



ART, CULTURE AND THE CITY

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# A Community Issue

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# The Breakfast Club

Derek Boshier hosts a multigenerational 21st-century artists' salon inside a fast-food restaurant.

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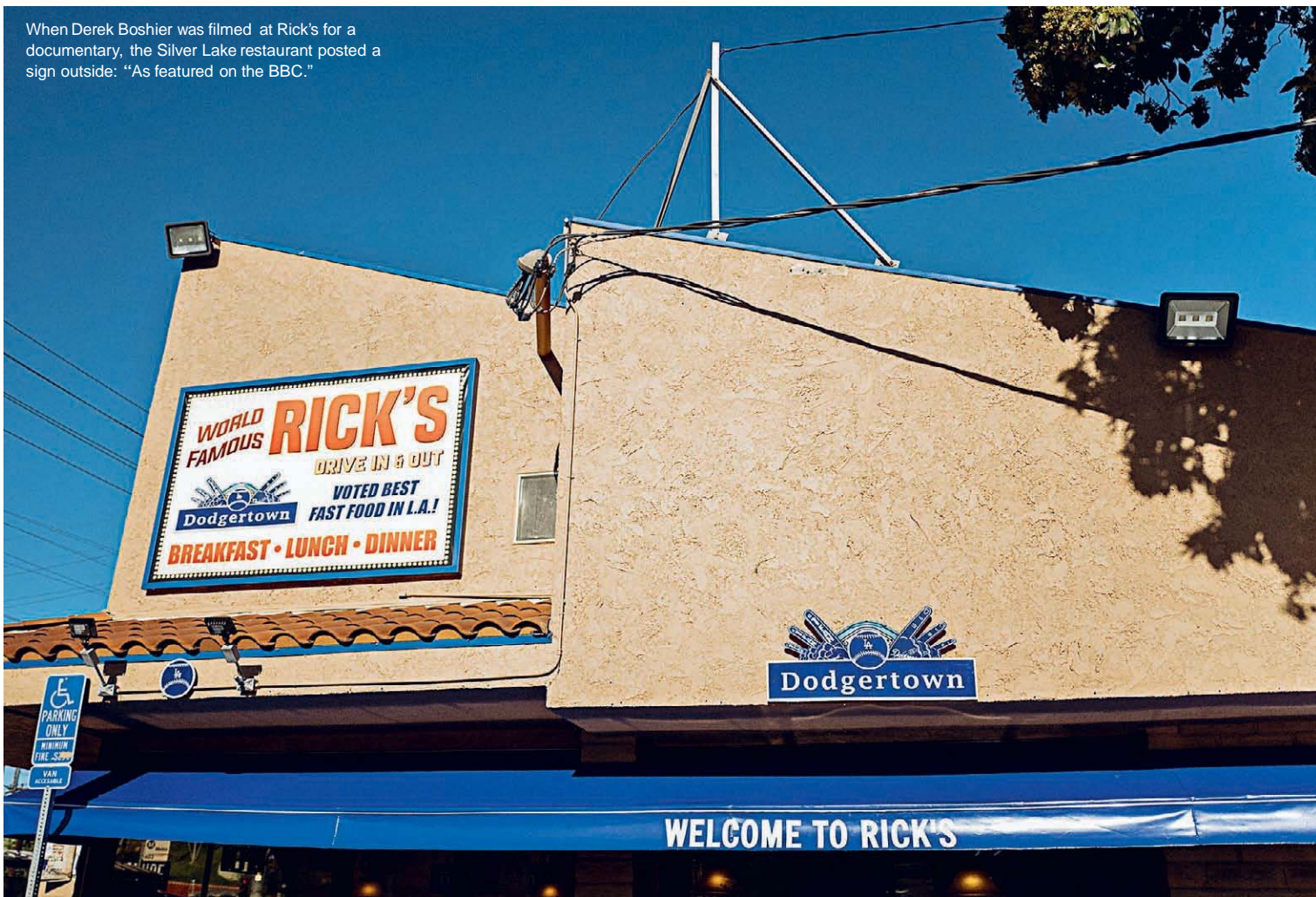




Derek Boshier has brought friends together for breakfasts at the same diner for nearly a decade. Clockwise from left: David Eddington, Jan Toynton, Penny Slinger, Dhiren Dasu, Susan Compton, Matthew Rosenquist, Tracy Bartley, James Scott, Derek Boshier and Dave Smith (off page).



When Derek Boshier was filmed at Rick's for a documentary, the Silver Lake restaurant posted a sign outside: "As featured on the BBC."



The invitation, when it comes, is invariably by email and typically consists of the entirety of the note crammed into the subject line, plus a random image.

"Can you make Ricks tomorrow Thursday at 8.30 am.....derek," read a recent message accompanied by a photograph of a headshot of Julie Andrews adjacent to a paper Union Jack. "Sent from my iPad."

There is a long history of artists' salons established in coffeehouses and restaurants. The French-Romanian poet and performance artist Tristan Tzara and his Dada cohort hung out at the Café Odeon in Zürich. In the '50s, the Abstract Expressionists famously met to drink, pontificate and brawl at the Cedar Tavern in Greenwich Village, and in the '80s, New York's artists upgraded to the more civilized Mr. Chow restaurant. In latter-day Los Angeles, a group of artists and art-adjacent folk with a 50-year age range—many of them expat Brits—gathers on an irregular basis for breakfast at a fast-food restaurant within earshot of the 5 Freeway, near Silver Lake.

This is really not a salon at all in the traditional sense. There is no manifesto or

shared artistic mission. The group, known informally by its constituents as Rick's Club, is united by one main attribute: friendship with the 82-year-old artist Derek Boshier, who has been convening these breakfasts for several years at the Dodgertown eatery located conveniently close to his Frogtown studio.

A graduate of London's Royal College of Art in the early 1960s, Derek is best known as part of the generation of British Pop artists that included David Hockney, Peter Blake, Allen Jones and Patrick Caulfield. Though his work has gone through periods of dramatic change over the years, it has always incorporated words and pictures culled from the imagistic churn of contemporary life. Rarely separated from his beloved iPad, with the exception of the times he accidentally leaves it on the roof of his car—a fate met by his two previous models—Derek films and photographs almost obsessively.



When I arrive at Rick's Drive In & Out at 8:35 a.m., there is already a gaggle of familiar faces discussing how to rearrange the tables. Naturally, the group has waxed and waned over the years; I first attended around 2011 after I cold-called Derek and asked to visit his studio. (Already a fan, I was excited to discover he was living in LA.)

Some in the group have known each other for decades. Over sausages, potatoes, eggs and toast, Dave Smith tells me that in the mid-1960s he was a student at London's Hornsey College of Art, where Derek was a tutor. The two friends lost touch until 2001 when Dave, a painter who lived for most of the 1970s and '80s in the Bahamas, turned up at the opening of one of Derek's exhibitions at his gallery in Santa Monica.

Similarly, across the table from Dave, Penny Slinger reveals that she was a student at Chelsea School of Art, where many Pop artists taught in the late '60s. When Derek encountered Penny's solo presentation of 1970s erotic collages at the 2017 Frieze London art fair, he left a note with the gallerist suggesting she get back in touch. Penny, who has lived in LA since 2018, is now a regular attendee at Rick's with her creative

partner, the artist Dhiren Dasu. At an early gathering, she was astonished to encounter Philip Vaughan, a former classmate and, as Penny proudly tells me, the only other student, aside from herself, to graduate with first-class honors in their year.

Others, myself included, are from a younger generation. 31-year-old Gretchen Andrew is best known for hacking her art into Google search results for "Frieze Los Angeles." A Silicon Valley-trained programmer, Gretchen can also paint, having apprenticed to the British traditionalist Billy Childish while based for some years in the UK. She is currently working on a series of witty compositions in which her own work is reproduced on the cover of *Artforum*.

On this particular day, Gretchen is wearing a self-made shirt that reads "INTERNET IMPERIALIST," a term of her own invention that alludes both to the Wild West possibilities of the Internet and to the scale of her artistic ambition. "It's my tongue-in-cheek way of admitting to the gravity of the work I do. I can manipulate the global Internet. Me! Let's all be terrified!" she laughs. Gretchen and Penny have neighboring studios in the former Federal

Reserve building downtown, where they became friends, and subsequently Penny introduced Gretchen to Derek.

I find myself sitting between Penny and another British expat: the film director Zara Hayes, who rocks her sleeping eight-month-old son in his car seat. In 2015, Zara directed a 30-minute film for the BBC series *What Do Artists Do All Day?* which profiled Derek and gave Rick's its own appearance on the small screen. (After the breakfast scene was filmed, the restaurant posted a sign outside: "As featured on the BBC.") Last year, Zara wrote and directed her first full-length feature, *Poms*, about a group of women, played by Diane Keaton, Jacki Weaver and Pam Grier, who form a cheerleading squad at their retirement community.

Zara intended to ask provocative questions in the film about the representation of older women on screen, but she admits that some of the responses shocked even her. She describes "the nexus of misogyny and ageism," and Penny enthusiastically agrees. From the start of Penny's career, she has reacted against the objectification of women throughout the history of Western art by using herself in her work. "I wanted to



Internet artist Gretchen Andrew (right) discusses her work with painter David Eddington (left) and television director and producer Ian Toynton (center).

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I ask David Eddington,  
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“I am when I’m sitting  
at this table.”

be my own muse,” she explains. In collages, Xerox works, sculptures and films, Penny combines found images with photographs of herself and has begun using life casts of her body in her most recent work.

In the late 1970s, Penny more or less stopped exhibiting in the mainstream art world and moved from London to New York. Then, after some years on the Caribbean island of Anguilla, she wound up living in the redwood forests of the Santa Cruz mountains on a 35-acre estate, where, in 1996, she married the yogi Dr. Christopher Hills, who left her the property when he died the following year. After her husband’s death, she continued organizing events on the land, including an elemental solstice festival in 2001.

Only recently has Penny chosen to re-engage with the art world, in part because of a fresh upswell of interest in her work. She and Dhiren met in 2001, and he often lends his digital skills to her projects, as well as devoting time to his own animations, photographs and collages. Currently he is working on an immersive full-dome VR experience of a series of photo collages.

Penny says that Derek, who is approximately ten years her senior, has been an important role model. “I always wanted to do something that I would never retire from,” Penny says. Even in his ninth decade, Derek throws himself tirelessly into ambitious new bodies of work, often entreating us to follow him to his studio after breakfast to inspect his latest painting or drawing. He is currently finishing work for an exhibition slated for

May at Night Gallery and planning for additional shows in Pasadena, Manhattan, Serbia and Azerbaijan in 2021.

Sitting between Derek and Tracy Bartley—who is the director of the late painter R.B. Kitaj’s estate—is James Scott, a filmmaker and painter who is one of the longstanding members of the Rick’s entourage. This morning, James is jet-lagged because he has just returned from the International Film Festival Rotterdam in the Netherlands, where he premiered *Fragments*, a documentary about Derek that he shot entirely on an iPhone. (The group’s shared enthusiasm for technology is remarkable given its median age.)

James hands me an orange pin bearing the words “POP ARTIST” and beneath, in smaller letters, “Rick’s.” “I had it made. It’s based on Richard Hamilton’s work *Epiphany*,” he says, referring to the famous sculpture of a pin emblazoned with “SLIP IT TO ME” that Hamilton found on a trip to LA in 1963.

I notice a number of people around the table are already sporting similar badges. “Are you a Pop artist?” I ask David Eddington, a British painter who now lives in Venice. “I am when I’m sitting at this table,” he laughs. Derek’s work has progressed through various media and styles over the years, from conceptual art to experimental film to figuration, but, for him, the Pop art label is the one that has stuck. Even though he resents it somewhat, on balance, it has opened more doors for him than it has closed. “I was in the right

place at the right time,” he says, stealing a line from Hockney, his close friend.

Hockney casts a long shadow over this group, and his name invariably comes up at breakfast gatherings. Though he sometimes attends parties at Derek’s house in Glassell Park, he has never been sighted at Rick’s—at least not yet. Hockney recently painted Derek’s portrait, soon to be exhibited at Annely Juda Fine Art in London. Derek reveals that the gallery generously offered him first refusal on the portrait, but regrettably he couldn’t spring for the £1.2 million price tag. A print of the painting hangs in his home, although he grumbles jokingly about the cost of getting it framed.

Eventually people begin to make their excuses, say their goodbyes and set off to start their working days. Art can be a lonely pursuit, and artists have often thrived on community. Being an expat can be lonely too, especially in a sprawling city like LA. At Rick’s, unlikely allegiances have been welded between individuals young and old, from both sides of the Atlantic, brought together, not by our admiration of the \$8.49 Big Breakfast, but by our collective recognition of how rare such occasions are and how fortunate we are to have Derek facilitating these connections. Gretchen tells me she has actively sought the mentorship of senior artists, especially women. “The crew at Rick’s reminds me that if I’m lucky, my career is long,” she says, “and the ups and downs get ironed out in the shadows of the stories and experiences around me.”





Endless refills of coffee keep the conversation flowing late into the morning.



Derek Boshier with the youngest member of Rick's Breakfast club, Micah Stewart-Hayes, son of film director Zara Hayes