

What Mott-ly Meant to Me

By Patrick Sumner

May 9, 2012

When I first met Mott I was an impressionable youth and that dude made quite an impression. It was before I had made my total transition to dressing like a flat-chested girl in an old man's cast off PJ's. I was at a side yard picnic at 54th and Tracy, just off Troost, and Mott sauntered up looking like a full on London punk, full Mohawk up, black leather jacket, ears multiply pierced. I noticed his custom made boot and how his foot turned slightly sideways, that was also like his nonchalant demeanor. He held back in a small group of art students he came with, he sat down on a stone wall and turned his head sideways somewhat askew from our inquiring eyes. It was love at first sight for me but unrequited. I would just see him around at shows for a while after; he was older than me and at the Art Institute. That was 1982.

I used to hang out at the Tute in the sculpture department with Vince Roark who swept up. Vince and Mott were friends. Vince took me under his wing and showed me his work. Vince was a mathematical genius and gifted sculptor. He was very horny and when he saw the chicks I often ran with he told me to "share the wealth." The Art Ghetto around Warwick and the 39th and 43rd Street corridors was then the heart what was happening in Mid-town. This was years before the Crossroads and downtown was then a wasteland. I saw Mott's box assemblage with the skeleton of a little bird nailed in it. I asked Mott about it and he said people thought he was a baby bird killer. He laughed at this, as though Mott was an eccentric and sometimes a bit surly, he was a humane person at heart and wouldn't have hurt a fly. When I did a paper on the history of the scene after 1984 I interviewed Mott and he schooled me on the variations of pop to hardcore. Things I had witnessed but scarcely understood many nuances about, the scene had occurred in a blur of constant partying and playing in the streets. Mott was hardcore but relaxed. During the interview he showed me his collection of zines and show flyers that was in a cardboard box in a closet. I was like "Kunta Kinte I found you!" Those zines would provide the basis of my entire historical reconstruction of the old school scene. Mott and I discussed turning the collection over to a local archive. After that our relationship blossomed. I started partying with Mott regularly. He was an artist but also very much an intellectual and he was a pleasure to be with always.

Flash forward to the 2000s. Mott had returned from a sojourn to Lincoln, NE and we began to hang out a lot again. We would go to all of his openings and all-ages shows. We drank together, marched in Mardi Gras together. We bonded deeply and Mott's gallery was my refuge. In 2004 I had a pronounced manic break, and though I was in the middle of a bunch of creative work and activism, my personal life was spinning out of control. I used to take my little boy all over so he could see the crazy stuff in the burgeoning art scene of the Crossroads. But eventually I couldn't take him anymore as my mind started coming unhinged. I went to MoMO Gallery nearly every day and while some in the arts community turned away from me in fear and loathing, Mott-ly was my saint and mentor, a true friend in a time of dire need. Mott told me

that he and I were alike, both born artists, both born under a special sign. His grace and love saved my life. With friends like Mott and help from my girlfriend Cynthia I got psychiatric treatment. I balanced out and came back to good sense. Mott and I spent many happy times thereafter in each other's company and with Mott and my family in tow. Those were sweet years and when I found out Mott had passed I nearly lost it. Losing so great a friend and mentor was devastating but the community came together to honor a man with the heart of a lion. Many of us coalesced around the Slap and Tickle Mott's newly minted gallery and his partner in crime Apryl Mc. Now do to Mott's living legacy I have a whole group of new friends who have sweet tolerant hearts. I have many new friends because of Mott, but I'll never have another brother in spirit like him again. Mott-ly is a living legend to many; to me he is the guardian of this atheist's reluctant soul.