

# STREET NEWS

*The Soul and Spirit of the Street*

## A NEW BEGINNING!

### JIMI HENDRIX

the exclusive story of a rare filming of the incredible guitar legend as told by John Marshall, the filmmaker himself (page 6)

### HOME SWEET HOME

an art exhibit portraying Home by people living in the streets, squats, shelters, and other alternative spaces (page 8)

### MIDNIGHT RUN

...ing look at room-service on wheels for the roomless of



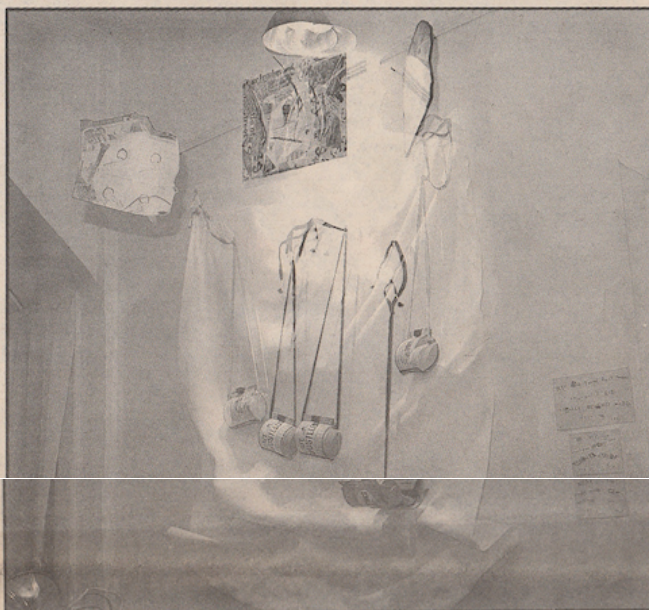
# WHAT WOULD BRECHT HAVE SAID?

Review of HOME SWEET HOME by Austin John Marshall

Before he fled Hitler to the USA, and later became a Forum, Brecht (Bertolt) conceived (in 'The Threepenny Opera') of an organization of panhandlers, led by an arch-criminal, who had to sign on to collect their crutches, eye-patches and other items needed to gain their quota of public sympathy.

The group show which opened at the Brecht Forum April 1 contains one piece at least with a cutting satirical edge which Brecht (the playwright) would have appreciated: 'Camcorder Box,' by Nick and Gabriele Manhattan. Using techniques "taught me by the masters," Nick Manhattan sells the box for \$50-\$100, not in galleries, but on the streets. Later, of course, the unsuspecting pigeon discovers that the box contains a camcorder-weight brick, plus a statement by the artist and an offer of a full refund—"which no one has so far come forward to claim."

The Manhattans lived (until it was recently burnt down) in a tepee at the Canal Street end of Manhattan Bridge. Both have degrees (Nick an MA in



Literature from University of Illinois, Gabriele from Yale School of Drama), and are dedicated to challenging existing ideas of what art is. "If we put an aborigine dreamscape or Navajo sand-painting into a gallery; and they sell the piece and buy a limousine, what is it?"

I asked Nick if had a better term for the kind of artist represented in the show. "Urban Nomad is probably the best term to define what's in this show from what's in a normal gallery. Knowing that you have some kind of permanent residence affects your whole approach to creating visual works."

At the opposite pole from Nick's

'Camcorder Box' is another box; rather, a rough shrine made from 2 sides of a cardboard box; before it a coffee tin with a sprig of dried flowers, 2 fifteen-cent candles, a tipped-over paper cup with change and a drapery of plastic strips; pasted to one side of the rough diptych are pictures and to the other a typed memorial list of names of—presumably—street people known to the artist. The list is extensive and dates stretch from 1981-92. This piece, by Annie Q. makes a fitting memorial to the Reagan/Bush years.

Between these two poles—of Street Smarts and Pathos—there are around forty works, using every kind of medium, including metal assembly from 'Suckers Hole,' Robert Parker's forge on 13th Street, and video by Exavier Muhammad. East 13th Street, with its homesteads, seems to have produced a school of artists/activists, like Exavier, who presented the first of two performance pieces in the evening. Exavier wrote last year's successful Living Theatre production of 'The Larry Davis Story.' Like that play, the performance on April 1 featured the extraordinarily beautiful and gifted Carla Cubit.

Another group featured at the show were Voices and Visions from the Margins who sell work by "homeless, formerly homeless and the economically disenfranchised." Annie Q., whose baby this

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Street News' General Manager  
z on a job well done.



Photos by Steve Sooto



# WHAT WOULD BRECHT HAVE SAID?

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project apparently is, would not give *Street News* any co-operation (*Street News* extends to Ms. Q. any space she needs to say why) but anyway; her group *Voices and Visions from the Margins* can be reached at: South Press, 343 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522; telephone (914) 693-0473/3591.

Back, momentarily to Brecht, who answers the question "What Does Man Live By?" with "By resolutely ill-treating, beating, cheating, eating some other bloke/A man can only live by absolutely forgetting he's a man like other folk." Anita Morse, who curated this show, with her energy, optimism and compassion (and in the face of no financial assistance) affirms with every word and work of her own, the humanity of the people we would probably not like to think about too much. With ladies around like Anita Morse, the cynics don't stand a chance.

## ENCOUNTER ON EAST 13TH ST.

*"We recycle trash into beauty. Hollywood does the opposite."*

Exavier Muhammad

To appreciate the tricky logistics that challenged Anita Morse in assembling 'Home Sweet Home,' try following in her footsteps. If the people whose work you want to show don't have regular addresses, telephones, or even doorbells, how do you contact them?

To contact Exavier Muhammad necessitates a certain amount of hanging out around the row of homesteading buildings on East 13th Street near to Avenue B. On a stoop there's a black guy playing bebop licks on an alto sax. I talk to another black guy there, asking him about Exavier. Information will cost a cigarette. He

thumbs towards the building next door. "He's up there on the 4th floor." I bang on the door and yell up a couple of times. No reply. Another sax player, Butch, appears on the stoop beside the first. "You'll find Exavier in Apt. #7 in the last blue building near to Avenue C on 14th Street." I hike over there. Ring #7. No reply. A construction worker lets me in. No reply to a knock at #7. I leave a note and my phone number. Walk back to 13th and B, and put a similar note through the mail slot of Exavier's building. As I turn to leave, Exavier comes out onto the stoop.

"I need to hear more about you and what's happening around 13th Street." "Okay; I've just been working in the building—the dust has made me dry. I need to get a beer from the corner store."

I asked him if the definition of homesteading that I'd heard somewhere—that your apartment becomes your career—applied to his situation. "That's true to a degree"—he looked at the dust on his hands—"but we've moved beyond that here. Let me show you what I mean."

Exavier is a slim, softly-spoken black man looking a lot younger than his 45 years. He takes me into 537 and proudly shows me a small, but pleasant cafe/theater/community center space. "When the Living Theatre (note: this is correct spelling) on 3rd Street closed, they gave us a platform for a stage and some lighting equipment. We put on regular performances here. We've got some great jazz players right here. Butch and the East Side Bandits, and Luther Thomas, the guy you heard playing out on the stoop—he's got a CD coming out soon. This is the 'Coffee Thirty Cents Theater'. I'm putting together a company to perform a new play I'm writing, 'And They Began to Paint

Their Faces Green.' It's an apocalyptic fairy tale about ways to end racism."

I asked him about some of the other creative people in the strip. "There's Bill Stark, who is an inventor of new bicycle-type vehicles called '10,000 Bicycles'—he maintains a pool of cycles for anyone to use. Then Robert Parker and his forge; there's a whole group there called 'Sucker's Hole.' Butch and Eve Washington and the East Side Bandits. Luther. There's Carmen Hall, a Vietnam vet who paints Native American portraits"—Exavier points up to a canvas behind the stage. "Tim Canty, who's a poet and writer did those canvases up there. Kirk and Carla Cubit you know. They were in that sketch we did at the 'Home Sweet Home' show, which Carla wrote, based on a bad experience she had in the shelters; and how squatting is a healthier alternative environment."

"Rolando Politi helped to establish a recycling group in the neighborhood. Another thing about living here: carpentry skills. You have to when you're carving out your apartment from a raw space."

"Plumbing too?" "There's always someone who can help put in a sink or a toilet."

"We've developed a whole network of other kinds of service. We have a certain amount of free food distribution. Anna Tucker, who's a qualified shrink, can offer counselling. And Ron Kuby, who's in partnership with William Kunstler, is available to help with any legal problems with the buildings. All our carpentry is up to code in case of a visit from the fire department."

"We had a windfall lately. MCA wanted to depict an East Village band who were hiding out in a squat, having been

accused of a murder. So they used one of the buildings here as a location. It's for an episode of 'Law and Order,' which is due to be aired on May 5. The facility fee they paid helped us install a hot water system in the building next door, and pay up what we owed to Con Ed for one of the buildings."

"It's worth noting that Hollywood, with all its resources, can't re-create what we have managed to do here. We take trash and recycle it as beauty. I suppose you could say that Hollywood does the opposite."

I asked Exavier if he'd ever been homeless. "Not before I came to New York; it was about ten years ago. I was in pretty bad shape until I got into homesteading. Before that I was in Philly; I had a Bachelor's in Theater and an MFA in playwriting from Temple U. Then I worked with Charles Fuller's Afro American Theater Company. This situation is really hopeful for me right now."

Perhaps in Exavier Muhammad, the homesteading movement has its own Bertolt Brecht.

*Back in his native UK, Austin John Marshall worked as a graphic artist, writer, film-maker and music producer. Since coming to New York twelve years ago he's been doing much the same; also working for WBAI radio, 'Downtown', writing and performing poetry and painting murals in his adopted neighborhood, the Lower East Side. No stranger to the myriad perils, constant fascination and occasional joys of Manhattan street life, he brings to this paper the kind of eclectic eye and ear we've been looking for as contributing editor.*



Read the first column of the following two pages; then the second column...

**Interview with Anita Morse  
by Richard Moskowitz**

*S.N.:* How did you get involved in "Home Sweet Home?"

*A.M.:* It's a long story. I had done something similar to this about a year and a half ago when I did the "Self-Portrait Myth of Mental Illness" show that was also at the Brecht Forum."

*S.N.:* I'm not familiar with that.

*A.M.:* It was really a pretty incredible show.

*S.N.:* What was that?

*A.M.:* It was when I worked at Community Access, and I ran the photo unit there. We were sitting down and talking to the members of the photo unit from the Community Access day club, and we discussed...we wanted to do something that was from the clients, and one idea was: what does it mean to them to be diagnosed as mentally ill, and do they agree with the diagnosis? What does it mean to the people who are diagnosed? We read about people diagnosed as men-

express exactly the way he feels? So we worked on it, and what evolved out of a lot of discussion and intense debate was that we put up a piece of foil over his face so it sort of looked like him. We took the foil off and the head was like a sculpture of his face! And the camera angle was very contrasting; his face was hidden in shadow; up above was the looming hand. And it's just an incredible shot. Yeah. It actually go into *Interview* magazine. That was one of them. Most people believe that mental illness doesn't exist and that it's a social construct. A couple of people in the show thought that mental illness does exist. One person said, "I am mentally ill. I go through cycles of mental illness." She is diagnosed as manic- depressive. She's really...they're all really amazing. And she believed it did happen to her, that she did go through cycles of what you'd call mental illness. We would have some pretty heated debates because some other people said "No, it doesn't exist." It ended up being a really interesting show. And how

# HOME SWEET HOME

tally ill, or we read about the homeless—we read about any kind of group like that from social service providers or academics. You know—experts in the field: psychiatrists. And we don't really hear about it from the person that's labeled.

*S.N.:* Right.

*A.M.:* So that's where this whole thing came from. It's to give people a chance to say, "hey—what's it like for you? What does this mean to you?" And this was educational for me.

*S.N.:* With the mentally ill?

*A.M.:* Well...I worked with them being a photographer. They told me what they wanted and I did the lighting. And it was different in that we really worked through certain issues. Like, someone said, "This is how I feel. I feel that when a psychiatrist talks to me he doesn't see who I am, he sees who...he sees a mirror-image of himself." So we have this incredible shot of a guy. How can we let someone

"Home Sweet Home" came to be was that it was my perspective of seeing what it is...to be homeless. What does it mean to be homeless? Not even to be homeless, but what does "home" mean?

*S.N.:* "Home." Right.

*A.M.:* This isn't about "homeless," it's about "home." What does "home" mean to people?

*S.N.:* They don't have one.

*A.M.:* Well, no, because like one person said, "Hey—I live in a condominium box. And that is my home!" And that's his belief. Then I learned about people from the self-help movement. They have a collective of houses and squats and buildings where they came in and through their own time and energy made these...great places to live.

*S.N.:* So how did "Home Sweet Home" evolve then?

*A.M.:* Well, it evolved through my going out and "outreaching" different people



that live in alternative spaces in different situations. How did these people that are displaced manage for themselves? When do they sleep at night?

*S.N.:* What did it take you to put this together?

*A.M.:* It was difficult because most of the people don't have phones! So I travelled a lot.

*S.N.:* So you hooked up with these artists—you contacted 20, 30, 40, 50 people?

*A.M.:* Once you get in, it's really through word of mouth. You just need to get in, to have that door slide open a little. Once it's slightly ajar you just walk through it.

*S.N.:* I know this "Home Sweet Home" exhibit opened a week ago. Have many people come to see it?

*A.M.:* I've had many people call me.

*S.N.:* Is it too early to say whether or not there'll be another one next year—bigger and better?

*A.M.:* You're the second person to ask me that! You never know....

*S.N.:* You've learned what to do, what not to do?

*A.M.:* Yeah. Trials and tribulations.

*S.N.:* Like what? More press coverage? More promotion? More people?

*A.M.:* Well, the space is a little problem...

*S.N.:* Did you have a budget? Were there any donations or community support?

*A.M.:* I wish I could say I did!

*S.N.:* So you did this all out of pocket? I commend you for doing this without any real support or finances!

*A.M.:* I had a lot of support from the people I met. Annie Q. was incredible. She really helped me.

*S.N.:* She had some negative feelings |



*Anita Morse congratulated by S  
Richard A. Moskowitz*

about *Street News*, but we've offered her a forum to express herself. I would like to talk to her.

*A.M.:* She's really an incredible woman. What she has done is really worthwhile!!

*S.N.:* This "Home Sweet Home" exhibit will make an interesting story. Here's an art exhibit put on by homeless individuals. It will let people know that homeless folks do have talents.

*A.M.:* I have a real problem with the term "outsider art." It's an insult when people come up to me and say "I didn't realize how talented homeless people or mentally ill people could be!"

*S.N.:* This exhibit will demonstrate their talents. I'm sure it will be a success. Thank you, Anita. Good luck.

*A.M.:* Thank you, Richard.