

early october 1998

II Letter

Report on month number one: Imperial Artist in Res.

alright, so I was wrong. I can do this. I'm getting with it, catching my balance and starting to get some work done. I'm avoiding the hip art scene, spending as much time making sculpture in Blackett Lab's shop - Room 013A, drawing in my office and flat, making sure my lectures are good and other wise hiding as much as possible... from the press especially

As a footnote, the first couple of weeks over here saw me very stressed out and unhappy. Each morning my big decision was weather to carry my return airplane ticket with me, so I could train straight to the airport when I decided to bail out, or to leave the ticket here at the flat, pinned to the ceiling so I could not get to it without conviction, and would have to return here before bailing. Well, I've gotten past that stage now. But I was, a dozen of times, ready to pull out of here - not wanting ~~to~~ do this. Richland looked better.

Of course what has made the difference is getting my knarley hands back to making sculpture. And the environment of the Physics workshop I'm in (013A) is very comfortable and nurturing. I've gotten to know my 12 shop-mates, skilled blue-collar workers all, and really like them and after they rather accepted me into their family they are very helpful. I get invited out for a pint or a joint after work, been to a birthday party... it is so much more comfortable than the hip art scene around Arts Catalyst or the ArtLAB gallery where my exhibit is (at Imperial College). And the foundation all this is built on is all the help and support from my friends back in the States between my EYE of the Storm lectures back in March and when Linby put me on the plane. Couldn't have done it without you!!!

II Letter

(page 2 - now 13 October
almost $\frac{1}{2}$ way through
and only 3 weeks from
opening of exhibit)

And my intern Ellie is perfect. Scholarship student at Saint Martins; the best art school, hands down, in the U.K. She's in here her last year, in art theory of art-science collaborations (Ellie wants to use her minor in biology to create new life as art... far ahead of me in sculpture!) Two art students won out a fairly extensive competition to be my interns but do to the ~~to~~ ^{and me personally} very limited space in the Blackett Physics metal shop; I felt I could only handle one intern and chose Ellie. Good choice!! Not only is she very bright and insightful but is very interested in learning metal-work. She isn't paid for working with me but does get college credit. She enjoys working with me in the shop more than talking about art theory (as do I) and has learned to at least tack-weld and actually drilled and tapped 18 support brackets for the reliquary face-plates without breaking a drill bit or a tap!!

The biggest help Ellie is to me is that she was born and raised in London and knows her way around (I haven't enough fingers to count all the times I've gotten on the wrong underground train or bus and, after being lost for hours, having had to take a cab back to my flat for 20 quid). Today she and I ran very esoteric errands into the bowles, warrens and back alleys of London all day. From gold leaf through the wire-reinforced safety glass Imperial College's Radiation Control Officer wants installed on the face of the reliquary that houses the fiesta-wave salt & pepper shakers that Dale Trivious equipped me with, we ran a lot of errands. Even Ellie had trouble finding ~~for~~ some of the places and we did get on a couple of wrong trains and have to back-track. But she knew her stuff and down along the docks she'd say "don't flash any money or look at your London map in this neighborhood".

Back to the shop 013 A tomorrow and I hope my shop-mate Fred put the ~~too~~ louvers in the last Reliquary door in the right place. (addenda - he did)

II Letter (page 3) 13 October

Last story on Ellie: I had met with Ellie a number of times before I brought her to the shop. O13A is clearly "MAN-LAND" and very insular. The break-room is festooned with scantily-clad pin-ups and littered with motorcycle and girly mags. Every third word in the banter and conversation of tea-breaks is "shit" or "fuck" and conversations often deal with girl-friends, ex-wives, et cetera. I started preping my mates a couple of days before I brought Ellie in that, you know, I was saddled with this intern and she would be in the shop a couple of days a week and seemed ok and wanted to learn metal-work and ...well, we would just have to deal with it. For my own sake I didn't want to lose the new and precarious acceptance I had established in the shop. That was (is) what is making my residency work.

I need not have worried. She fits in fine. Each tea-break she is there not a 'shit' or a 'fuck' is heard and some of my mates work crossword puzzles!! She packs a lunch and wears work clothes and handles the flirtations of some of the younger lads with grace. She will be even more help to me when the paint, polish, ^{and} ~~var~~ varnish period begins next week or so.

The exhibit opens 4 Nov and we start installing on the first-plus Angle Tower will need some work to hold hundred pound reliquary on its crumbling walls (along with paint, lights, etc). All this is by way of staying saying I'll be too busy to write again for a couple of weeks.

I've received mail and phone calls from some of my friends which are most welcome. What will be even better will be to see so many of you in December.

Meanwhile, much love,

