



The Artist Who Fell to Earth

WILL CHUCK CONNELLY'S STAR RISE AGAIN?

BY | JANE ROY BROWN

IN THE 1980S, the New York City art world was as hot as the space shuttle's nose cone upon re-entry, and the handsome young painter Chuck Connelly emerged as one of its star-kissed sons. He sold a million dollars' worth of work during that decade, including a piece to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was close-ups of Connelly's juicy brushstrokes that appeared in scenes from the film *New York Stories* (1989) when Nick Nolte's character worked at his canvas.

Not bad for a blue-collar kid from Pittsburgh.

But by 1990 Connelly's

career had crashed. The reasons for his blistering fall from grace is excruciatingly clear to anyone watching *The Art of Failure*, an HBO documentary about Connelly and his work, which has its premiere at the Bantam Cinema on June 14. (The film airs on HBO July 7 at 9 p.m.) The screening precedes the opening reception for the Connelly exhibition at New Arts Gallery in Litchfield (newartsgallery.com) from June 7 through July 14. The film, by Jeff Stimmel, documents Connelly's talent for both painting and self-immolation. Con-



Connelly in 1986 at the Metropolitan Museum

nelly soliloquizes at Andy Warhol's grave, hires an actor to impersonate him, and (more than once) lurches about his studio, beer in hand, railing against anyone he feels has sold out.

In one of the film's interviews, a gallery owner recounts how Connelly publicly lambasted *New York Stories*, sealing his reputation as an ingrate. "That was the end of Chuck Connelly," she says.

Or was it? *The Art of Failure* makes clear that the 53-year-old Connelly, now self-exiled to Philadelphia, is trying to stage a comeback. With a body

of work numbering more than 3,000 pieces, he has plenty to show for the past two decades. According to Stimmel, Connelly hopes that the film and the show at New Arts will help relaunch his stalled career.

Stimmel, like his subject, hails from Steel City, where he started out working on the TV show “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood.” This is his first feature-length film, culled from more than 300 hours of footage. The project began in 2002, when he met Connelly’s sister at The New York Times’ television division, and she introduced the two men. Initially fascinated with the vagaries of the art world, Stimmel shifted his focus to Connelly’s life

cially at the time when Connelly was first being seen in New York. He’s a genius of the brush-stroke—a pure painter.”

The fact that Connelly appears to have his finger stuck on “self-destruct” doesn’t alarm Carretta: “The majority of artists go through huge struggles just to be seen, so this story is common. The work was our prime focus, and it was exceptionally strong.”

The show comprises 21 pieces spanning Connelly’s career and ranging in size from 60 by 68 inches to 24 by 36 inches. “What’s hard to capture on film is the dynamic, three-dimensional surface of the paintings,” Carretta says. “There’s a physicality to the work—it’s about the act



“WHAT’S HARD TO CAPTURE ON FILM IS THE DYNAMIC, THREE-DIMENSIONAL SURFACE OF THE PAINTINGS,” SAYS THE GALLERY OWNER.

and work, filming him for about five years. “When he’s not drinking, he’s kind of lovable, and he’s a great artist,” Stimmel says.

New Arts Gallery owner and artist Tony Carretta agrees. “We see a lot of great paintings, and these fall into the master zone,” he says. “His painting is entirely without gimmick, which many artists relied on to get attention, espe-

cially at the time when Connelly was first being seen in New York. He’s a genius of the brush-stroke—a pure painter.”

cially at the time when Connelly was first being seen in New York. He’s a genius of the brush-stroke—a pure painter.” Stimmel previewed the film for Connelly before the Litchfield County screening. “He was a little uncomfortable, but he felt it was honest, and with him, that’s most important,” Stimmel says. “I don’t think he cared for the title at first, but he’s grown to like it.”



books to summer by

WHAT WOULD AUDREY DO?

Timeless Lessons for Living with Grace and Style

By **PAMELA KEOGH**

Thank God for Audrey Hepburn. Fifteen years after her death, she is still the go-to girl when we need tips on style and manners. Pamela Keogh, author of the bestselling *AudreyStyle*, poses the dilemmas facing us in today’s world and answers them, channeling Audrey. The book covers everything from fashion and makeup to dating. A must-read for anyone wanting to emulate one of the world’s most gracious women.

ECCENTRIC GLAMOUR

Creating an Insanely More Fabulous You

By **SIMON DOONAN**

If you are a fan of David Sedaris, you will enjoy Simon Doonan as well. This is the man responsible for putting Barneys New York on the map and making store windows a new venue for camp theater. In these new comic essays, Doonan offers women an alternative to the cheapness and tackiness that pass for personal style—thanks to the Parisés and Britneys of the world. He is laugh-out-loud funny, but on the money with his opinions.

THE BISHOP’S DAUGHTER

A Memoir By **HONOR MOORE**

Honor Moore had a turbulent relationship with her father, the Honorable Bishop Paul Moore of New York. Growing up in a family of nine children who went from being wealthy to living among the poor of postwar America, Honor Moore wrestles with her private conflicts, unaware of the ones her father battled at the same time. She reveals a riveting story of a family and the secrets that can destroy it.

—Joseph Montebello