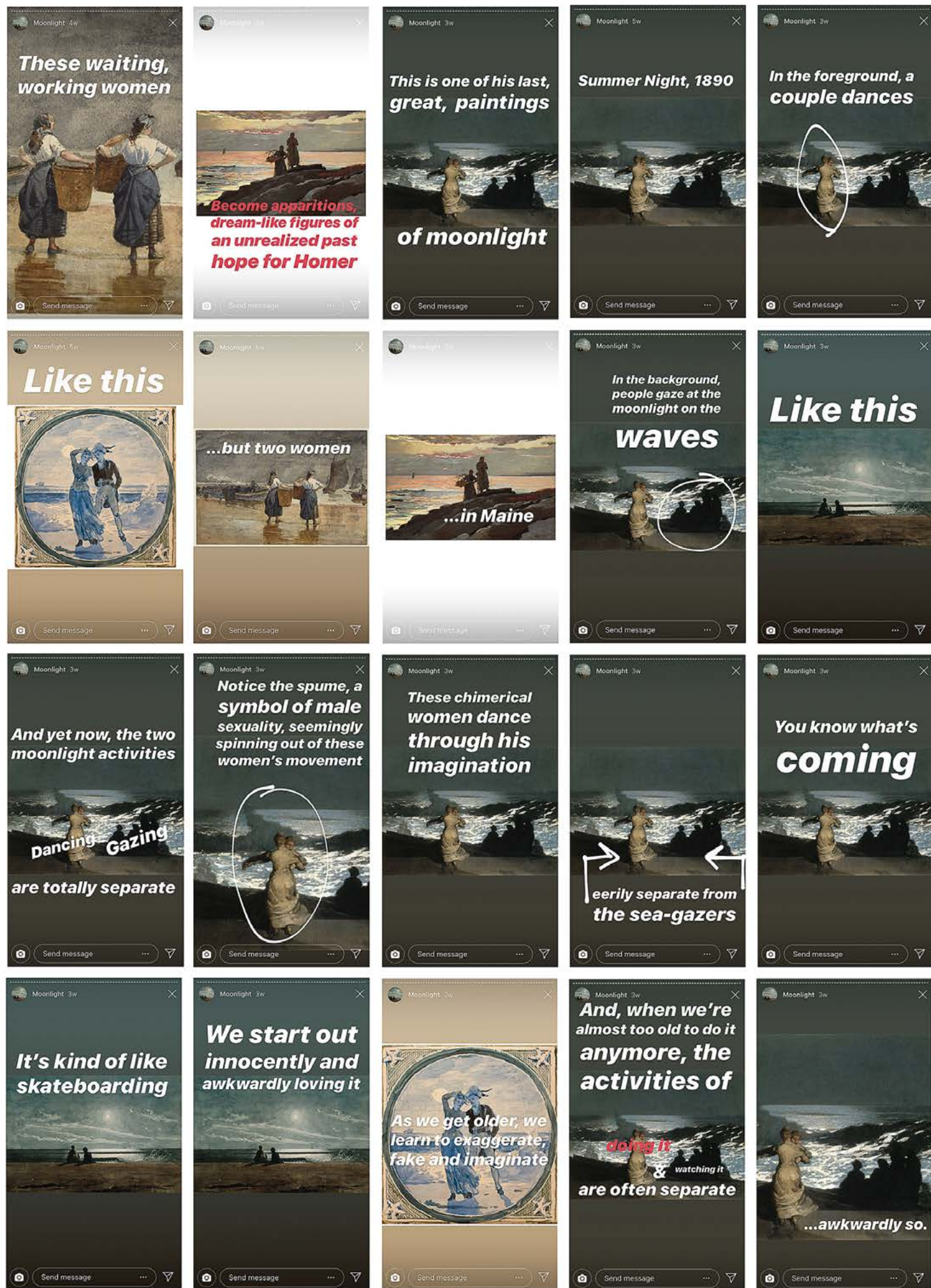
TB Yeah, they're weird. Alfred Barr bought one of those pieces for MoMA. I love that Robert Indiana was kind of better known than Andy Warhol in like, 1963. If someone was like, “who are the pop artists?”, Indiana would have been top three, Warhol would have been thirty, you know? And so, this whole *LOVE* thing came about because he did this Christmas card for MoMA with red and green and blue. That was also a sort of coded reference to his former partner. So, the graphic element of those letters was this homosexual relationship that could not be talked about publicly and that “O” on its side was about that instability of love. And I just loved how...[laughs] “loved” how in skateboarding, when we say *LOVE*, when we think of Robert Indiana, we think of *Love Park*, we think of that whole thing. Then there's this weird textual iconographic relationship between that sculpture and his own biography which ended up being kind of tragic. Everyone thought he was a sellout and because he didn't trademark it, he lost control of this image that had been deeply personal.

KJ And that partner was Ellsworth Kelly.

TB Yeah. I still like that scrappiness of the beginning of recycling texts and stenciling...I mean, that's very skateboarding,



One of many 'stories' on art history and skateboarding from Barrow's Instagram account, @feedback_ts.



right? Appropriating things that aren't art and using them for art. The critic Lawrence Alloway wrote about junk art. That whole transition between junk and pop I think is also kind of interesting, like, that resonates with skateboarders, you know? The sort of glitzy, graphic element of skateboarding and the sort of fashion-y part but also the fact that we're grimy and in the streets and appropriating garbage for our sport.

TL Love Park in Philadelphia was so central to the evolution of street skating. I love that that story and the Robert Indiana sculpture linger in the background of so many of the most iconic videos and pictures in skateboarding—whether or not these kids skating around it know it. I remember as a kid I spent so much time wandering from one public plaza to another...Like in D.C. I would skate Freedom Plaza, and there was so much history right around there. That's also a really important part of being a skateboarder to me, that wandering around. I remember in college when I learned about the Situationists and the *dérive* and I was like, "Oh, woah!"

TB "We do this!"
TL Yeah and like, "Psychogeography? This is a political thing that I do?"

TB Okay, I got that same sort of spark in college when I heard about them and all that, but at the same time, those Situationists were like: "Here's what we're gonna do, and we're doing this because we're responding to..." And I feel like skateboarders just did that because that's what we had to do, you know?

TL We performed those gestures in utter ignorance. [Laughter]

TB Yeah, exactly! But like, we have a different objective. We're not like, "Hey, let's change the way people think about the plaza in front of the Seagram Building" because we don't like Philip Johnson and that Miesian fucking fascism. We're just like, "this has a good marble ledge and open flat ground, let's skate here until we get busted," you know? ...And it is totally tied up in early modernism! Every spot, every plaza! Freedom Plaza, Pulaski or whatever, that's what, Robert Venturi or someone like that? It's one of those PoMo guys, because there's weird math of the L'Enfant...

TL Is it Robert Venturi? I mean, that makes total sense. I didn't know that!

TB I think so, it's one of them.

TL Utter ignorance, I had no idea.

TB Think about it, it's super PoMo. It's like, there's a map of D.C., there's the L'Enfant grid, and axial things.

TL And it's just empty until you get to these two giant ledges that are there for no reason.

TB Yeah! But then you have this very processional space of the Mall and all the stuff going on around it where you have neoclassical buildings and all this sort of monumental space that is D.C. and then that thing's kind of ironic comment on it. It's from the '80s, I think. Maybe 1980. Whereas like, Embarcadero, that's sort of the Bay Area brutalism thing. Love Park, even the Brooklyn Banks to some extent, or the Seagram Building or Washington Square Park, they all would not have been possible without this modernist urban redevelopment and changing space that ends up being empty, you know? And that's why skateboarders go there. But again, we're unknowingly pushing against that space.

TL I want to get into this other thing that you do. You give walking tours around New York, right? What are some of the stops? Are there any stops around here?

TB Yeah! I mean, we're between what is basically the architectural Cold War. You know, you have the Jarmulowsky Bank

directly across the street from here. They're trying to turn into condos or a hotel or office buildings...

TL It was gonna be an Ace hotel for a second but then I think they pulled out.

TB Okay, so Sender Jarmulowsky comes over to the United States from Eastern Europe and makes his fortune selling steamship tickets. And then when immigrants come over here, he opens Jarmulowsky Bank in 1877. That building dates from 1912 or something like that. So that's their tower you know, like corporate headquarters, bank in the lobby. And before 1913 there was no insurance on deposits, so at the outbreak of World War I, all these immigrants living in this neighborhood make a run on the bank because they were trying to pay for their families to come over. The bank doesn't have their money, they've obviously overextended themselves. You know The Forward building?

TL Oh yeah, a few blocks away. It's one of my favorites.

TB Jewish Daily Forward! The modern American Jewish identity was forged by this basically socialist newspaper, a labor newspaper. Strikes and all these things would happen in front of that building, there are Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels reliefs on the facade. So, you have socialism and capitalism. And these are the two tallest buildings in this neighborhood. The Jarmulowsky Bank had this little tempietto at the top that made it the tallest. So, the Jewish Daily Forward added this clock with this finial. Everyone's swinging their dicks around, and what's hilarious is that the bank goes bankrupt. One of the sons—Sender Jarmulowsky is already dead—commits suicide off the top of the building rather than face the people that are rioting on the ground floor. The bank, the rags to riches story of Sender Jarmulowsky, turns into a sweatshop through the twentieth century. Jewish Daily Forward turns into luxury condos. Here's the legacy of that Cold War, right?

TL I see who won.

TB I think that one of the things that giving walking tours has helped me do is that you learn how to talk about big ideas with the objects in the spaces in front of you. It's nice to know that stuff as a backdrop when you're skateboarding. It has nothing to do with skateboarding though. But we skateboarders also have our own significance. Like when we see Black Hubba, we know who did what on it up until the very last trick that's been done down it, and I love that, kind of unpeeling and revealing these histories that matter to us, and that's great.

KJ Different ways of engaging with the world around you, different kinds of lenses or frameworks. It's nice to switch between them.

TB Yeah! Where did you guys grow up?

KJ I grew up in Portland, Oregon.

TB Okay! And you grew up in the D.C. area so you probably both had central skate spots that had a good skate history. For me, I grew up in Austin, and Austin didn't have a history. So, I would go to San Francisco, and I would have that sort of Walter Benjamin auratic kind of experience looking at Hubba Hideout and I'd be like, "Oh my god, I'm too scared to even touch it!" [Laughter]

KJ I know the feeling!

TB Yeah, totally. I think for me, New York has always had this because I grew up in this tertiary city in the middle of the country, anything in New York is super significant. You're not so much convincing someone that they have to care, it's

like you're telling a story about someone they already love. And we have that in skateboarding, things done at certain spots matter a lot to us, you know?

TL I heard one of the stops on your tour is a statue of New York's first it-girl?

TB Audrey Munson. You can see her well-represented on the entrance of the Manhattan Bridge, on that triumphal arch that's based on the arch at Porte St. Denis in Paris. She's the figures of industry and commerce on that arch and was the first supermodel in a way. She started modeling at fifteen and now you find her on the top of the Municipal Building, above Henry Clay Frick's private entrance at the Frick collection, in all these exalted public spaces in New York as the allegorical figure for something, be it civic duty, industry commerce, abundance, whatever. She modeled for artists, like MacMonnies and Adolf Weinman, all these neoclassical sculptors. So, here's this moment in the Gilded Age when American cities are trying to look like second empire Paris. You know, like with D.C., these axial plazas with monuments in the middle. She happens to have the right look and even became the first woman to hold the torch for Columbia Pictures.

KJ Oh, wow.

TB But it's now based on Annette Benning, not her. There have been ten Columbia torchbearers and she was the first one. Standards of beauty have changed considerably but she was just at the right place at the right time, she had a very Grecian profile, and she was down to get naked. She was the first woman to be naked in a movie. Anyway, she has this kind of hot shit early career, and then is burnt out by the time she's 29, checks herself into a sanatorium after a couple tragic life events, including being involved in a murder, and dies in that sanatorium in 1996 at 105 years old.

TL You said you wrote a new story last night. You think you could share it with us?

TB Yeah. Well, let's see. Do you want the story of the board review or the review review?

TL What's the one that you said is about adulthood?

TB The board review, yeah.

TL The board review. Alright, let's do that. So, some kid that follows you sent a picture of their board and you made a video with this as response.

TB Okay, so these I usually write on the spot when I'm on the bus, but this one, I had just posted a huge story so I had to write it out and then apply it later when I was drinking Guinness by myself at a bar. You have to imagine this kid's board in the background and this is going on top: "There comes a time when you have to make some choices. Call them turning points, moments where you don't realize it at the time, but every choice you make matters. Say you're just out of college, thinking about what kind of adult you'll be. You're still living by this rhythm that your life will change drastically every six months, like cycles of a semester truncated by winter and summer breaks. And yet, six months doing the same thing sounds like an eternity. This is the skateboard of someone in that moment. Look at the trucks: well worn turning points." And then I would circle the trucks. "They have seen you through the last few semesters. They may see you into adulthood, but probably not. Not unless you don't plan on being an adult that skates very much." In this case, he'd grinded to the core of these trucks. "Which again, is a choice. Your stickers all speak to the myriad options in front of you. Virtue signaling righteous stickers

that announce that you have travelled widely and have a conscience. Most of them, anyway." And there I circled my own sticker. "What these stickers also propose is that you are more interested in the social dimension of skateboarding than the physical dimension." I'm doing a little projecting there. "Again, you're at the fulcrum between college and adulthood." I don't know how fulcrum is actually used. "Your skateboard is decorated like your bedroom door of the house you grew up in." Thought that was rather brilliant. "It's like you've mounted wheels to that door and ridden it away, first through the highly mediated threshold of a private college and now out into the highly mediated world of young adulthood. The patina of scrapes and scratches is reassuring. Slappy crooks pinch most sweetly when you know that they may disappear. But that wheelbase is troubling. Those are the scuffs of someone who is too far from home, too far from the rigid strictures of Forbidden 14." He's an Instagram account called anti-boardslide. "At your age, doing a board slide is giving into defeat. You're looking for fun in the aesthetics of adulthood, and what you don't yet realize is that adulthood is not fun. Adulthood is defeat. Adulthood is seeing your skills decline and your responsibilities increase, adulthood is realizing that all the stickers in the world won't prove your worth, no matter how righteous. You're at a crossroads, and it's a crooked path ahead of you." He's riding a Krooked board. "Make no mistake. You're at a crucial turning point. But your turning points are encouraging. Look closely at this haptic mirror image of your childhood and say to yourself, 'I should do more noseslides.' And don't worry about the rest. That'll fall into place." He didn't have a lot of noseslide marks on his nose. [Laughter]

TB And obviously, that review had nothing to do with him or his situation, I was completely projecting my own shit onto him. But that's the whole point of Instagram, right?

TL Yeah, that's great. When I go through your comments, everyone's calling you a hater but when you truly love something, you're critical of it. It's funny that those kids don't get that.

TB I would fucking hate me if I were a sixteen-year-old, because the thought that you're gonna be an adult who sits around and actually thinks about skateboarding rather than skateboarding all day, that's anathema to a kid. That sucks. I have to accept that the people hating on me because they think I'm a hater don't realize that I'm doing this out of love. And unless I want to drive myself crazy—and I often do—I'm never going to convince those types of people, you know? I don't expect people to pay attention to every post or read every story and look at what I'm doing *en masse* as this big project that's, to my mind, a kind of love letter to the type of era of skateboarding I like and a way to engage with skateboarding as someone who thinks about things conceptually and also let people know that I still skate. I don't expect people to get it. It's turned into a thing that I kind of can't not do. But yeah, of course, I'm playing the hater. I'm definitely doing that. If me criticizing someone's shitty clip that is obviously shitty, that no one told them is shitty, makes me a hater, then I'll be a hater! But at the same time, I'm also spending time thinking about that clip, you know, and that to me is expressing love. At the bottom of it I'm saying, "Let's pay attention to this, it matters." Even if skateboarding is meaningless, the fact that we're doing it is the most important thing.

