

## GARDEN OF EDEN

The *Garden of Eden* is a must-see stop if one is driving through Kansas on their way to either coast. It's right off the super highway. Kansas— smack dab in the middle of the lower 48 states, laying claim to being the center of it all—has traditionally been the bread basket but is now a surreal landscape of churning wind turbines. Kansas is an emblem and symptom of our bifurcated country. Conservative education, anti-abortion activism, the Koch Brothers network of Super PACs and think tanks tend to define its identity. But looking back to the 19th c offers a different, more romantic story, of populist settlers, free expression types, who moved to the plains to farm and fight the fight against slavery. S.P. Dinsmore (1843-1932) settled in Lucas and built his own *Garden of Eden* out of cement, as a tourist site and a political platform. He collected 10¢ a vist to tour the House and environs or 25¢ if you wanted see the mausoleum in the backyard where he was eventually buried. With this outsider art project, Dinsmore freely recast the stories of the creation for the American midwestern plains and discussed the ethical struggles of the 19th century. Each of the cryptic sculptures tells the visitor about do-it-yourself populist politics, the downsides of modern civilization and the useful interpretations of Bible stories. Adam and Eve welcome visitors to the Garden. The tree of life. The sacrifice of animals. The angel guards the apples. Two snakes form a grape arbor. One is giving Eve the apple. The girl warns danger ahead. Labor is crucified by our leaders. They are the ones who eat cake made by the sweat of the other fellow's brow. Father Time is the all-seeing eye.

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All locations. The Garden of Eden, Lucas, Kansas

## SLEEPERS

The first time I visited the Amargosa Opera House was on a road trip with a friend in the early 90's and we were the only guests at the hotel. Marta Becket, former ballet dancer and proprietor of the hotel, hand painted the walls with imaginary guests, portraits and furnishings. I was lucky to have seen Marta Becket perform her old Vaudeville act with her partner Tom Willet that season. But on a return visit, when again we were the only guests at the hotel, Marta was too frail to perform. She sat in the front row and watched a great show of old style physical comedy performed by a Red Skelton impersonator. One of his weirder bits was pretending to be a slice of bacon in a frying pan—he jiggled and sputtered, contorting his body, then collapsed on the floor and curled up on his side. I guess the bacon was cooked. The magical journey of the dead as they abandon the flesh is poetically framed in the cataloging system of Aby Warburg's great library. He worked over his lifetime to catalog human history and knowledge through an internal logic of how disciplines of knowledge and aesthetic form touch on and effect each other. The Afterlife section includes subcategories such as: *367 Hell*, *370 Journey after Death*, *375 Harrowing of Hell*, *380 Judgement of the Dead*, *385 Cult of the Dead* and *390 Immortality*. Warburg's categories track the customs of belief in the afterlife of the dead and also the afterlife of images that circulate in the collective imagination that inspire and confirm those beliefs.

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Old Woman in Bed. The Met, New York, NY

Sleeping Beauty Automaton. Madame Tussauds, London, England

Sleeping Gnomes. Catskill, NY

Étant Donnés. The Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France

Visible Woman. Morbid Anatomy, Brooklyn, New York

Birthing Doll. The Huntarian Pathology Collection, Glasgow, Scotland

Peacock Headboard. Amargosa Opera House, Death Valley Junction, NV

Edward Colston Statue Displayed on its Side. M Shed, Bristol, England

## FRACKING TOUR

My Aunt Ruth took me on a tour of the SW Pennsylvania countryside near where I grew up and where the Marcellus Shale has been fracked for some time by mysterious corporate entities for the natural gas reserves. The people who live along the mountain ridge are poor and it was a wind fall to get paid for the digging and extracting of the stuff underground. Whatever it was, no one knew for sure, and when it ended up affecting the ground water and these same people were getting brown sludge pouring out of their faucets, it was a nasty surprise. After the company would dig and lay the pipeline, the surface would get replanted and the landscape ended up looking oddly serene and untouched—by far a better visual snapshot of the countryside than it had looked before. Aunt Ruth was able to track the progression of the industry because it coincided with her weekly Meals-on-Wheels route—a subsidized program in which volunteers deliver free lunches to the elderly. The people were around her age, and actually she knew some of them from her high school days 70 years earlier. I am not sure why my Aunt never married except perhaps to care for her parents into their dotage, but she was always proudly self supporting. I thought the shorthand she learned for court stenography came easily to her since Arabic, being her first language, had an elegant calligraphy as the written word.

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All locations. Canonsburg, PA

## FLIGHT

The morning of 9/11/01 I went up to the park in Brooklyn for a run and could see from my vantage point that one of the WWC towers was on fire. Strange I thought, and after another couple of loops around the track, I saw that the another tower was on fire. I thought the fire leapt from one roof to the other and it must be windy. It was the only explanaiton that I could come up with. A small crowd had gathered on the track and I learned of the plane crashes. I walked home and called my friend Bobby who said he was evacuating, then my phone went dead. Later I found out he made it as far as Queens before getting stuck in traffic. It was such a strange, unsettling feeling to not know what was going on or what to do. I thought to call my mother, and when I finally got through to her from a pay phone she had no idea anything was happening. People were hanging out at the cafes and bars, watching the news unfold on the big sports TVs, thinking they might need to give blood or do something. Many young people were watching the buildings burn from the vantage point of the park on the water front—lounging on blankets, picnicking and playing frisbee. Yeah, I knew it looked bad and when pictures of that scene emerged a full year later, critics condemned the seeming disinterest but in that moment there was not much anyone could do. I walked over the bridge to Manhattan guided by the smoke filled sky and towards the origin of the debris that was gently wafting this way and that in the air like the slow-mo opera of splintered objects, appliances and paneling in *Zabriskie Point* after they blow up the mountain house. I was on Houston Street and oddly, just a few hours after the attack and the towers collapse, a middle aged lady was on the corner selling pictures of the towers burning—a reality that now was the past. I bought one. I was let through the police line at Houston Street and I walked downtown to check on a friend. Many people covered in ash were streaming uptown and others—volunteers and curiosity seekrs—were streaming downtown. I was offered a bottle of water from a guy with a van who had driven in from Jersry to hep out. That night at Su's, we listened to the harrowing tale of our friend Jane who, fleeing the tower and in the smoky chaos, ran south deeper into the smoke's toxic path. She ran the long way around the building before coming back to where she had started to then run north. Somehow she had lost her shoes. In the following days at Ground Zero, I manned a wash station where military personnel, who were digging for evidence and human remains on the pile, cleaned up and dusted off before entering a temporary rest shelter set up by the Red Cross.

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Flight 93 National Memorial and Gift Shop. Shanksville, PA  
9/11 Plane Wreckage. The State Museum, Albany, NY  
Observation Deck. World Trade Center, 1981 New York, NY

## COLORS

Landing his first job with Glamour in 1950, Warhol's big break was an early assignment to illustrate shoes for a feature appropriately entitled *Climbing the Ladder of Success*. Impressed by his sketches, the magazine awarded him six additional pages, while the credit line mistakenly read *Drawings by Warhol*, a misprint that in turn led Andy to drop the "a" from his last name. Warhol came to be identified with the shoe manufacturer and retailer I. Miller and in 1956 he began a series of fantasy footwear ads about people he admired—fashionable socialites and magazine editors, actors, actresses and authors—the beginning of the artist's fascination with fame and his focus on celebrity as subject matter. The swashbuckling Elvis Presley boot, projects Elvis as a movie star with complex, erotic appeal, his film *Love Me Tender* recently released. While Warhol's shoe for Christine Jorgenson, the first person to become widely known in the US for having sex reassignment surgery, is displayed from an above angle, appearing mismatched with two noticeably different sizes. Julie Andrews, who was starring in *My Fair Lady* in 1956, was personified as a classical Cinderella-esque pump. The Zsa Zsa Gabor fantasy shoe, based on an actual I. Miller design Warhol originally drew in 1955, features a baroque high heel decorated with cutouts and heaps of embellishment, alluding to Gabor's jazzy social life and elaborate wardrobe. Likewise, the collaged gold leaf mule Warhol designed for his longtime muse and crush, Truman Capote, featured wildly arranged flowers emerging from the shoe's interior, a reference to Capote's outwardly gay personality and his musical *House of Flowers* which was appearing on Broadway. The company's art director, Peter Palazzo, described it this way, "We try to stir the woman's imagination...to make her think of color without using color...to make her think of shoes without giving details." And as Andy would say, "I'm still a commercial artist. I was always a commercial artist."

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Showroom and World Maps. World of Tile, Springfield, NJ

Grid of color swatches for shoe design. Andy Warhol

Foot. Small Herculaneum Woman, *Chroma: Ancient Sculpture in Color*, The Met, NY

## STRATEGY OF DESIRE

Dichter was an early specialist in applying psychoanalytic principles to advertising. He analyzed consumer motivation and was big in the burgeoning field of persuasion. Decades of reports he authored from the Institute for Motivational Research such as “*The Sex of Rice*” and “*What is Soap?*” were stacked in his back room. Dichter was an inquisitive and flirtatious fellow, at the tail end of his illustrious career when I went to work for him up in Peekskill in the 80s. He was old but still consulted on a number of cultural phenomena and trends. One of my favorite meetings was a conference call he had with the Ponds Cold Cream people who were in despair about the staying power of their competitor Oil of Olay. Dichter had a bunch of face creams and shampoos on his desk that the company had sent over and he was trying them all on, spraying his face and applying creams to his hands. He loved freaking people out and embarrassed the Ponds team by asking them their thoughts on sell and sexual attraction. What he was getting at was the unconscious animal drive that scent plays in daily life—that smell should not be underestimated in the quest for satisfaction in choosing a partner. Dichter invented Dove Soap and thought the curvaceous shape of the bar was comforting, like the feeling of a child cupping his mother's breast or the sense of home one gets by grasping the door knob upon arrival. He did the marketing campaign for the original Barbie Doll. He was interviewed for a chapter in *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan and is blamed for advertising's negative effects on women's self confidence and ambition.

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Dichter Publications. *The Human Factor* and *Pantyhose Potential*  
All locations. Peekskill, NY

## JUNK

I have this quote but not sure who to attribute it to. "The story of objects asserting themselves as things, is the story of a changed relationship to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names not so much an object than a particular relationship of subject-object. As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects to see what they disclose about history, nature or culture and above all, what they disclose about us, but we can only catch a glimpse of things." It might be Jean Baudrillard. We get caught up in things and the body is the ultimate thing among things. Is the object—the thing the stuff—intelligible without us? Or is then the object free to make it's own course through the world of meaning and non-meaning? Does everything have to mean something? Then there is the question of value. I am attracted more to losers than to winners, but that's not the only reason I value junk. I see it as an object lesson in worthiness and a gateway to the soul. The storage room of human achievement is in the neglected, the has-been and the gadgets that hold the memory of once being loved or useful. Owned and held dear by someone. Keith has his own inexplicable spatialized sense of order and is most conversant with DVDs, books and also spices. He always manages to find the thing he is searching for, unlike me. To me the accumulation of stuff is basically a dictionary of sadness.

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Billboards. Brooklyn, NY  
Thrift Store. Milwaukee, WI  
Wall Painting. New York, NY  
Stack of Drives. Brooklyn, NY  
DeeDee's Laundry Room. Woodstock, NY  
Roberts Family Portrait. Pittsburgh, PA  
Keith at his Leisure. Brooklyn, NY

## FACTORY GIRLS

. . . girls who generally come from quiet country homes, where their minds and manners have been formed under the eyes of the worthy sons of the Pilgrims, and their virtuous partners, and who return again to become the wives of the free intelligent yeomanry of New England and the mothers of quite a proportion of our future republicans. Think, for a moment, how many of the next generation are to spring from mothers doomed to infamy! . . . It has been asserted that to put ourselves under the influence and restraints of corporate bodies, is contrary to the spirit of our institutions, and to that love of independence which we ought to cherish. . . . We are under restraints, but they are voluntarily assumed; and we are at liberty to withdraw from them, whenever they become galling or irksome. Neither have I ever discovered that any restraints were imposed upon us but those which were necessary for the peace and comfort of the whole, and for the promotion of the design for which we are collected, namely, to get money, as much of it and as fast as we can; and it is because our toil is so unremitting, that the wages of factory girls are higher than those of females engaged in most other occupations. It is these wages which, in spite of toil, restraint, discomfort, and prejudice, have drawn so many worthy, virtuous, intelligent, and well-educated girls to Lowell, and other factories; and it is the wages which are in great degree to decide the characters of the factory girls as a class. . . . Still, the avails of factory labor are now greater than those of many domestics, seamstresses, and school-teachers; and strange would it be, if in money-loving New England, one of the most lucrative female employments should be rejected because it is toilsome, or because some people are prejudiced against it. Yankee girls have too much *independence* for *that*. . . . though he will find error, ignorance, and folly among us, (and where would he find them not?) yet he would not see worthy and virtuous girls consigned to infamy, because they work in a factory.

*Lowell Offering*, December 1840

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Boott Cotton Mills Museum. Lowell, MA  
Paintings, Details. Anonymous, Hudson River School



## BLUE SKY

It's true that geniuses are often regarded as mad and Reich was probably both. Depending on your point of view, he was either a renegade crackpot with an Orgasmatron or a visionary theoretician of sex and a hero to all people wanting to break free of society's restraints. From the book's introduction, "The repressed always returns, with a new aura, and the signs are that Reich is returning." I agree, and it's best to try and not be cynical about Reich's utopian vision for humanity. Orgone is the fundamental life energy and it is blue. What is it about blue and the rhythmic pulses of the sky? Cosmic space is indeed the frontier we seek. One summer, a group of us drove up to Orgonon in Maine to feel the universal pulse of the life energy and make sure the aliens were not invading and stealing the Orgone. People wonder if there is life on other planets but who knows what form that aliveness takes. We sat in the pitch black for an hour or so in the large Orgone accumulator room built in the 1950's—it's walls and ceiling padded with alternating layers of organic sheep's wool to attract the energy and metallic steel wool to reflect the energy. We had been instructed to wear sunglasses in the dark so as not to confuse the light from behind our eye with the Orgone in front of our faces and after adjusting to the dark, we gleefully described to each other the very trippy abstract phenomena dancing around the room. Self expressive, techniques for physical release, garish ridiculous paintings, acting out drunk, egotistical, in legal trouble, belief in flying saucers—he's complicated. Dream: I am introduced to a macho Artist—Richard Serra? I am young punk girl in a T shirt that shows my nipples which is no big deal but still slightly embarrassing. He tours me through his studio and then we go upstairs where there is an audience and we are to play some sort of game. We swing chains of pearls at each other aggressively until only one team stands. He shows me a picture of the *Girl with the Pearl Earrings*. I easily take out the first team—swinging the pearls violently and without restraint. Then they get wise and introduce a disk like frisbee and try to get me but I dodge it every time. Then the Master—Wilhelm Reich? comes out and swings a large UFO shaped disk that spins menacingly towards me. I deflect it as it tries to cut my chest and anticipating its return I knock it down with my foot.

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Found Paperback. *Wilhelm Reich: A Personal Biography* by Ilse Ollendorff Reich (1969)

Reich paintings. Orgonon, Rangeley, ME