



the unseen blinky palermo

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My father-in-law, Jack, is a blown-in-the-bottle bohemian—a free-thinking, free-wheeling sort who grew his own food and made the dishes that held it while residing in a New Mexico commune; actively participated in the Beat movement of the late '50s; stood in the crowd when Martin King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech; was arrested no fewer than fifteen times for protesting various social and political injustices; and, at some point in the mid '70s, after moving his young family to Greenwich Village, kept occasional company with art world icons such as Blinky Palermo.

In fact, it was Jack who introduced me to Palermo, via *To the People of New York City*, a fifteen-part work consisting of thirty-nine paintings by the avant-garde mixed media artist born Peter Schwarze, in Leipzig, Germany (1944). Schwarze (later Heisterkamp, after his adoptive parents) is said to have been christened 'Blinky Palermo'—the name of boxer Sonny Liston's infamous promoter—by his mentor/professor Joseph Beuys, the notorious German conceptualist and Dadaist theorist.

Palermo was a geometric minimalist taken with vibrant hues. He played with stripes and color fields—an approach quite common among abstract artists of his period—and, ultimately, created four particular bodies of work: "Stoffbilder" (or "the cloth pictures"), wherein he would sew together two or three pieces of commercially dyed monochrome cloths and then mount them on stretchers generally measuring six feet-six inches square, effectively putting across his ardor for specific color combinations); close to thirty works painted onto walls, often centering attention on spatial characteristics of some room or embellishing its features; acrylics painted on metal panels mounted away from walls at large intervals from one another and visibly brushstroked by extreme colors; and "Objects", i.e. wooden staffs, painted or shrouded by painted canvases.

Since August 15th, I've been covering the annual three-week Edinburgh International Festival. (It's over fifty years old and has earned its reputation as one of the world's best celebrations of the finest in opera, theatre, music, and dance.) The big buzz, for many in my line, is an exhibit planned for next year's event: It seems that a long-lost masterpiece of Blinky Palermo is to be raised from the dead.

In 1970, Palermo was based in Dusseldorf and created a wall painting, titled "Blue/Yellow/White/Red", that graced the entrance hall of the Edinburgh College of Art. "Strategy-Get-Arts"—a palindromically monikered festival exhibiton—found the entire school overtaken by cutting-edge artists (including Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Klaus Rinke, and Joseph Beuys) and a sort of organized mayhem ensued. It was at this time that Blinky painted "B/Y/W/R" onto the high back wall as approaching visitors were sprayed with water and a pile of chair parts decorated the steps. When the festival concluded, a directive went out for Palermo's work to be painted over, despite the protests of Richard DeMarco, who had invited the German artists to Edinburgh, and several others. But those protests fell on deaf ears; the college's powers-that-were had no respect for avant-garde art and felt it cheapened their institution's image.

Nonetheless, the ghost of Palermo's "Blue/Yellow/White/Red" has continued to haunt the minds of many who pass through the frieze section of the hall where it is hidden. Charlotte Higgins, arts correspondent for The Guardian UK, recently interviewed Andrew Patrizio, Edinburgh College of Art's director of research development, who said:

"The college authorities, at the time, wouldn't have rated it as an artwork...[but] In my seven years, here, it has always been something that has come up in conversation. The idea of recreating it has been bubbling around, but there has never before been a critical mass behind the idea."

Never, until now. Patrizio is one of a group behind the "B/Y/W/R" restoration project, funded by a private donor and Edinburgh College, itself. Since the water-based paints used by its artist most likely have not survived thirty-odd years of white emulsion, "Blue/Yellow/White/Red" (one of only two such-known Palermo works outside of Germany) will have to be recreated as well as revealed. Patrizio's plan is to do both by next year's Edinburgh Festival. My plan is to be present at the unveiling, with my father-in-law at my side, to perhaps gain further insight into the quiet, womanizing, influential, short-lived Blinky Palermo.

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