



BERLIN #1

1.

The last couple days I've been here and there and everywhere. I went from Los Angeles to Detroit two days ago on an overnight flight that put me in at 7:30am on about four hours of sleep. A friend was kind enough to pick me up and take me to campus to see if my pick-up truck would start. It wouldn't. I left the damn thing sitting in the school parking lot to die alone without a degree. Tracy, Jeffrey, and I spent the rest of the day packing a large rented truck with all of our belongings. We spent the night at Jeffrey's parents' house in Livonia, Michigan. His folks were friendly enough. His mom smoked a lot of cigarettes and his dad didn't say much. The next morning, bright and early, we hit the road. Tracy sat between us on a couple of pillows. Jeffrey and I talked about guy stuff and Tracy laughed at us. We got to New York in the early evening. I dropped them off in Sunset Park, Brooklyn so they could start their new life together. Then I got back in the truck and went on down to Maryland to see my mom.

2.

I just got back to Frederick after driving over to Baltimore in Jim's car with Andy. Andy took me to a party in a big warehouse close to the building where he lives. The party was filled with art-school looking kids who hadn't seen the inside of a bathtub or shower in a long time. We got nice and drunk and stayed out all night. Today we spent some time with Andy's dad, Eugene, and his two-year old daughter, Rivka, at a public swimming pool in West Virginia not too far from the Maryland border. In the evening, Andy and I went to our grandmother's for dinner. We had rotisserie chicken and Pecan Sandies for dessert. She showed us her new paintings. Boy, they sure looked good.

3.

Now, I'm on a bus heading back up to New York City. Andy helped me drag my two giant suitcases from his building over to West 20th Street in Baltimore so I could meet the bus on time. Last night we took bikes to see a late movie in Fells Point down by the Harbor. The moon lit up the poor, empty streets and, in that moment, I loved Baltimore more than anything or anybody in the whole world. God bless the USA.



4.

I'm in some random diner on Broadway a few blocks south of Union Square waiting for the eggs to show. You know how eggs are. Anyway, the coffee is decent. New York is as dead as a decapitated figure. I'm counting down the days. I have to get through today, Saturday, and Sunday. Berlin on Monday. God, I can't wait. It's still Friday, only now it's 8:15pm. I'm back on Jones Street in the West Village. My friend owns the apartment and she's letting me stay here while she's out of town with her boyfriend somewhere. I just watched a documentary about Bruce Nauman. It was bad – why are documentaries about artists always so horrible? Had some decent Chinese food. Paul McCarthy's work at the Whitney was kind of boring. I was expecting to like it more than I did. Art in general seems really bad lately. I need to get out of New York so I can appreciate it again.

5.

Berlin. It's Wednesday, a little chilly outside. I am clean, relaxed, and healthy as a banana. Today is September 3rd - my 32nd birthday. I'm resting on a red bed in a medium sized room with two big windows revealing a view that is unfamiliar. The room with the unfamiliar view is empty except for the red bed, two wooden tables, a dresser, one brown chair, a simple coat rack, and the items from my two suitcases. It's perfect. Lost Weekend's room is directly across the hall – she's in there now making a figurative drawing.

6.

I'm on the red bed in my simple German room looking up at a simple German crack in the German ceiling. I want to crawl inside the German crack like a German spider and die a simple German spider death. It's been a long day. The sun is hidden behind humorless, gray German clouds. The days are hard to understand because they don't speak English. It's easier at night when Lost Weekend and I are drunk and language doesn't matter anymore. My room stinks of oil paint.

7.

It's after midnight now – I can't sleep. I'm so unsure of everything – nothing makes sense. How did I become an American man who makes unsellable oil paintings in an unfamiliar room with parquet wooden floors? I don't enjoy feeling like a loser, and yet, this is how I often feel. How am I supposed to earn a living and have a decent life when I have no income?



8.

Day four in Berlin. I've got twenty little paintings going. Tomorrow, I'm going back to the art supply store to buy as many canvases as I can carry back. I will fight the good fight. The Painter! The Painter! The Painter! A lot of drinking and smoking. Last night Lost Weekend and I went out to the bar and then another bar. On the way to the bar we saw a woman wearing a scary mask twirling fire and a man in a loincloth spitting fire from his mouth. Lost Weekend said she'd never seen anybody do that in the streets of New York on Saturday night. I said, "Me neither."

9.

I'm beginning to warm up to this gloomy city. It's grey most of the time and it rains a lot, but it's peaceful as a sleeping cat. I don't have a phone and I have no desire to get one. I don't get mail. Day is night and night is day. Correspondence with the outside world only happens if I choose for it to happen. Today I was in my studio stretching canvases and painting a little bit. My process for the current work is slow, controlled, and emotionally removed. I only apply a small amount of paint to the canvas at a time and then I have to wait. There is a lot of waiting. I like to work on a lot of canvases at once so I always have something to do. It's peaceful in this room. I like it here. Yesterday, I met a friend of a friend named Peach Tree. Peach Tree is pretty. I like Peach Tree.

10.

I woke up at 12:30pm and messed around in my studio for about an hour. Then Lost Weekend and I went for a long walk around the neighborhood. I bought a couple postcards and a chessboard. Lost Weekend got an alarm clock so she can wake up before noon. She got sad today and I found her crying in her room. She told me that sometimes she feels like she has no place to go in this world because she can't stay here forever and she doesn't want to go to New York or LA. What a weird mind-fuck it is to be an artist. I gave her a hug and told her everything will work out okay.

11.

The United States is falling apart. The financial crisis is the international talk of the town. My friends in New York tell me how awful it is in the USA. I'm lucky to be here in Berlin living this daydream of a life. Peach Tree has been introducing me to her friends who are all artists or writers. We fucked a few nights ago in her apartment after we got drunk at the bar. Tonight is her last night in Berlin because she's moving to London. I'm taking her room.



12.

My studio is packed up again for the move so I haven't been able to work. I kill time with long, aimless walks around the city. The sun continues to hide. Peach Tree is in London. Lost Weekend bought herself a ticket back to New York because she's out of money. It's a drag.

13.

Just woke up, took a shower, and now I'm sitting on the edge of the bed in my underwear and a flannel shirt thinking about the sad dream I had last night. I dreamt I passed a restaurant where Good Morning was a waitress. She noticed me through the window. She came outside and embraced me. Then I started crying like a crazy person. Yep, that's it. This is hard. Being an artist is hard. America is falling apart. The world is a scary place right now. Good Morning is long gone.

14.

Now it's October. I woke up about an hour ago at 11am, which is on the early side for me lately. Last night Lost Weekend and I went to a lecture by a Berlin based critic named Jan Verwoert called, "Why Are Conceptual Artists Painting Again? Because They Think It's A Good Idea." It was a good idea to see that lecture.

15.

I'm in Peach Tree's room, sitting in an old wooden chair in my long johns. It's cold outside, but it's warm in this pretty room. I saw Leonard Cohen perform last night with Lost Weekend. I almost cried during *Hallelujah*. Now I'm trying to get some work done, but it's a little hard to concentrate because I don't have room to spread out. It's raining outside and I'm eating chocolate. The chocolate in this country is so damn good I eat two bars a day.

16.

Lost Weekend and I went to a party somewhere across town last night. We had a lot of shitty vodka and I smoked more than one too many cigarettes. Now, I'm just sitting around Peach Tree's room by myself. I am the shape of a lung cancer ashtray. I painted some this morning, but unfortunately, I really have to pace myself or I will make too much work and I don't know how I will get it all back to the USA. It's a weird situation. I'm working on more than 100 paintings right now.



17.

Lost Weekend has a ticket to leave Berlin at the end of the month so I'm here on my own after that. It's going to be real hard for me here when she's gone. Lost Weekend is like my sister. We've had an amazing adventure together these last couple of months – from Detroit to The Spiral Jetty to Los Angeles to Humboldt to New York to Berlin. I can't imagine life without her.

18.

It's dark outside, but it's hardly 7pm. We went to see the *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner – Late Paintings* exhibition at Julius Werner Berlin. This was my second time seeing it. It's so funny that Kirchner wrote about his own work under a pseudonym. He wrote, "Around 1926 Kirchner's talent had brought about a new achievement, insofar as it unified everything he had accomplished earlier in a new technique that approached the frugality of his earlier works, yielding visionary compositions." Anyway, this is the last page of this book. Good bye.