

Patrick

Angus

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Almost 27 years have passed since his death, and finally today we can affirm that the extraordinary work of Patrick Angus is in the process of being rediscovered and is once again proving of great interest to the contemporary public. Two retrospectives of his work have been exhibited in Stuttgart and Los Angeles, and an important anthological catalogue published by Hatje



Untitled (Self-Portrait), 1980s.

Cantz has brought back from obscurity not only his extraordinary talent and his very personal vision of the world, but also, and above all, a precious testimony to the great artistic period of American realism. Indeed, reality has always been central to Patrick Angus's work: whether it's the melancholy landscapes of small-town Arkansas, or the crowded streets and characters of his native Santa Barbara or Los Angeles, or the underground scene of old-style gay bathhouses and gay porn cinemas from 1980s New York, his paintings are always a poetic, violent, sharp, ironic epiphany depicting the world around him.

In 25 years of hyperactive output (already at the age of 13 his only occupation was drawing and painting) he produced hundreds of works that were very diverse in

both technique and form. In this work, painting and drawing are the culmination of constant, daily observation, representing a tribute to, and love of, reality. An unrequited love, perhaps, or at least perceived thus by the artist, whose life was constantly plagued by great personal insecurity and little consideration of his own potential, be it artistic or social. Angus's painting flows from there, from the exact point of a threshold he never completely managed to cross (that of a life he yearned for and pursued to the end). And thus for Angus, his painting was desperately autobiographical and necessary. Looking at his work is like leafing through the pages of a personal, intimate visual diary in which the small-town America of his youth is summarised on canvases and in works on paper that depict domestic or vast and desolate landscapes, abandoned gas stations, and homesteads, all immortalised with a keen photographic eye. Already during his very first productive period—around the end of the '60s—an obsession with portraits can be seen in his work: portraits



Untitled, mid 1970s.

of himself and his enigmatic 'boys', who were initially friends or schoolmates, and subsequently life drawing models at the Santa Barbara Art Institute. These are his muses: teenagers and small-town guys, improvised dandies, workmen, sportsmen, bored and somewhat lost-looking young men, half-naked portraits of subjects lying on a bed or reclining on a sofa; the expression often fleeting, perhaps bored, beautiful and elusive in their jeans and tight-fitting shirts. The sexual theme becomes more explicit and insistent from the late '70s onwards, when Angus arrived in a boundless and frightening Los



The Mysterious Baths, 1984-85.

apartamento - Patrick Angus



Previous spread: (Detail of) The Striped Mattress, 1986. Opposite page: (Detail of) Hustler with White Sox, 1980s.





Previous spread: (Detail of) Seated Nude, 1989. Opposite page: (Detail of) J.B. at Table in Black Shirt, 1980s.

Angeles, armed only with his own personal influences (Hockney and Picasso above all others, in stark contrast to the informality that was in vogue in the art market of those years) and eager to feel part of a world—the artistic and libertine world where individuals can finally express their homosexuality, while in fact remaining marginalised. He thus condemned himself to a lonely existence, perhaps, but one which undoubtedly was the only possible position to really bear authentic witness to the times. The apotheosis of the sexual theme can be found in the work of his last period, in New York, set in the porn cinemas or the Gaiety Theater, a gay burlesque club in Times Square closed by Mayor Giuliani in the late '80s, when AIDS was decimating the global gay community. But it's neither the disease nor the sexual acts that form the abiding theme of the large screens or side corridors of the halls that are Angus's main focus; rather, it's the marginalised and enormously diverse slice of humanity that meets up in this gay demimonde to celebrate the mystery of a shared solitude—of the strident yet soft contrast between the vivid colours of naked bodies and the darkness that envelopes everything.

Another central theme for the artist is the array of spaces: external and internal, public and private. The streets of Los Angeles, the fast food restaurants, the motel rooms of regional America, the family home, or his own studio. Then there's the arrival in Manhattan, where Angus portrays the spaces in which the gay community of the '80s lives and finds itself—the clubs, steamy saunas, parks (Central Park, above all others)—but also the more intimate spaces: bedrooms, kitchens, public and private bathrooms. Angus's architecture is well depicted in perspectives and volumes both on canvas and in drawings, but these pieces find formal perfection in their account of the interiors, punctuated with iconic objects, beautiful colours and graphic patterns. This formal and stylistic taste often brings to mind the school of Hockney and Procktor. Angus thus confirms himself as a great American realist, and his optical device firmly frames the figures in context and in space at all times, the warmth of the body in the relentless indifference of the non-human world—that of objects and décor. The exceptional nature of his work—the work of a short and very intense life—was recognised and admired by a number of notable contemporary intellectuals and artists, including Quentin Crisp, Robert Patrick, and above all Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, the great critic and producer of the film *Ballets Russes*, who paid homage to Angus in two monographs: *Strip Show: Paintings by Patrick Angus* in 1992 and *Los Angeles Drawings* in 2003.



David Hockney and Patrick Angus at his solo show, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1992.



Patrick Angus and Douglas Blair Turnbaugh alongside his portrait, mid 1980s, Angus's studio, Manhattan.

Angus experienced just a mere hint of the great fame he deserved as an artist only right at the end of his life, in a spectacular solo show organised by the University of California, Santa Barbara, in February 1992; it was on this occasion that David Hockney (yes, the very same, one of his main idols) bought six of his works and shot a short video of the evening. A photo of the occasion still remains, showing two men laughing: one is Hockney—tall, burly, already recognised as one of the great masters of the 20th century—and the other is Angus—minute and already visibly consumed by

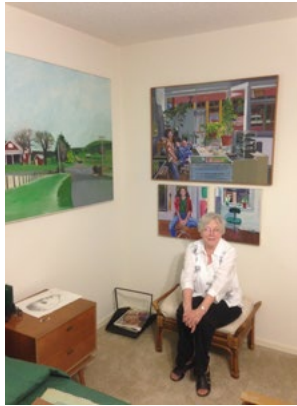


Above: Robert Trent, 1990. Below: Jim White, 1991. Opposite page: (Detail of) Stewart at Home, 1986.  
Following spread: (Detail of) Tom Stuart and Robert Stuart, 1990.

apartamento - Patrick Angus







Above: Angus's aunt, Mary Jane, alongside a selection of his work at his mother Betty's home in Arkansas. Opposite page: (Detail of) *Room*, 1985.

AIDS, which would kill him only three months later, but smiling, perhaps for the first time aware of his extraordinary talent. His was a star that shone most brightly just as it was about to be extinguished, but today we can finally assert that it has once again begun to shine, thanks also to the present author and to a whole host of friends (and coincidences!) that've helped me find his work and bring it out of obscurity and back into the light.

The first time I heard of Patrick Angus was in 2012; I was in Paris and an artist friend of mine showed me some work by another artist on the screen of his iPhone, describing him as 'completely unknown but utterly brilliant'. After two months of unsuccessful research—no gallery had any of his pieces and I wanted one—I contacted the Fort Smith Regional Art Museum, in Arkansas, a small museum that had five works by Angus in its collection. Surprised by my request, Lee

Ortega, the curator, gave me the most important contact I could imagine, namely that of Betty Angus, the artist's mother. Obviously I called her immediately. Betty and I talked for an hour on the phone; she spoke to me about her son, his great talent and tragic death, and how in 22 years nobody had ever shown up to ask about him. This was a moving phone call for both of us, and it ended with a promise: I vowed to go and visit her in Arkansas.

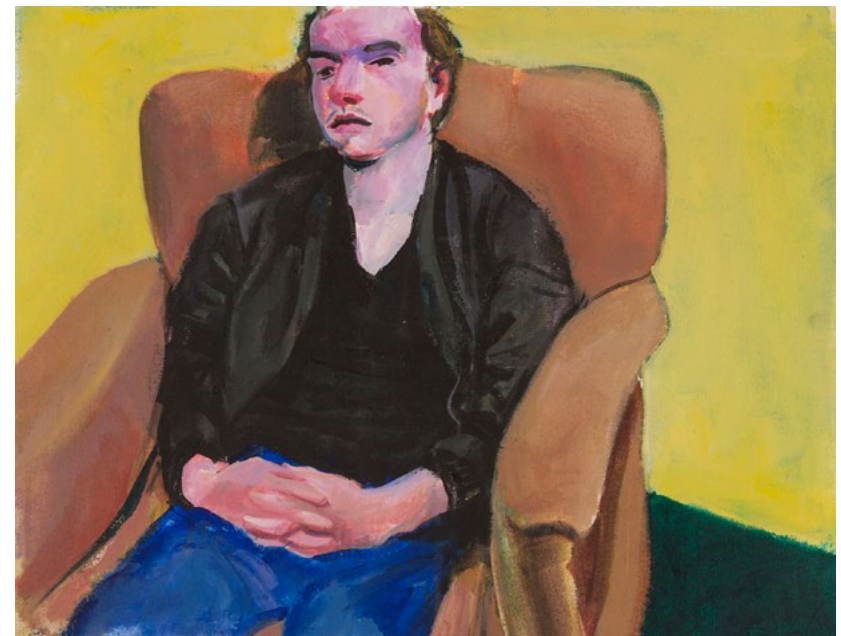
Two years passed, and then in August 2014 I decided the time was right; together with my photographer friend Carlotta Manaigo, who enthusiastically embraced the project, we began our long journey. We first went to New York in search of Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, Angus's mentor and the custodian of all his New York work from the '80s. Douglas belongs to the New York intelligentsia and lives surrounded by wonderful paintings by Angus and Duncan Grant in Manhattan's exclusive Rockefeller Apartments; he counts Richard Prince as one of his friends and drinks only margaritas. After three intense days of chatting and drinking, Douglas introduced me to Robert Patrick, a revered and leading activist within the New York LGBT+ community. He is an art collector, was a friend of Angus, and currently lives in the Hamptons, right next to Carlotta's mother. This marked just the beginning of a great many coincidences. We also visited his art collection. Seeing Angus's work in real life confirmed my intuition: it is incredible.

We continued our journey to Arkansas, where we finally met Betty Angus, a beautiful 80 year old who wears only monochrome colours, who was waiting for us aboard a bordeaux-red Chevrolet outside what I think is the smallest airport I've ever seen. Betty was accompanied by her sister Mary Jane; the two are inseparable. They took us home, and when we opened



Above: Betty Angus, Mary Jane, and Carlotta Manaigo in Angus's bedroom at his parents' house in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Below: Betty's garage filled with Angus's paintings.





Opposite page: (Detail of) *Portrait of Douglas Blair Turnbaugh*, 1991. Above: *Sleeping boy*, late 1970s.  
Below: *Untitled*, undated. Following spread: *Portrait of Robert Stuart*, 1990.



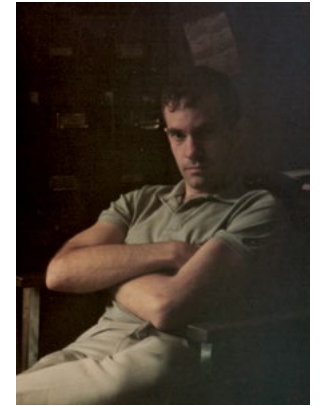




the garage we discovered a treasure trove. Hanging among rakes and shelves filled with detergents we see the canvases. This formed the beginning of a three-day exploration. Angus's mother's home is a veritable museum: canvases, photos, and drawings are in every room, perfectly matching the blankets and sofa covers sewn by Betty using Patrick's colour palette. We spent our time there doing research and collecting photographic documentation of the archive, and in the evening Betty would take us out to the local casino. We talked a lot; Carlotta photographed everything, the canvases, the drawings. At the end of the three days Carlotta and I continued on our journey to Texas, bewitched by this experience and with a lot of Patrick Angus's work in our luggage. I left Betty with a second promise: I would return, not least because I was already hatching plans for an exhibition in Europe and a series of articles about our meeting and about Patrick. Meanwhile, Douglas told me that a Stuttgart art dealer, Thomas Fuchs, was organising an exhibition dedicated to Angus, planned for February 2015. I was delighted to see that the world was beginning to notice the existence of the artist Patrick Angus. I told Douglas that I went to visit Betty and that I'd seen an extraordinary collection of his work in her house. Douglas was startled: his relationship with Betty had finished as soon as it began, as Patrick lay dying on his sickbed, and he hadn't even realised she was still alive.

Back in Milan, I began to show Angus's work to a few friends, including Anna Siccardi, who, like Carlotta, became excited about the work and the whole story and suggested that we return to Arkansas together. And so we did. On November 23, 2014, we returned to meet Betty, and I found everything as I had left it: the museum house, the monochrome clothes, the welcome and emotion of a woman who perceived in these Italian visitors a genuine enthusiasm for her son's work. By this time, Betty had already been contacted by the German gallery owner. The bomb had gone off, and unwittingly I found that I had been responsible for lighting the fuse. Buying any canvases was out of the question, now that there's a gallery that curates his work and that in a few short years has managed to organise exhibitions and publications that have at long last recognised the artist's influence and importance and restored him to his rightful place in the art world.

Anna and I organised our first exhibition of Angus's work in Italy, inaugurated in May 2015 in Milan, at Loom Gallery. This was also followed by solo exhibitions in Los Angeles and at the Fort Smith Regional Art Museum in 2015, a beautiful catalogue produced by Hatje Cantz in 2016, and two exhibitions in Germany in 2016 and 2017. In late 2017 the first major retrospective exhibition was held at the Kunstmuseum in Stuttgart, in May 2019 the first posthumous retrospective in America was inaugurated at the Long Beach Museum of Art, and in 2020 yours truly will begin writing a musical inspired by the life and work of Angus, set inside the Gaiety Theater itself. So what you have read is a summary of a strange and extraordinary story, of a pursuit, an immersive experience, and the building of an adventure shared together with a friend who comes from the past, a friend whose name is Patrick Angus.



Above: A portrait of Patrick Angus, 1980s, photographer unknown.  
Opposite page: *Untitled*, undated.