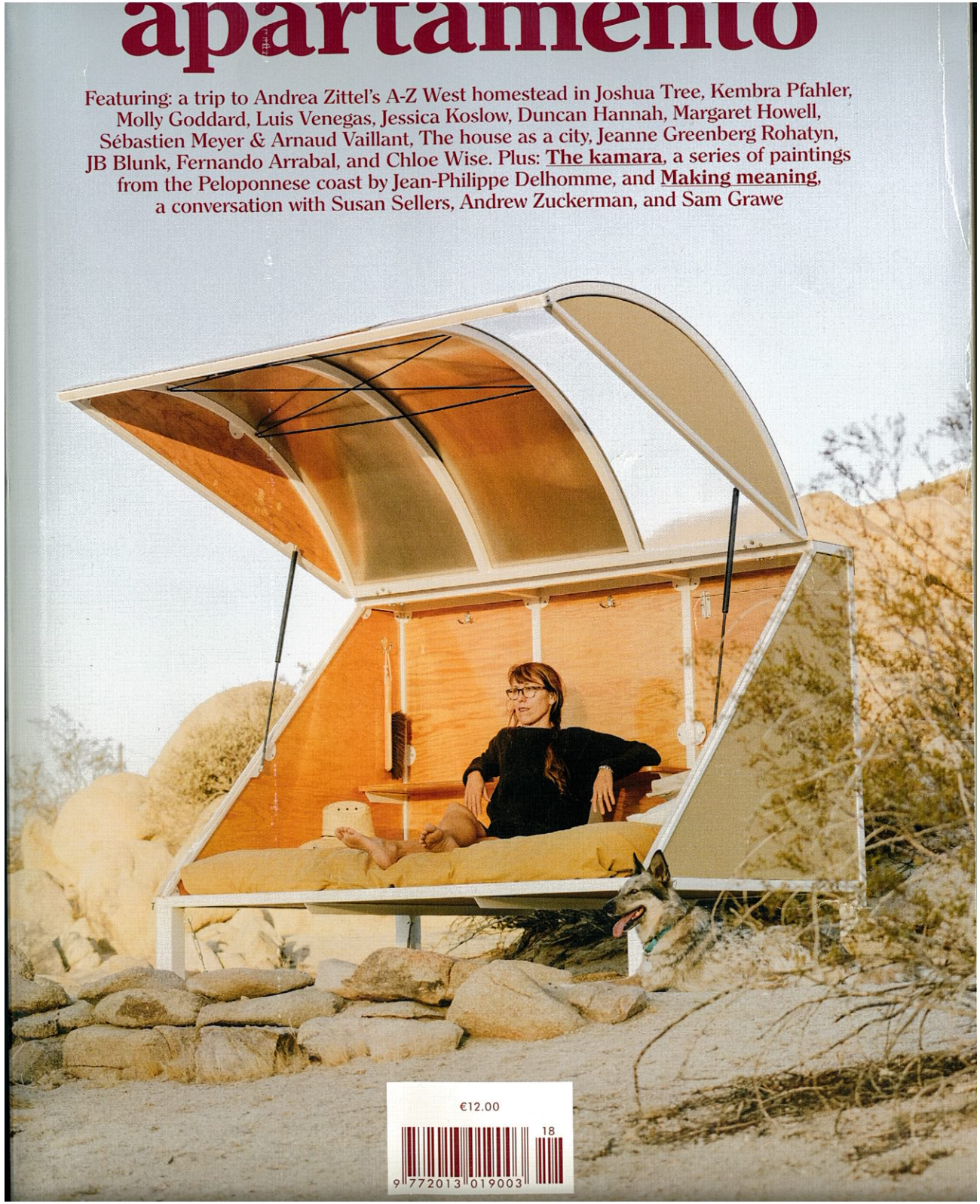
apartamento

Featuring: a trip to Andrea Zittel's A-Z West homestead in Joshua Tree, Kembra Pfahler, Molly Goddard, Luis Venegas, Jessica Koslow, Duncan Hannah, Margaret Howell, Sébastien Meyer & Arnaud Vaillant, The house as a city, Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, JB Blunk, Fernando Arrabal, and Chloe Wise. Plus: **The kamara**, a series of paintings from the Peloponnese coast by Jean-Philippe Delhomme, and **Making meaning**, a conversation with Susan Sellers, Andrew Zuckerman, and Sam Grawe



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Duncan Hannah is a New York City–based painter who has lived and worked in his apartment on the Upper West Side since 1977. After a Midwestern childhood filled with a curiosity towards art and all things British invasion, Duncan moved to New York to attend Parsons School of Design to study painting and quickly became a fixture and important personality in the city's glitter and early punk rock scene centred around New York's Max's Kansas City, CBGB's, and the Chelsea Hotel. His friends and collaborators were the who's who of New York's best and brightest: Patti Smith, Tom Verlaine, Richard Hell of the band Television, and Deborah Harry of Blondie,

DUNCAN HANNAH

INTERVIEW BY JIM WALROD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD KERN

to name a few. At the same time Duncan appeared as an actor in Amos Poe's *Unmade Beds* and Eric Mitchell's *The Foreigner*, which are now seen as two of the earliest and best examples of New York's rebirth in independent cinema. I stop by to speak to Mr Hannah on a beautiful August day at his apartment, which also acts as his studio and overlooks what was once one of the more notorious drug-infested parks in New York City and the backdrop for Jerry Schatzberg's *Panic in Needle Park*. It's now one of Manhattan's most sought-after and gentrified areas. I spoke to Duncan about his career as an artist in a rapidly changing New York.

Where were you born?
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

What was that like?
It was alright for a dopey little kid. Very Midwestern. But my parents had sophisticated tastes. They loved the Great American Songbook, Fred Astaire, and stuff like that, so I grew up being exposed to George Gershwin and Rodgers and Hart, etc. The Beatles were on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964, and then everything changed.

Were there other Anglophile influences that came into your house, in Minneapolis, during that period?
My parents had a lot of travel books that I would pour through. I had read and loved Sherlock Holmes, and my parents took me to England when I was 10 and 14, and it made a big impression on me. I could feel the history in Europe, new vistas. It was the Summer of Love, and *Sgt Pepper's* and *Are You Experienced* had just been released. I was with my mom on Carnaby Street, in London, and that was totally cool. I was just a kid in grey flannels. Why could I not be just a little bit older and be one of these fabulous people that looked like pirates and smelled of incense?

Were you drawing by then?
Oh! Yes, always.

What kind of things were you drawing as a kid?
The same things everybody draws: battleships, bombers. I used to draw with the evening news on. I have a drawing of Patrice Lumumba from that time. I probably loved that word and plus he was cool looking with his fez and all. I was always drawing James Bond in his car. I really wanted to be a spy. Drawing was a way of fantasising, which it still is.

A lot of my friends find periods and places that are outside of their upbringing. And these almost fantasies drive them through life. Looking at your artwork, it is easy to see a level of sophistication that harks back to exactly the period you are talking about. What influenced you at that point? Was it music? Film?
Both. Plus I was always reading. I had read [illegible] which were aimed at boys of my generation. The Rover Boys books were written early in the century. They go up against young villains and save innocent girls from terrible fates. I still wonder if that made me slightly askew. Then there was *Playboy* magazine; that was very influential.

With *Playboy*, was it women or the lifestyle?
It was both. It was the whole package. It was the first time I had ever seen nudity. The way Hugh Hefner presented this world of European sports cars and high-end stereos and bachelor pads, Jack Kerouac, foreign cinema, and all kinds of sophistication that he thought people would be down with. I kept thinking, 'If this is what being an adult is going to be like, I think I'll like it'.

There was also a bohemian lifestyle that Hefner was pushing at the same time.
Yes. That lifestyle kind of came true for me. I had wanted to be an artist since I was three, without even knowing what that would entail. Somewhere I must have seen an old movie about Greenwich Village with the striped T-shirts and candles in Chianti bottles and artist studios with skylights and loose, poetic women in black leotards, and jazz, so I had this picture in my head. 'Yes, that's for me', and for a while it was.

Music seems to be an important influence. What was the first music that had an impact on you?
After The Beatles paved the way, the AM radio in Minneapolis was great. The Castaways, Count Five, The Music Machine, garage bands like that. British bands would come through town, like The Who, The Yardbirds, and Cream. The message was being carried through the music and I was all for it. I absorbed it all.

How were you dressing?
Well, I was in a prep school for a while, so that was blazer and tie. Then I went to public school and was trying to emulate the British rockstars. I talked my mom into cutting my hair like Jeff Beck.

He actually had the best hair cut.
He did. He had great hair.

He still has the same haircut almost.
I think it is a wig.

Were you painting the whole time?
Yes, but I was much more influenced by the music at that point because it was so immediate. It was a common language. I remember a friend of mine calling me up and asking if I had just heard 'Over Under Sideways Down' by The Yardbirds on the radio. It seemed as if it was almost a secret knowledge. Much more important than seeing a Roy Lichtenstein show, for instance. I was visiting my sister in New York and went to MoMA. I did not understand a lot of what I saw and thought, 'Uh oh, I wonder if this means I am not an artist', because I thought if you were an artist you would immediately be able to understand it all, and I just felt locked out by much of it. So much left me cold and I thought, 'Uh oh, this is bad. I should be really loving this and I'm not'.

All the bands and the lifestyle you are talking about are based on mod and not on hippie and not on anything revisionist. That's very modernist. And a lot of people forget about the music of that time—it was about living in that time. It was about youth culture and 'now'. MoMA was probably outdated by comparison, in your mind.
Maybe. Painting is such a different medium. The great thing about music, when you're a kid, is it's the soundtrack to your life—you drive with it, you fuck to it, you get high with it. I mean, you don't do any of those things to fine art. I was really pining for the accessibility and immediacy that fine art just did not deliver, so I was into *Zap Comix*. I was copying Robert Crumb like everyone else. I loved Victor Moscoso and Martin Sharp, who did the cover of *Disraeli Gears* for Cream. By the time I got to art school—my teachers were colour field painters—I remember saying, 'Can you teach me how to paint like Manet?' And they said, 'Why would you want to do that?' I said, 'If only to reject it'. Matisse was taught by William Bouguereau, and then he rebelled and he became Matisse. But he had a great groundwork that informed everything he did after that.

Figurative painting was dead during that period.
It was a bad time for painting.

Did you ever go through an abstract period?
I tried to be an abstract expressionist for the first couple years of college, but I realised I was designing abstract expressionist paintings. It wasn't coming from down deep. For those guys it was like theatre. They were exploding in a very intelligent way. You look at a de Kooning and it is a high-wire act. He is so finely balanced and the accidents are so carefully considered. Anyhow, I realised I wasn't that guy, as much as I loved it, and I missed narrative. I missed Tarzan, I missed Sherlock Holmes, I missed James Bond, I missed *Playboy* magazine. I thought, 'Can't you just get everything in there?' There were English painters like Ron Kitaj and David Hockney who were including books and sex and design in their paintings. So, again, my focus went to England because the American pop artists weren't doing that so much. Peter Blake was using the Ziegfeld Girls and Tuesday Weld and things like that. He loved *Alice in Wonderland*, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, some of the same ingredients as British psychedelia. I found that very appealing.

Were you influenced at all by hippie culture?
I entertained the idea, but there was a conformity to so many hippies that I found very disappointing. I mean, I took the drugs and I slept with the girls, but I wanted something more. And some glamour, too. There were so many mediocre people masquerading as hippies.

When did you feel pulled to New York?
I always knew. I came here when I was seven, stayed at the Waldorf with my parents, and distinctly remember standing on Park Avenue under the hotel awning, watching the yellow cabs go up and down Park Avenue, and thinking, 'I get it, this is where you come to live'. Because it is the end of the rainbow. I went to Bard for a couple of years first, in Upstate New York, to buffer my move. But I kept coming to Manhattan to see The New York Dolls.

When you were coming to see The Dolls and hanging out at Max's Kansas City, what was that world like?
It was fantastic. When I moved here in 1973, I met Danny Fields at a New York Dolls show at the Waldorf and he—

Danny Fields is the person who signed MC5 and The Stooges, and who was instrumental in—
The Doors and The Velvet Underground and later The Ramones. He came up to me in the

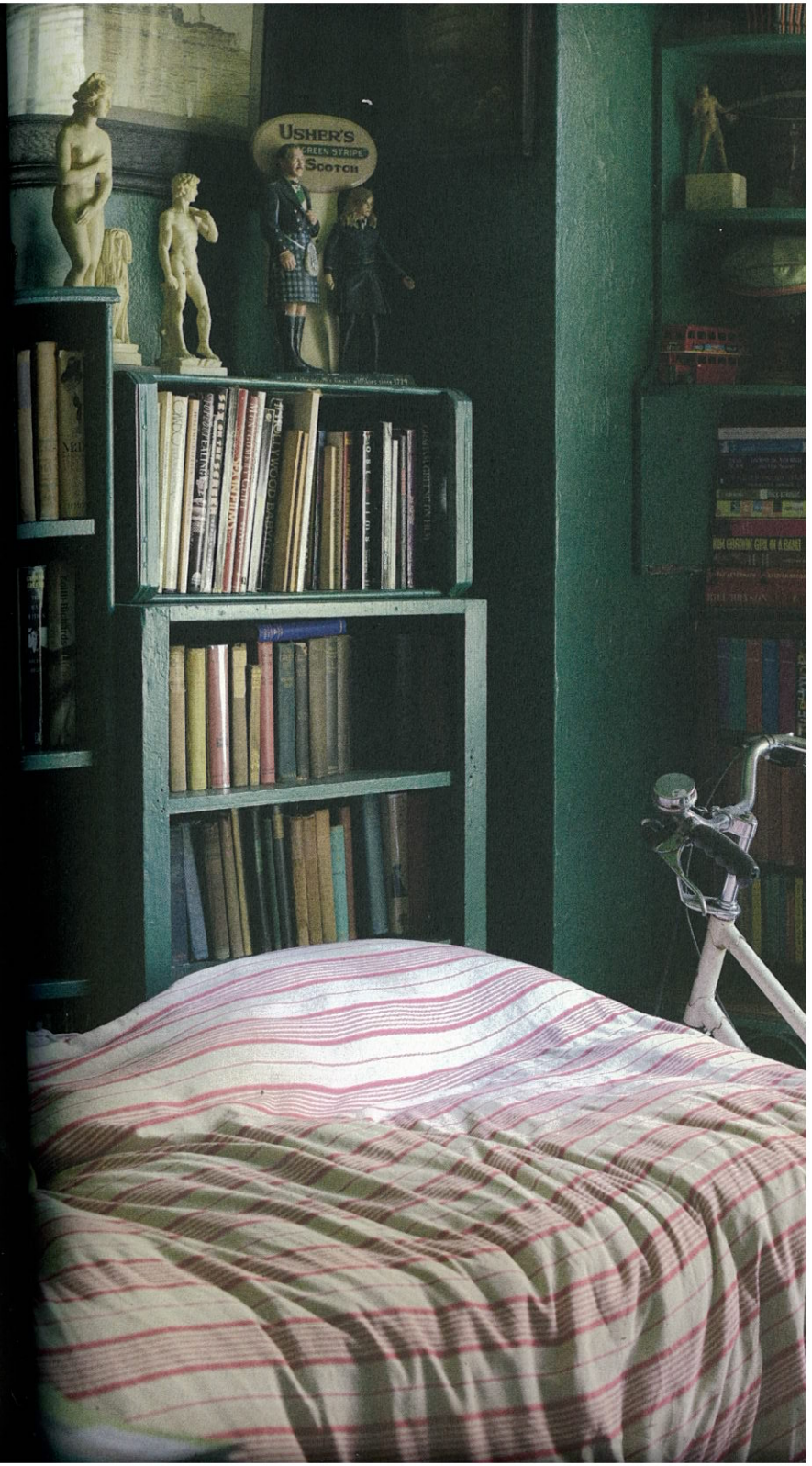
lobby of this Halloween party and said, 'What are you, a movie star?' I said, 'No, I'm an art student. Who are you?' And he said, 'I'm Danny Fields'. My brain whirled and I suddenly saw the back of record covers. I said, 'Wait a second. The Doors, The Velvets, The Stooges, MC5? That Danny Fields?' And he went, 'Mmhm. You get high marks'.
So he took me under his wing and it was like through the looking glass. There were all the people I had been reading about back in Minneapolis. He was like the gatekeeper and it was such a colourful scene. It was part Warhol Factory fantasy, part rock 'n' roll. The deal was, you moved to New York, you changed your name, and you were anybody you wanted to be. People were indulging their fantasies. To miss a night at Max's Kansas City would be a terrible thing. Like a new play every night, a crazy play. Taylor Mead standing on a table reciting *Finnegans Wake* or something, or Eric Emerson, in silver hot pants, serenading you. I just loved it.

It seems like you landed at ground zero of New York City culture. At that time were people aware that you were painting?
No, not really. To be an art student back then meant nothing. That came later on, in the late '70s, when dealers started coming over to look at my work. Sadly, they could not believe I was a figurative painter. It was uncool.

The first time I saw your name was as a kid, in some rock magazine. There was a picture of you and Jayne County—an early transgender rock star—and I thought you were a musician. Because you were always pictured with people like Debbie Harry and Patti Smith.
Well, that's who I hung out with. When I got out of school in 1975 I had to make a living, so I worked as an illustrator. I was in the *New York Times* and *New York* magazine and *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, stuff like that. I'd always loved magazines, anyway. I was doing punky collages. I was the token punk illustrator that magazines and newspapers might use. So I was still anonymous, although I'd been in a couple of underground movies. I was just that guy they knew from the rock club, who wore black velvet overalls.

Yes, you and your overalls.
Yes, me and my shirtless overalls.

I actually saw a model thank you on Instagram, wearing overalls and no shirt. It simply said, 'Thank you, Duncan Hannah'. Who was influencing you at this time?
Patti Smith, who was a friend of mine, because she was putting herself together from all these disparate elements, like Arthur Rimbaud and Anita Pallenberg and Billy the Kid. And I thought, 'That is what I am doing, too'. And David Bowie, he was putting himself to-



gether from people like Evelyn Waugh and William Burroughs. You take 15 passions and you put them in a blender and try to get some kind of interesting synthesis. Somebody called it 'new furniture made from old wood'. Have you heard that one before?

No, but it's so much better than recycling.
I thought, 'I think I am that kind of artist', because I had too many things I was passionate about. Some people aren't. I taught for a couple of years, and the majority of my students did not have these deeply felt passions. So, to them, one thing was as good as another. It was all kind of arbitrary. Impersonal.

At that time it was conceptual art, there was pop art, remnants of pop art.
Yes, installation, information, Earthworks. Boring.

The great Ray Johnson.
Yes, he was an anomaly, he was great. And, fortunately, he was a pal, and he was very supportive. A kindred spirit, because he would include everything. And Joe Brainard, he was another influence. His collages were fantastic, his paintings were fantastic, his poetry was fantastic, his journals; I adored Joe Brainard.

When did you start to think there might be a chance you could make a living as a painter?
Well, in 1979 I rented Club 57 with David McDermott. We decided we would try to get real art dealers in there, and then they would sign us up and then we would be real artists.

Had you moved up here already?
Yes, I moved here, to this apartment on the Upper West Side, from the Village, in 1977. Because beatniks in the Village would drop by with bottles of alcohol and I never got anything done. So I made a move up here to get some work done.

It was a culture of getting fucked up.
Yes. It was a belief system.

Did you know anybody at that time that did not get fucked up?
A few, and I was very suspicious of them. I thought, 'Come on, let's get drunk and see what happens'.

How did your show at Club 57 go?
Nothing happened. I think I sold a painting for $350, and we all got drunk and it was fun. But that was it. I don't know if anybody looked at the paintings. But it's so funny, because in 2017 MoMA is putting on a big show about Club 57. And they contacted me and said, 'Turns out you had the first art show there ever'.

Club 57 is where Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring, and Klaus Nomi came out of.
Yeah. It turns out that silly little nightclub is what has given me entrée to MoMA.

Congratulations.
I know, I couldn't believe it. One spends his entire career trying to get into MoMA, without any luck. They said, 'Oh yeah! We want these two paintings, and we are showing three films you are in, so you're going to be well represented in this show'. So it just goes to show you never know, you cannot plan.

So when did you start to get representation?
Well, then there was the Times Square show, which made the cover of the *Village Voice*.

But the Times Square show was very much a different type of show. Once again, different types of art to what you paint.
Yes, it is true, but I was in it.

A lot of people believe graffiti was taken seriously for the first time at that show. That is where Fab Five Freddy showed, that is where Keith Haring showed, that is where that whole tribe of painters came from.
Yep. It was a launching pad. Then came the New York/New Wave Show at PS1, and Diego Cortez put a lot of my work in there. It was a one-two punch.

Was there a sense of eroticism in the paintings at that point?
Yes, I must have had a couple of nudes in there. I hadn't quite found my true voice yet, but on the other hand, it didn't matter. Suddenly, to be a young painter was cool. I quit illustrating immediately and I was a full-time professional painter at age 29.

Were you selling paintings? Were you able to support yourself?
Yes. There was a waiting list and things got better and better until there was a stock mar-

It seems you've always stayed completely true to an aesthetic that is wholly yours. The first time I saw your paintings, I thought the world you were painting was very aspirational.

It wasn't conscious, but I'm sure that's true. You just evolve, and I evolved into me. It was never a cerebral thing. I never thought, 'Oh, OK, I've got it all plotted out!' Which is just as well, because, for me, this was the best way to do it. Trial and error. I found myself gradually, and I was fuelled by things that I was fascinated with, which did not include the zeitgeist.

How have you seen the city change over that period of time? Because it seems you have a fortress of things that are dear within us.

I do relate to what TS Eliot said, 'These fragments I have shored against my ruin'. I know what he was talking about.

But it's great that within this apartment you seem to have created a world that is distinctively yours. The second you turn the knob to go out into the hallway, it seems that you enter into a less interesting New York.

That's nice to hear. New York has certainly lost some of its eccentricities. I loved the used-book shops and the used-record shops. Now there are no record shops at all! A lot of my old haunts are gone. Chain stores have come in, and it has become expensive and definitely more homogenised. When I first moved here, I was struck by the fact that all these marginal people I met had found a niche. I met an amazing array of eccentric people and they all had jobs. They worked for David Bowie or they worked for *16* magazine. You moved here and New York would find a place for you, no matter how weird you were. I thought, 'Wow, good for New York!' It is better than I even thought, because it does that for you. I mean, it did it for me. I don't know if I could have made a living elsewhere, but I haven't had a job since 1974, which is pretty great.

I don't think I've ever had a job!

That was my ambition, to do what I love and never get a job and not have to grow up too much, and it worked! I don't think New York is necessarily that place anymore. But hopefully I'm too far in the door now to get kicked out. I miss all the eccentric people who came from all over the world. We all found each other and we were all lured by The Velvet Underground and the romance of Manhattan—you didn't have to go to another borough.

You didn't have to go above 14th Street.

Now that is impossible. It's so unfortunate. My friends and I were on a hunt to find out who we were through our artistic forefathers, to see who we felt aligned with. It was like a treasure hunt. I had a taste for the fringe, the also-rans, the figures who remained shrouded in mystery. You had to hunt through used-magazine shops, and you had to listen to the radio at three in the morning, and you had to do all kinds of things because a lot of it was very obscure. Now with the internet it is all a click away, and therefore it means a lot less. We are all privy to the same and infinite amount of information. All my 20s were spent on this search, and I think that served me very well.

Having said all that, I still find it is such a relief to come back to New York City. It is the only place in the country I would ever want to live.