

THAT GOOD GOOD

THAT'S RIGHT, WE GOT THAT GOOD GOOD / FROM EVERY STREET TO EVERY BOROUGH, AND BACK TO EVERY HOOD HOOD

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2005

Zoot Sutra (song for my father)



'Hot 16' By Leo Valledor

My dad was raised in The 'Mo of the 'Sco aka the Fillmore district of Sucker Free aka San Francisco. Leo Corpus Valledor was born January 18, 1936. He told me his mother, Geronima, died, while embracing him. He told me his father, Abdon, abandoned him soon after. Leo was left with a house full of bachelor 'uncles' the recently immigrated men looking for work who continued Geronima's card games and often forgot to pay rent to the new, young 'landlord' Leo. He negotiated the Fillmore ghetto as a minority in another minority's community. Leo strode the strut and rapped the slang in order to communicate with, navigate through and yes, imitate fully, the hustlers/players/cornermen of that era's hood. He was a teenager during the Birth of Cool and so that became HIS music but he shared it with the Beats over in North Beach.

Although he was naturally skilled at drawing, it seems that the music allowed him to make a leap from designing the Galileo Yearbook cover to receiving a scholarship to California School of Fine Arts from 1953-1955 (now the SF Art Institute) and under the mentorship of Wally Hedrick he was soon having solo shows of his paintings at The 6 Gallery, the Spatsa Gallery and the Dilexi in the late Fifties. The title of a piece he made in 1956 simultaneously summed up the against-all-odds ambitions and his street swagger: "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Cat"

His first large paintings were in the 'abstract expressionist' style of the time but his interest in 'Eastern' philosophy brought him to a series of "monotone" meditative works with titles like "Becoming" and "Presence." He soon developed a new 'Eastern' philosophy when he moved to New York in 1962 and, along with the Park Place Group (the 'first' 'downtown

gallery' included Mark di Suvero, Peter Forakis, Forrest Myers, Dean Fleming, Robert Grosvenort, Anthony Magar, Tamara Melcher, Ed Ruda), explored Einstein's theories through various artistic media with Bucky Fuller's geometry, Buck Rogers energy and mind-altering substances. Oh, did I mention this was the early Sixties?

Mutual admiration amongst Leo, Donald Judd and Sol Lewitt surfaced at the Kaymer Gallery and bold shows at the Paula Cooper and Graham galleries upped his profile. Paintings as currency led to a tab at hip-mecca Max's Kansas City which allowed for free lobster dinners but he struggled to make less-than-\$30-rents for illegal lofts on Park Place and then Walker. He was part of the group that INVENTED 'loft living' and 'downtown.'

And he and my mom left it all in 1968 to return to SF. I was born a year later. 'Summer of Love' indeed.

He tried teaching at the Art Institute but didn't understand why the kids didn't just 'paint what they wanted.' When I was a kid I knew he was a Painter but didn't realize what being an Artist was. I knew he showed at 'The Museum' but I didn't realize there were other museums besides the SF Museum of Modern Art. And I thought everyone had parties for their 'openings' and worked at their 'studio'. He used to use masking tape to clearly delineate what parts of the studio a kid could play in. He would play Pharoah Saunders as my lullaby and Nina Simone as Sunday gospel. He played the sax 'freely' but couldn't read music... so he invented his own notation. His painting 'God Bless The Grass' alluded to other distractions. He couldn't hold his liquor and danced like fellow jazz-head, Bill Cosby. He showed HUGE paintings at the Oakland Museum but when times got lean he learned to paint small, jewel-like pieces on discarded door-skins he would find in the Mission District. His titles were an artform of their own alluding to culture...

The Flip Side, Disoriented Oriental, Okasian, Culi, We Shall Overcome

Inspiration...

Rothkokoro, Quintessence (for Edward Varese), My Ship (To R. Buckminster Fuller), In the Balance (To Mark)

Music...

Duop, Milespace, The Bridge (to Sonny Rollins), Zoot Sutra (song for my father), Work of Art (to the Jazz Messengers), Bluzing

Or just wordplay...

Ultimojo, Solidude, Mama Sutra

He took me to James Bond flicks and "A Clockwork Orange" when I was too young to get it. He listened along to my favorite mix-shows on KPOO and KSOL when he was too old to get it. He used to bring me to the Marina to listen to the big Latin and Samoan dudes play the drums and he took me to the early show of an Art Blakey/Jazz Messengers gig featuring an up-and-comer named Wynton Marsalis.

And he was always painting. He showed at the Modernism

and at Daniel Weinberg.

He was excited that I was moving to New York but had never been to Brooklyn when he lived there. He was in good spirits but bad health after he had a tumor removed from his brain and he died quite suddenly at the age of 53, apparently from a related growth. He died when I was visiting SF and when I was finally feeling like I could have a serious conversation about art and music and things like that.

Obviously there is a lifetime of details and stories that are between these lines and one day I'll put them together but today, on my fathers birthday, I just had to remember a FEW things...

Leo Valledor 1936-1989

Excerpted from Rio Valledor's blog:

<http://riogood.blogspot.com/2005/01/zoot-sutra-song-for-my-father.html>