

# *The Scattershot Plot is a Dead Giveaway*

## Dirk Knibbe

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DIRK KNIBBE: AMERICAN PICKER

D,

I admit when you first emailed me about this show, and its title, and all those ideas buzzing around in your head, I felt like I should *figure it out*. I rolled my desk chair over to the ol' corkboard and started sticking the colored pins in. Exhibit A: Fawn Hall. Exhibit B: "Appetite for Destruction." Exhibit C: Dionysus.

This made me a little nervous because isn't it always annoying when writers — or artists for that matter — mistake themselves for detectives? All clever-clever. No, let's not.

Instead I'm thinking of you now, Dirk. I'm thinking: is it really possible that the first time I saw you, up on Hillside on orientation day, you were dressed like a mechanic (I believe they call it a "speedsuit" or was it overalls?), leaning against a doorway, a toothpick hanging from your mouth? Am I only imagining?

I'll continue imagining. My brother used to watch this reality show called *American Pickers*. In it, these two antiquarians drove around the country visiting sheds, storage units, airplane hangars overflowing with junk. The show's feeble drama, in case you're wondering, came from the hosts' drawn-out bartering with strangers for their rusted-over tchotchkes.

I'm imagining you in an old pickup. A surfboard in the back. You drive window down, up the coast, state to state (in my mind all fifty sit stacked one on top of the other, an endless West Coast). Every now and then you'll stop off at the odd small town to wade through some crackpot's garage filled to the rafters with American detritus. *How much you want for this old Fosters Freeze ashtray? Oof. Tell you what, throw in that iron snake hook and this cocktail napkin signed by Tonya Harding and you've got yourself a deal.*

Your work is not a puzzle. And thank lowercase god because a puzzle is made for solving. What you do, Dirk, is already plenty (and I'm mostly guessing here):

- 1) Stay tuned to the correct frequencies: New Age music, vintage porn, TV static, magic, rust, Craigslist, candy, Carlos Castaneda, gossip, game shows, midcentury furniture, hardcore punk, Hollywood memorabilia, mushrooms, hieroglyphs, dyslexia, seafoam...

- 2) Isolate the pertinent details, amigo
- 3) Ease them on into your cosmos
- 4) Roll the dice and let it rip

But in case anyone else feels the urge to *figure it out*, feel free to hand them this puzzle (attached). It might help them get it out of their system. Then, I hope, they'll abide the wonderful unknowing of your work, Dirk.

One thing I've always liked about your art is the way it purports to organize wholly unintelligible content. One of my favorite illustrations of this can be found in a new painting of yours called "Last of The Moses Codex." In it, an indecipherable cipher appears scrawled on the grid of a crossword puzzle (an artifact you discovered and bought on Ebay). In your painting, the document is torn down the middle. Beyond it, a midnight void.

Similarly neat, rational-seeming arrangements of lunacy also pop up in some of your favorite places. Religious ceremony. Conspiracy theories. Modern art. And of course, the granddaddy, Language — that precarious Jenga tower upon which everything teeters.

This is where your devious titles come in. When we were at Art Center together, I recall a debate on the subject during one of your thesis committee meetings. The show in question was, I remember, insanely called *THE AS IS DASH CAMEO*, which followed one you had called *SEESAW RATTRAP*. You defended these titles, explaining they were funny. Some of the Big Dogs in the room disagreed. One of them suddenly turned to me, their teeth bared, growling: Do you think they're funny, Ren?

Well, uh, yeah, I mean... In the words of Ralph Wiggum: funny, but not ha-ha funny.

Your titles are trippy in that they make me trip, send me tripping down the stairs, prat-falling into the same black basement where Borges laid eyes upon the Aleph. This effect you call "slapstick spiritualism." It alerts us to the fact that beneath every graph, grid, clock or scale lies that endlessly percolating Petri dish of unmolded, disordered imminence. Things are never, in other words, as they seem. This text for example may resemble a letter from me to you. But we both know that's not true.

It's playing Scrabble on acid (try it, it's fun!). It's sorting grains of sand on a beach at high tide. It's the mutant rat in your shiny trap. It's the scattershot data in your plot.

Best,

R

