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INTERPOL AND THE STOLEN BILLY

Oh woe was we when the Billy work was reported lost or stolen from the Rourke Museum's permanent collection. We hightailed it to the INTERPOL Stolen Works of Art Database, but oh was we again - WE WERE DENIED ACCESS. It seems XART (eXperimental Art Research Terminal) isn't in their acronymic vocabulary: "In accordance with our strict data processing rules, only information provided by authorized entities (INTERPOL National Central Bureaus and specific international partner organizations, such as UNESCO, and ICOM and ICCROM) can be inserted into the database." - And Blah, Blah, Blah. The aforementioned work had been acquired by the museum's beloved founder, James O' Rourke, and described fondly in this note:

Dear Billy, The "International Register of Historic Happenings" Bronze arrived. It has been again installed (I hope this time forever) in the same place as 1985 and it looks good. I feel better having it back and up and am very pleased. I thank you kindly. It seems we need another one to attach outside the gallery on the southeast corner for last 18 June 1990. What does another bronze cost?...

Billy is a regular in Rourke's *Midwestern Invitational* exhibition. For the 64th, he created a lost work replacement, a restoration if you will. His work was sold to a collector and donated back to the museum. But, there's a caveat: To be whole again, it must be hand etched and stamped. To date, there has been no word on how the museum wishes to proceed. Perhaps a performance installation for the 65th *Midwestern*? Only time will tell, but the show always opens on June 18th - so maybe - just be there.

THE DEAD AGAIN - AT 40

Billy was buried alive for three days 40-years ago in his much ballyhooed *Performance for the Dead*. Way back then, President Reagan's Undersecretary of Defense for blah, blah, blah, TK Jones, was quoted in the *LA Times* on nuclear threats: "If there are enough shovels to go around, everybody's going to make it." In the current atmosphere, Billy says, "Climate...War...Slow down...Maybe we're better off underground".

The burial is Art History. The anniversary snowballed into multiple events throughout September. Unburied Billy took on the title role of *Exhumed Corpse* for all public appearances. The actions built to a zoomed live art climax straight out a New York's famed Franklin Furnace Loft.

The Furnace "On a mission to make the world safe for avant-garde art" teamed with The Interior Beauty Salon "An organism living at the intersection of creativity and healing" to co-sponsor the *Full Moon Exhumed Zoom* finale. Billy and Nicolás Dumit Estévez Raful Espejo Ovalles kicked it off with a tete-a-tete now archived at the www.interiorbeautysalon.com site.

The Loft's Grand Master of Ceremonies, Harley Spiller, offered introductions with his usual brand of panache. Billy told how his live burial grew evermore controversial. Naysayers and self-

appointed guardians of art and etiquette were aghast! Funding sources chickened out. What if he died? But, it wasn't Billy's first rodeo. *Performance for the Dead* took on a community driven life force of its own.

A trio of those art workers zoomed in with their memories and tribulations. Artist and architect, Kevin Pomeroy, was a go-to-guy and a pall bearer. Catherine Schuler Vargas had been swept into several past Billy works and happily joined the mourners. Family matriarch, Catherine Mora Cleary, had served as a bodyguard for the *Intergalactic Tour* and came with all 3 kids for grave digging parties. In the end, Kevin summed the community up as simply, "Let's bury Billy".

Art rustler, Ed Lagace, chased the excitable *Exhumed Corpse* around Art Works USA in a zoom studio tour. Admittedly, it was sometimes a bit Keystone Cop-ish. They focused on the archived burial objects and *In Sympathy*, the international postal art exhibition that accompanied the performance. Artists from over 20 countries had sent thoughts and images inspired by the live burial, end of life issues, death and dying.

The *Zoom* hour was too tight for a similar open call. Billy invited 6 highly acclaimed artists for an *In Sympathy Live Art Invitational*. To say the least, it was a high point as the performance sextet donated five live, yet virtual, 2-minute master works:

First up, **Beth Stephens** and **Annie Sprinkle** simultaneously spoke and sang a melodious funerary cacophony complete with candles while wearing their very stylish bonnets.

Nicolás Dumit Estévez Raful Espejo Ovalles performed a total metamorphosis before our eyes while a disembodied voice recounted a nearly fatal milk intolerance - from his own mother's milk.

Ed Woodham appeared mysteriously as if out of nowhere with an elegant golden headpiece within a borealis landscape. He belted out a heart wrenching *Love Me Tender* and disappeared as surprisingly as he had arrived.

LuLu LoLo embodied a Parisian chanteuse with all the trappings and beckoned Billy to find his final resting place among the famous on her Pere Lachaise Cemetery map.

Bellavia wore a flowing antique venison game bag gown in a river walk splash down at the site of the "Angola Horror" - an 1867 train wreck that killed 49.

Why bother with our inadequate descriptions? The whole event is archived at <https://franklinfurnace.org/category/loft-archive/>



Bellavia as

sculptor/ure

THE PLAYERS:

Beth Stephens and **Annie Sprinkle** coined the term EcoSexual and are masters of multi-media art about love, sex, and queer ecologies.

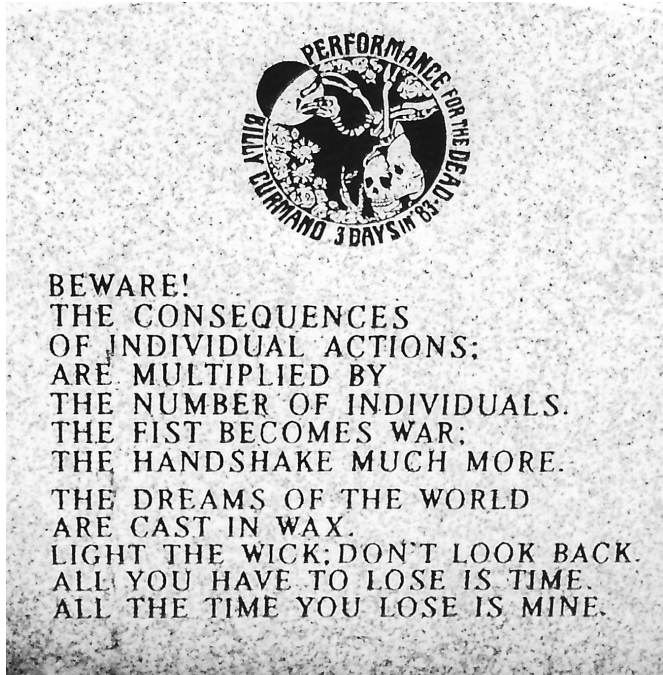
Nicolás Dumit Estévez Raful Espejo Ovalles is an artist, curator and Death Doula who treads an elusive path that manifests itself performatively through creative experiences that he unfolds within the quotidian.

Ed Woodham is an elder Southern queer artist and founder of the wildly popular annual New York City event *Art in Odd Places* - sometimes replicated in other places.

LuLu LoLo is a performance artist, playwright/actor and activist. Her *Where Are the Women* public actions gently pushed NYC to recognize and add more monuments to women.

Bellavia is a multimedia artist that you may remember as the provocative Death Valley "Spirit Guide" in Billy's Hampton Award winning *The Search (For the Spiritual in Art)*.

The Zoom Tour ended by the newly dedicated *Leaning Grotto of Witoka* and the Mount Airy granite tombstone. Billy read from the message "carved in stone":



BACK A WEEK UP FOR THE BLOWOUT BASH

Volunteers had prepped and polished - or at least cleared out the Art Works USA spider webs for The *Driftless Region Blowout Bash* and the *Exhumed Zoom*. The *Bash* was a gift for Billy's adopted hometown and a warm up for the Loft finale. Both opened with Mitákuye Oyás (relatives) - an acknowledgement of these Psinomani, Dakota and Ojibwa lands.

About 17,000 years ago, the Muir Glacier covered all but this tiny earth island with silt, gravel and rock - glacial drift - during the last ice age. Twice before it had been sparred from glaciers and left with a steep, rugged landscape and the world's largest concentration of cold water streams. Is it coincidence or a drift less miracle that Art Works USA anchored here?

The *Performance for the Dead* logo jumped out from banners, pendants and T-shirts. It was frosted into the decadent chocolate anniversary cake. Revelers from near and far sated themselves on the "mandatory" midwestern potluck. They strolled freely about the studios, grounds and exposed archives examining burial ephemera and samples from the *In Sympathy* exhibition. As the clock struck three, the group gathered on the grounds for

a gravesite visit followed by the formal grotto dedication. Billy recounted its colorful history from a didactic panel:

THE LEANING GROTTTO OF WITOKA

Long ago, some MN "good old boys" wanted
to play a trick

on the Witoka Store proprietor affectionately known as Heini.
In those days, dynamite was easy to come by.
It'd be pretty funny to blow up the outhouse!

But it didn't explode.
The boys investigated...

BOOM!

Their truck was covered.
That tipped the authorities.
The culprits were arrested.

Restitution included a
fancy two-seater concrete block outhouse for Heini.
The entire structure was moved,
purified and transformed.

It now stands proudly as

THE LEANING GROTTTO OF WITOKA.

Dedicated September 23, 2023

-Billy X Curmano

The heavy chain and lock were lifted and the steel door removed to reveal objects of worship from many of the world's spiritual traditions alongside simple baubles, doodads and kitsch. A group photo followed before a return to the Experimental Sound Lab and the New X Art Ensemble's signature style of free jazz.

A SET UP FOR 40 - AN ANNIVERSARY MONTH

The *Exhumed Corpse* published Zines with kids for the River Arts Alliance *Family Art Day* and the first 40th Anniversary event. The following weekend, he fronted the New X Art Ensemble in a double Anniversary Celebration for Broken World Records' 11th and the *Dead's* 40th. The latest incarnation of New X is: Jeff Strand (guitar), Ed Lagace (bass clarinet and flutes), Steve Smith (sax), Marvin Lightspeed (percussion), and Dan Novac (bass).

The *Corpse* traveled to White Water State Park for Campfire Reveries and then the Winona Arts Center for the *Members Exhibition* Reception with his *Plight of the Single Angel Family*.

40TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE SWAG TEE SHIRT...

Ebony black with the bold white performance logo is certified fair trade and organic cotton. - Margarita says, "Lovely and extremely comfortable." In Men's sizes:

S, M, L, XL @ \$27.00; XXL \$33.00 XXXL \$37.00

Include Size; Add \$10.00 shipping/handling to all items. No Tax.

BURIED ALIVE PARTY KIT... Party suggestions plus:

An Actual Burial Stone from the Original 1983 MN Gravesite -
with a Certificate of Authenticity.

County Medical Examiner's Death Certificate (Copy).

Two *Performance for the Dead* Post Cards and a Memory Card.

The *Household Word Project*.

The *Meet Your Maker Fashion and Etiquette Guide*.

The Search (For the Spiritual in Art) DVD with sights and sounds from 3 performances: *Performance for the Dead* (Buried Alive), *Death Valley Desert Classic* (40-day fast)

and *Swimming the Mississippi* (2,367.4-mile, source to gulf, Mississippi River Swim and *Henry Hampton Award Winner*).

The 1983 *In Sympathy* Postal Art Catalog.

A steal at **\$122.00** (\$99.95 plus \$7.38 TX & \$14.67 shipping)

Tees & Kits Available from www.billyx.net and Art Works USA



PERFORMANCE IN ABSENTIA: BILLY BOARD

Billy performed in absentia for 8-second per minute intervals, on a 10' x 21' electronic billboard with the handwritten script, *I knows I'm insignificant...but...at least I planted trees.* - along with an altered shipping label off a bundle of his many bundled baby trees. Editors note: Billy spent several years planting tens of thousands of trees initially for the MN Department of Natural Resources, then as a contractor to private landowners.

A version of his message was also published in the *Earthkeepers Handbook* (Ecoartspace, Santa Fe, NM, 2023). A facing page included his “green side up” simple tree planting guide. He scaled the tree planting tribute up for the holidays.

The digital billy board was visible when traveling towards the Mississippi River and downtown Winona, MN via Mankato Avenue from November 13 through December 10. The live art ode slightly disrupted the usual slew of commercial and holiday messages. He cautioned, “Watch for it, but drive safely.”

If you ever wondered where your money goes, this was one superfine example. If you'd like to sponsor a Billy Board, ring us up.

Continuing his legacy of “unauthorized performances”, Billy had cookies to share “Under the Billy Board” in a meet the artist unauthorized closing reception. Unauthorized Parking was available at both the WNB Financial and Target lots. The gathering took place without incident.



TEXAS TWO STEP: TOUR & PERFORMANCE

1. A virtual studio tour similar to the 40th Anniversary tour, but before burial archives were dug out - streamed to the University of Texas at Austin (UT). Co-conspirator, artist, curator, and UT instructor, Nicolás Dumit Estévez Raful Espejo Ovalles set the wheels in motion. The video is available on line, archived at UT and the Interior Beauty Salon. 2. Billy was invited back to UT in person for a visiting artist talk and live performance *Greetings from the Mississippi to Waller Creek*.

A SURPRISE ARRIVED FROM VVAW:

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

Winter Soldier Service Award

Presented to

Billy X. Curmano

In recognition for sharing your creation, *Oxy the Smart Bomb's* precisely-guided political barbs in *The Veteran*...20 years and counting!

VVAW Board of Directors

October 22, 2023

The “Winter Soldier” term derives from Thomas Paine’s *The American Crisis*, December 23, 1776:

“These are the times that try men’s souls: the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered;...”

The Vietnam War, or as the Vietnamese call it, “the American War”, was a mistake built on deception and lies. VVAW soldiers spoke out and acted to end it. The organization staunchly supports peace and social justice. VVAW recently announced their third sponsored library and learning center being built at An Nghia Secondary School, Binh Dinh, Vietnam.

Billy and New X often perform his heart wrenching *Wagin War* in their shows, but he took it solo for a Winona State University History Class and *Poets' First Tuesday*, at Blue Heron - Winona.

LAMENT & A SINGLE ANGEL FAMILY

Billy has been reinterpreting old masters’ paintings with his own romantic renderings. Two of these 2023 paintings were hung in Winona for “members’ exhibitions”. *Water Nymph Lament*, recalls *The Lament of Icarus* by Herbert J. Draper, 1898. It was hung in the River Arts Alliance (RAA) member show. The water nymphs were kind of a left over fantasy from the 2,367.4-mile Mississippi River Swim. Billy sometimes stumbled ashore with long swim, hallucinatory exhaustion and became an Icarus as the support crew collected him. The show also included Billy videos: *Think On* and *Willy Billy Zoom* (with Willy Willy Why) and an mp3: *New X Lament* (Sixty seconds from the *New X; Trios & Duets* CD).

The Plight of the Single Angel Family was inspired by Lindberg’s *Heilige Schutzengel* circa 1900 and it graced the Winona Arts Center members’ show. Lindberg’s lovely angel was mass produced and very widely marketed. It’s still a favorite for Christian children and often hangs above their beds. Billy has been baffled by two children in obvious peril with only one angel. He unequivocally believes each child deserves their own angel.

Staying local, Billy showed up for a *Story Telling Night* at Ed’s bar with a funny, yet spine tingling, true account of frigid winter nights in an isolated farmhouse terrorized by rats and... his very large nemesis... the... “Rat King”.

MORE ROURKE

Billy's Rourke escapades began way back and a bit akin to postal art. Sophisticated mailings and catalogs came out of the blue from far-off Fargo. As luck - or fate - would have it, an extended *MN Artists in Education* residency sentenced him to several weeks in a tiny town's shoddy motel room where the tap water ran rusty brown. He was rode hard and put up wet, but Fargo seemed near enough for a weekend reprieve.

He motored to the Rourke with no appointment or expectations and dropped his portfolio at reception. He suggested someone might like a look-see while he strolled the galleries. Surprisingly, it worked. A curator wanted a video for their collection and whipped out the big museum checkbook. But, Billy had but a single portfolio sample along. The curator responded, "OK, No problem! I'll just give you a check so you don't forget." Billy was delighted with a rare advanced payment - No strings, No committee, No red tape, No paperwork.

On his next visit, he was surprised and a bit baffled as folks smiled, pointed and seemed to recognize him. His taped antics had gone into rotation on public television. Rourke's patronage grew with their annual show, panels and performances. He flew to Fargo disguised as a penguin and joined the panel, *Current Trends in Film & Video*, along with John Hanhart the Whitney Museum film curator (See: Vol. 4 #4). His *Impervious Flag Demonstration* for the *31st Midwestern* landed on the front page of the *Grand Forks Herald* (See: Vol. #8). Rourke Museum artists responded to his Mississippi River Swim with a themed exhibition. In another adventure, they formed a flotilla to escort a *Billy Swim* across Lake Itasca and the Mississippi Headwaters.

BOOTH HOUSE R.I.P. PLUS THREE

Billy cofounded, *Booth House*, a collective of culture warriors, in 60's-ish Milwaukee. It was a center for art, music, culture, anti-war, social justice and so on. His weekly music sessions started there. The members became as brothers, sisters and sometimes lovers. They ran with the dogs, played pick-up basket and/or alley-ball - sometimes just across the street with broom in hand to clear the glass - in what they affectionately called "dog shit broken bottle park". It was a neighborhood low in rent and high in crime.

Sadly, Brother Tony Greensward passed on. He lived at *Booth House* for about three years, until he was shot. He moved away, but remained Billy's life long friend. He supported the art and played a role in several projects. In 1980, they road-tripped together - up and over the Great Lakes - for Billy's first Canadian performance, *K'un*, staged at Vehicule Art, Montreal. The odd props at a 4 am Thunder Bay border crossing had the confused agent call in a supervisor. The blurry-eyed boss arrived adjusting his tie. Tony couldn't be bothered. He simply said, "You deal with it" and laid on a bench to sleep.

It was an enduring relationship. Twenty years later, Tony spent a week in Death Valley supporting Billy's 40-day desert fast. In a final gesture, Tony named Billy co-executor of his estate. Billy says, "What does that mean?"

Booth House to farm house: Billy moved to MN with Beth Matejicka Peters, her son Jason and Spirit the white wonder dog. Beth first charmed Billy at his Broadway galleries. They became lovers, art workers and family.

Sadly, they split. Beth took Jason back to Milwaukee. Time passed and eventually so did Beth. An every cloud has a silver lining memorial reunited Billy with Jason and his family. Billy brought some of her ashes back to their old farm house and saved some for the Leaning Grotto and the Mississippi River. "Come hungry, thirsty, and sober. We'll take care of the rest!" - Read the card for *Buddy Fan*, patron, collector and lifelong friend, Johnny Russell's memorial. For a time, he provided Billy a rent free studio as long as he kept Johnny's house full of art.

Johnny's generosity was legendary. He stopped by Booth House and sent Billy off to Austria for the *III Vienna Graphikbiennale* with walking around money and the words, "We work for money, but live for art".

Your INVITATION To FUN & ADVENTURE The Billy X Curmano Fan Club

If you enjoy contemporary artist Billy X Curmano, here's a great way to stay abreast of his projects. Join the discriminating crowd and become a member of Billy's own Fan Club. Send the form, all correspondence and Annual Membership Dues to:

ART WORKS USA 27979 COUNTY ROAD 17
WINONA, MN 55987

RING: 507.452.1598 or 507.279.4681

billyx.net@gmail.com or visit www.billyx.net

Momma Curman, President Ex Officio Perpetuitas
Kimberly Haedtke, Vice President Emeritus

MEMBERSHIP TYPES

\$2 CHEAPO: Some mailings; **\$15 IRREGULAR:** As afore, plus well-wishes from most of us; **\$25 REGULAR:** As afore, plus well-wishes from all of us; **\$50 DELUXE:** As afore, plus *Great Moments in Performance Art* (Non-adhesive) stamp series or Substitute Surprise; **\$250 DELUXE PLUS:** As afore, plus original print or Substitute Surprise; **\$750 SUPER DELUXE:** As afore, plus weekend vacation at Scenic Art Works USA (travel from Winona, MN included) or Substitute Surprise; **\$1500 SAINT:** As afore, plus vacation extended 1 week or Substitute Surprise; **\$5000 BUDDY:** As afore, plus 1 of Billy's special pizzas and Billy will pal around with you for 1 week or Substitute Surprise.

Institutional Rate: Add 20% for 1 newsletter to circulate and 1 to archive. Make checks payable **Art Works USA**. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Premium "Surprise Substitutions" may be made at our **whim**.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Okay Kimberly! I just can't wait; here are my first year ANNUAL dues. I want to join Billy X Curmano's Fan Club

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Sign
Here > _____

Member Amount

Type _____ \$ _____ Date _____

E-mail?