

We know how to give our whole life everyday

A. Rimbaud

I'll begin with me

Alcoholics Anonymous

John Boskovich sits in an elaborate golden chair decorated by carvings of dragons and swans. He wears a plaid shirt, his head shaved down to the skin, a knowing smile on his handsome face. He laughs as the interviewer reads his biography – a Bachelor in Philosophy from USC; studied English literature at Trinity College, Cambridge; art history at the Prado in Spain; BFA & MFA from CalArts; and to top it off, a law degree from Loyola Law School. “I don’t know, I like school,” he quips. “It helped me avoid working.” This is from his only public recorded interview, done with cable TV host Joan Quinn in 1994.

His cousin, film and commercial producer Krista Montagna, is the steward of his estate. She remembers that in the beginning her uncle, John’s father, had told him that he would only support his pursuit of art if he could become a successful, recognized artist in one year. And he did.

In the 80’s and 90’s Boskovich became the consummate multi-tasking, multi-genre LA artist, entering the national dialogue almost immediately showing alongside Cindy Sherman, Chris Burden, Bruce Nauman and Mike Kelly at commercial galleries on both coasts. He co-wrote and directed the feature film *Without You I’m Nothing*, starring lesbian comedian Sandra Bernhard, even earning her a Grammy nomination for best comedy album. The groundbreaking film received two-thumbs-up from the most notoriously moody film critics of the day, Siskel and Ebert.

Artist, academic, party animal, portraitist, film director, and more, Boskovich is heir to the legacy of Cocteau, and built on the Warholian concept of ‘factory artist’ by filtering it through LA Conceptualism. He repeatedly and boldly antagonized the realm of normative sexuality. One work, amplifying Ginsberg’s dictum: “America, I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel” was woven into a Navajo style rug and impossible to miss. Indeed, as a well-spoken, erudite, and autodidactic artist, he foreshadowed some of today’s contemporary artists through his persona. He knew how to craft an authentic personal brand too. He had his own letterhead, his own fonts, he freely shared his telephone number pre-social media and always presented as media trained, charismatic and relaxed, the perfect combination of humble yet confident.

During the interview, John gently touches the beads on a silver necklace he wears, cast from actual antidepressants and tranquilizers. *Rosary/Artist’s Current Listing*, 1993, made with his friend Warhol actress and fashion designer Tere Tereba, is currently on display in the gallery.

The AIDS crisis of the '80s and '90s colored John's short life and much of his production. It is a challenge for today's audiences to understand the one-two punch of overwhelming homophobia followed by an unmentionable plague singling out those closest and most loved by you. Imagine making art when you are losing someone new day after day. It was life in a war zone. When Stephen Earabino, Boskovich's decade long collaborator, best friend — and yes we can actually say it today — *lover*, died of AIDS, he was 32.

When Stephen got his diagnosis there were no treatments, there were no lucky ones, there were no survivors. This was a death sentence. John would surround Stephen with his artwork, special jewelry they made and personal mementos. This transformed Stephen's apartment into a *gesamtkunstwerk*, as if John was trying to share his life's energy with him. There are no known photographs of Stephen's apartment from this time.

Upon Stephen's death and in accordance with United States law, the apartment was sealed and only Stephen's legal family could enter. Boskovich was not family and could not. By the time John made his way back into the home, the entire contents of the apartment... photographs, artworks, jewelry, furniture... all of it was gone. Stolen, or rather returned to Stephen's family. No one knows.

The only thing left for John to claim to hold his memories was a cheap, used box fan. Transformed by a Plexiglas case with holes cut out so you could feel it, literally and figuratively, with a simple engraving in the style you might read on a tombstone. John turned this fan into *Feel It Motherfuckers – Electric Fan: Only unclaimed item from the Stephen Earabino Estate*, 1997. It is now in the permanent collection of MoCA, Los Angeles.

The brutality of losing Stephen and the subsequent experience changed John, he became withdrawn and restless, paranoid and hyper-creative, at times even manic. The result was *Boskostudio* in 1997. *Boskostudio* was a living installation, set in John's apartment which was divided into thematic rooms based on his conceptual conceits. As he put it, a combination of "schlock apocalypse and Millenarianism." Hare Krishna lamps, a pentagram rug, garishly colored walls and surveillance cameras adorned the living room, while the kitchen mocked early branding strategies with a Prada boxlike refrigerator, an additional surveillance camera and a shining trash can declaring "BOSKOVICH: FAMILY PRIDE SINCE 1915." Each room was its own world with its own name: Psycho Salon, The Mess Hall, Hell's Kitchen, The Sandra Bernhard Recuperation Laundry Room.

Boskostudio hosted a rotating public of friends, colleagues and onlookers. The visitors were sometimes invited by John, sometimes brought by MoCA, the local museum, and

some folks just found their way there. The results could range from quiet curiosity tours to legendary raging drug fueled parties.

The inward focus and paranoid mania took its toll and John passed in 2006 from a heart condition. When he did, this time, Montagna stepped in and dutifully preserved his work and archive, some of which we see on display here today. She saved everything she could from faxes to furniture. “He was my mentor,” she said. “We used to call him ‘the genius’.”

On view at Scherben is a sampling of Boskovich’s works from 1987 to 2001. On display in the center of the room is *I Have a Dream*, 1993. It consists of three peace sign-shaped bongs with a quote from Rodney King: “Can’t we all just get along?” Rodney King, an African American, was arrested after a high speed car chase and then beaten by police officers. The incident was videotaped by onlookers and, after public agitation, four of the officers involved were surprisingly acquitted. Los Angeles erupted at the result and became an inferno of rage and destruction for days.

Also on display are works from the *Rude Awakening* series (1990-1997), eponymously named after John’s favorite local pot dealing metal band. These still resonate in a modern context: Polaroids from everyday life are paired with text functioning like memes. Boskovich’s slice of life approach foreshadows today’s social media content. His wry, ironic charming edge has become the hallmark of an online generation: not too sincere, not too ironic, just right. He was an open book, sharing his entire life with the world down to his social security number.

The exhibition includes his short film *North*, (2001) in which we see moments of Godard’s *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) interspersed with shots of writer Gary Indiana reading from Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s novel *North*. Céline, a known anti-Semite and supporter of France’s pro-Nazi Vichy government, was in the process of being reclaimed by the French Left at the time. John discusses his aims for the film in detail in a separate handout.

On view to the public for the first time are a series of photographs Montagna herself took for documentation purposes after John’s death at the *Boskostudio*. He never had the opportunity to show in Europe during his lifetime. Now almost 20 years after his death, the exhibition at Scherben is the first time Berlin audiences have the opportunity to see Boskovich’s work in person. Here they can explore the inter-genre approaches he used to get beyond the almost insurmountable challenges facing him in a long ago world that is not all that different from the one we live in now.