



SOUNDS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

A Northwest girls' camp strikes a chord with two documentary filmmakers.

Arne Johnson and Shane King have been making movies together since they were bell-bottom-clad Portland teenagers in the 1970s. While Portland is the location of their first feature-length documentary, there are no teenage boys in sight. *Girls Rock!*, which opens this month, explores the Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls, where for the past seven years young women have been taught that it's okay to scream, sweat, try new things, fumble, and, above all else, make loud music.

The film spotlights four campers: a Korean adoptee from Oklahoma obsessed with death metal; a 17-year-old emerging from meth addiction and homelessness; a near-friendless misfit dedicated to writing a 14-song cycle of experimental noise about her dog Pippi; and an eight-year-old who seems wise beyond her years—until she's implicated in a biting incident. Campers have one week to learn an instrument, form a band, and write a song to play to a crowd of hundreds. They are taught by such Northwest rock luminaries as Sleater-

Kinney guitarist and singer Carrie Brownstein and Beth Ditto, lead vocalist of the Gossip.

How is it that two guys were inspired to make a documentary about a confidence-building camp for girls? "Growing up, Shane and I didn't fit typical gender roles," Johnson explains. "We weren't jocks, we were just dorks." Both raised by single moms, they are men who care about what happens to women "not just because of fairness and equality, but also because life is richer when their voices are heard."

They involved women in the filmmaking process as much as possible to counteract the male domination of the movie business (which, as Johnson points out, is "almost as bad as rock") and because they wanted women's perspectives to help tell the story. They hired women camera operators, animators, and editing consultants. Johnson and King also spent months

letting the campers and their families become comfortable around them to minimize their intrusion on a girls-only environment.

Even so, during interviews the girls would sometimes shrug shyly and say, "You know..." But Johnson and King *didn't* know, and soon

realized their cluelessness could be a way into the film. "The girls were like tour guides," says Johnson. "Because we were foreigners in some ways to their experience, they got to explain to us—and to the rest of the world—how they're feel-

ing." King says the girls came "up to the edge of the expectations of their gender and leaped through so courageously. They didn't care what we thought about them—and you realize how rare that is." Both men were transformed by the experience. "I can't say I have the courage of any of the 12-year-old girls I know," King reflects, "but I try." —Wilson Diehl

GIRLS ROCK!

Mar 7–20, visit Web site for showtimes; \$9–\$10
 SIFF Cinema, McCaw Hall,
 321 Mercer St, Seattle Center
 206-633-7151 | www.seattlefilm.org

DAVE EGGERS TALKS SHOP

But when it comes to his own work, he's not singing.

Dave Eggers doesn't often give interviews. When he does give an interview, he doesn't like to discuss writing—at least not his own: "I shy away from anything about me. I really just sort of appear in articles about 826." And on November 8 he's "just sort of appearing" at Town Hall in a benefit for 826 Seattle, the youth writing center he helped launch. Eggers will be joined at the event, called People Talking and Singing, by *The New Yorker* music critic Sasha Frere-Jones, comedians Todd Barry and

Eugene Mirman, and local indie musicians John Roderick of the Long Winters and Rosie Thomas.

"When it comes to talking about my own stuff, it's so draining, it always throws me off my own work for a while. It goes in all kinds of different directions," he says over the phone from the McSweeney's office in San Francisco, speaking surprisingly slowly and haltingly for a man whose career has rocketed so fast and assuredly. The Gen-X literary linchpin created McSweeney's independent publishing house

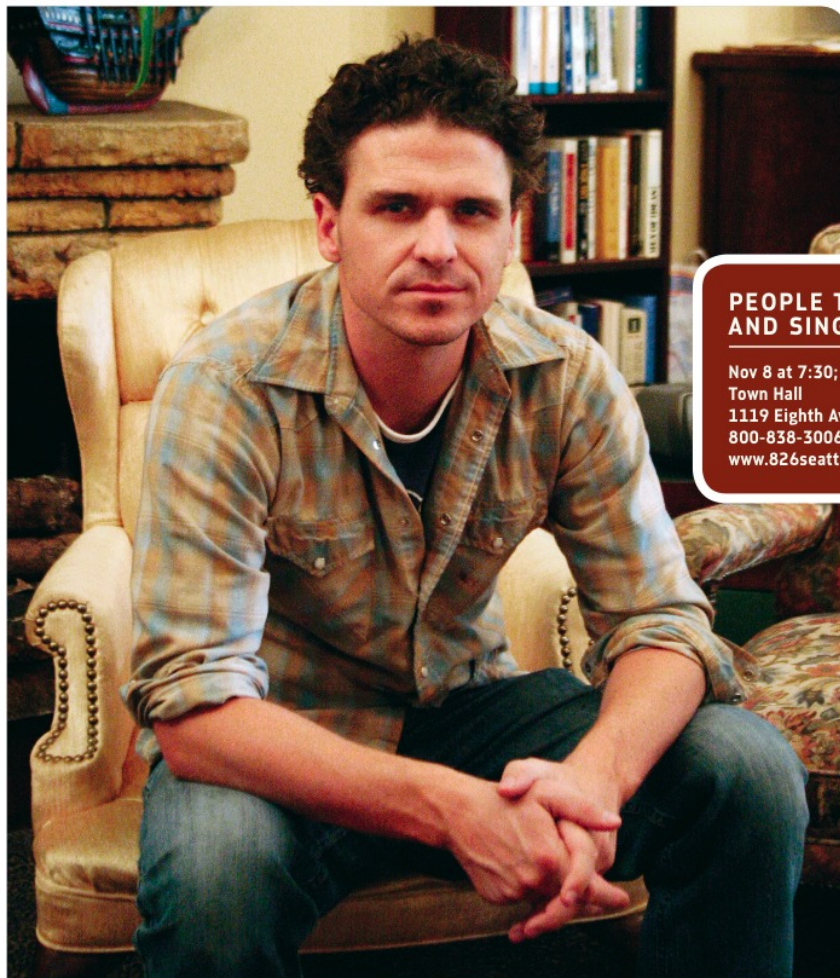
and magazine, sparked writing programs for kids in seven cities, wrote two acclaimed novels, a book of short stories, scores of magazine pieces, and a debut memoir that was named a finalist for a 2001 Pulitzer Prize.

Recently back from a trip to Sudan in conjunction with his 2006 best-seller *What Is the What*—a fictional memoir of Valentino Achak Deng, one of the real-life refugees of the Sudanese civil war—Eggers happily talks about 826 Valencia, the San Francisco writing center, which has since been replicated in a Greenwood storefront in Seattle. He believes in the transformative power of writing and writing teachers who create a safe place for kids to deal with "their socially awkward years and self-esteem problems."

His goal as a tutor and a founder of the centers is to make writing fun—especially for kids who hate it. "They think what they're being asked to do is write a dry page from a dry book from the 1800s," but Eggers and the gang tell them to "throw it all there on the page, all the blood and sweat. We start without constraints. We start with writing prompts, tell the kids 'be passionate, say something you actually feel.'"

He says it blows kids' minds to learn that essays and stories by famous writers don't come out perfect the first time. Here Eggers violates his rule to talk about his own revision process, confessing that he goes through 10 to 30 drafts of everything he publishes. "It strips away the myth that you're either born a writer or you're not, you're either good or you're bad," he says. "So much of it is work. I wasn't a kid who read 200 books a year when I was their age, and I didn't always think I was the best writer of all time, and I have to use a thesaurus too."

And then he's quickly back to 826 and the tutors there and how incredible it is for the kids to meet people who make their living with words. —Wilson Diehl



PEOPLE TALKING AND SINGING

Nov 8 at 7:30; \$35-\$100
Town Hall
1119 Eighth Ave
800-838-3006
www.826seattle.org/ptas

MEIKO ARQUILLOS

FACES AL FRESCO

Diana Falchuk discovers her faith in art.

Diana Falchuk—whom you may have seen fitting red legwarmers onto blue USPS mailboxes or teaching art to incarcerated teenage girls in Tacoma—is a woman who remembers how to play. As a kid she would make herself a plate of food after school and take it up to her room and sort of eat it and sort of toy with it while playing with glue at the same time. Unconsciously—and, it turned out, inexorably—she merged the two endeavors. In fifth grade she made a button that declared, “I am an artist.” But that was just kid stuff, and soon other things took over—high academic standards, parental expectations, questions of legitimacy, a degree in modernism—which led her to the Italian frescoes she would study as an undergraduate abroad in Umbria.

Falchuk moved here from Philadelphia in 1999, five years into Seattle’s infamous eight-year prohibition against posters on utility poles. When she saw all the rusty staples and tattered old bits of paper left on the poles from the days before the ban, she thought: “That’s just like those frescoes I’ve been lusting after!” Perhaps the correlation between Giotto’s *Lamentation* and crumbling bits of *Screaming Trees* fliers isn’t obvious, but where the city fathers saw a tetanus hazard for utility workers, Falchuk saw the face of the Virgin Mary. And Superman. And Dorothy.

Back in the studio she designed replicas of the dangling scraps she’d seen, painted over them with acrylics, dipped them in rust baths, and smeared them with mud to make them look worn and authentic. As she says, “I take fresh things and make them look really old.”

Falchuk has installed utility pole collages along Post Alley, in Greenwood, and on Capitol Hill, exploring faith, false idols, decay, and the communal aspects of art-making. “The idea is that the whole community has made this image occur, not intentionally but just by virtue of being a community, because all the posters get put up and they weather down and you start to see these bodies, or whatever.”

After spending much of last year creating very public art, Falchuk wanted to be alone again to play with her food. In her June show at Crawl Space (an artist-run gallery of which she is one of seven members) she shows drawings, mixed-media collages, and tiny sculptures made of fabric scraps and—no surprise—withered food bits. Her mailbox legwarmers and utility-pole collages could pop up at any time, so be on the lookout for those too.

Should you feel inclined to bring Falchuk a gift when you attend her Crawl Space show, make note of her fondness for crumpled old rotting things. For her birthday three years ago a friend gave her six duck heads. She couldn’t have been happier. It is in decay that she finds life, art, and—by extension—herself. —WD

NEW WORKS BY DIANA FALCHUK

June 16–July 15
Sat & Sun noon–5
Crawl Space Gallery
504 E Denny Way
206-201-2441
www.crawlpacegallery.com





**A RICH KID'S
BRAIN**

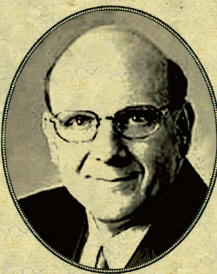
The Bush School
 Kindergarten–Grade 2 \$15,265
 Grades 3–5 \$16,320
 Grades 6–8 \$20,100
 Grades 9–12 \$21,165
 3400 E Harrison St, Seattle
 206-322-7978; www.bush.edu

The Evergreen School
 Preschool \$7,475
 Prekindergarten–Grade 8 \$14,950
 15201 Meridian Ave N, Shoreline
 206-364-2650; www.evergreenschool.org

Lakeside School
 Grades 5–8 \$20,450
 Grades 9–12 \$21,100
 14050 First Ave NE, Seattle
 206-368-3600; www.lakesideschool.org

The Overlake School
 Grades 5–12 \$20,385
 20301 NE 108th St, Redmond
 425-868-1000; www.overlake.org

BILLIONAIRES BEHAVING BIZARRELY



STEVE BALLMER
 CEO, Microsoft

NET WORTH
\$13.6 BILLION

Does a frat-grade “monkey dance” (check it out on YouTube) at investor meetings and forbids his sons from using iPods.



\$200,000,000

SHOWBOAT

Should you find yourself feeling a wee bit jealous of Paul Allen’s decidedly un-wee (414-foot) **YACHT** Octopus, with its accompanying helicopter, submarine, professional recording studio, and glass-bottom lounge, have one made for yourself. German yacht-maker Lürssen, in conjunction with Espen Oeino Naval Architects, built Allen’s pleasure boat—one of the largest in the world—and they’re taking orders. Estimated Octopus upkeep and crew salary expenditures: \$20 million per year. *Lürssen Yachts*, +011-49-421-6604-0; www.lurssen.com.

\$75,000,000

YOUR OWN COUNTRY

Mercer Island’s nice—if you don’t mind sharing it with 22,000 other people. But better to put your millions toward an island you can call your own. On **VATU VARA**, a 6,000-acre undeveloped Fijian island, you can reign over your own lagoon like some a despot, explore your personal volcano, and mount a massive treasure hunt—former owner Joe Thompson, an eccentric nineteenth-century U.S. sailor, supposedly hid his fortune somewhere on the island. But make your move now, King Seattle. Says real estate broker Cheyenne Morrison, there are “several interested parties, a resort owner in Fiji, some Saudi princes, and a guy in Dubai, but nothing has panned out yet.” *Luxury Real Estate*, +011-61-7-4099-3939; www.luxuryrealestate.com/647747.

\$39,500,000

THE CASTLE

Truly opulent estates have names. Like Graceland or Xanadu. On Mercer Island it’s **PROCTOR LANDING**, a fantasy spread on the shore of Lake Washington that looks like it was plucked from a fairy tale: cobblestones, carriage house, waterfall. The home also has an indoor/outdoor pool, a private dock for a yacht, and a security system. Realtor Kris Robbs says she’s been showing the 16,000-square-foot palace to some “big names in Seattle.” Are you one of them? *Coldwell Banker Bain*, 206-949-8611; www.proctorlanding.com.

ON THE TOWN

Apr 12–May 7 Mauro Altamura The artist from New Jersey takes pictures of unassuming faces in the backgrounds of *New York Times* photographs.

Apr 12–May 7 Anna Von Mertens The Brown University graduate's hand-stitched quilts illustrate the position of the stars during key moments in history, such as the Civil War Battle of Antietam and the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center.

Tue–Sat noon–6; Sun 11–5. 5107 Ballard Ave NW. 206-789-6242 / www.weareokok.com

Olympic Sculpture Park

Permanent Alexander Calder's majestic *Eagle*; Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's whimsical *Typewriter Eraser, Scale X*; Richard Serra's seemingly supple steel *Wake*; and other works remain on view—as does the breathtaking Northwest scenery surrounding them. Free. Park open 7–6 daily. Paccar Pavilion Tue–Sun 10–4. 2901 Western Ave. 206-654-3100 / www.seattleartmuseum.org

Photographic Center Northwest

Apr 1–29 Crossing the Water: A Photographic Path to the Afro-Cuban Spirit World Claire Garoutte and Anneke Wambaugh share their impressions of the spiritual power and ritual energy of a priest living in Santiago de Cuba via photos and text. Tue–Fri 9–9:30; Sat 9–5; Sun & Mon noon–9:30. 900 12th Ave. 206-720-7222 / www.pcnw.org

Platform Gallery

Thru May 3 Kelly Mark The installation includes two face-to-face television sets pulsating rose-colored light back and forth as though the screens are kissing, a video collage of the band R.E.M., and a series of photographs taken of people at intervals until the moment they become aware they are being photographed. Thu–Sat 11–5:30. 114 Third Ave S. 206-323-2808 / www.platformgallery.com

Seattle Art Museum

Thru Apr 6 The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti's Renaissance Masterpiece The 10 exquisitely modeled panels of Lorenzo Ghiberti's doors for the Baptistery of San Giovanni, recounting the Old Testament's greatest hits, bridge the medieval and modern worlds and meld the best of both. Three panels come to Seattle on the final stop of a first- and last-ever U.S. tour.

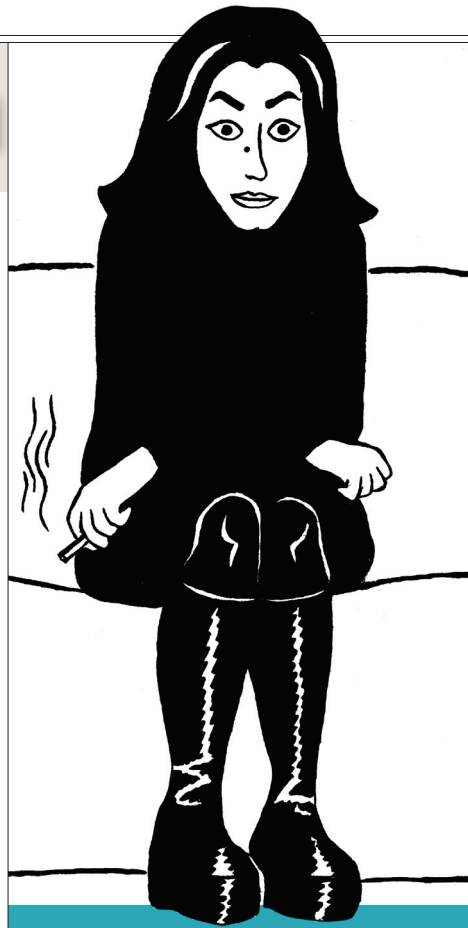
Thru May 11 Roman Art from the Louvre The touring exhibit of 180 pieces of art from one of the world's most comprehensive collections makes its only West Coast appearance. Mosaics, frescoes, sculptures, and pottery from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE bring to life the emperors, gladiators, and common citizens of the Roman Empire.

Apr 19–Aug 3 Kodiak Transplant yourself to a remote wilderness shack on Alaska's Kodiak Island. Architectural and glass artists Oscar Tuazon and Eli Hansen constructed the nearly 40-foot structure with concrete, lumber, and handblown-glass windows. The exhibit is the first installment of contemporary art curator Michael Darling's SAM Next series, introducing emerging artists.

\$7–\$20. Tue, Wed, Sat & Sun 10–5; Thu & Fri 10–9. 1300 First Ave. 206-654-3100 / www.seattleartmuseum.org

Seattle Asian Art Museum

Ongoing Chinese Art: A Seattle Perspective The exhibit draws from the collection started by SAM founding director Richard Fuller and continued by subsequent curators. Jade and celadon pottery, paintings, calligraphy, and painted tiles from all periods and dynasties



REBEL FORCES

Marjane Satrapi has been practicing rebellion for a long time. Growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution of the late 1970s, she gave her parents fits by listening to punk rock, talking back to teachers, skipping class. Years later she broke cultural taboos by sharing her family's story in a series of graphic novels, starting with *Persepolis*, about her childhood in Iran, and *Persepolis 2*, chronicling her struggle to fit into Western culture in Vienna, where her parents sent her when she was 14. Her comics made her a best-selling author, but Satrapi professes not to like the genre much. The drawings are often too busy and are “just about superheroes.” And when she speaks in public, she refuses to prepare in advance. “I always improvise, I never know what direction I’m going to take before going on stage. It just goes in one direction or another.” —WD

MARJANE SATRAPI
Apr 14 at 7:30; \$25–\$32
Moore Theatre, 1932 Second Ave
206-628-0888 | www.themoore.com

of China illuminate an artistic tradition stretching across thousands of years.

\$3–\$5. Tue–Sun 10–5; Thu 10–9. 1400 E Prospect St. 206-654-3100 / www.seattleartmuseum.org

Suyama Space

Thru Apr 18 John Grade The Seattle sculptor stretches a skin made of paper pulp, glassine, and cellulose across the gallery's 50-by-30-foot ceiling to simulate the feeling of looking up at the sky through the “pores of a peat bog.” Mon–Fri 9–5. 2324 Second Ave. 206-256-0809 / www.suyamapetersondeguchi.com/art

Tacoma Art Museum

Thru May 18 Veiled Northwest: Photographs by Mary Randlett This is the first museum exhibition to feature exclusively the landscapes of the Northwest photographer primarily known for her informal portraits of local artists and writers.

Thru June 15 A Couple of Ways of Doing Something: Photographs by Chuck Close, Poems by Bob Holman The photorealist painter takes an up-close and personal look at his influential circle of friends—including photographers Andres Serrano and Cindy Sherman. The hyperrealist examinations are accompanied by pieces by slam poet Bob Holman.

Thru June 29 Renoir as Printmaker: The Complete Works In the last 20 years of his life, the painter's interest in printmaking grew. His complete collection of etchings and lithographs serve as a reminder that the man possessed more talent in his (arthritis) pinky finger than most of us have in our whole bodies.

Thru Nov 30 Telling Stories Nearly 40 selections from the permanent collection explore the various ways artists create visual narratives. The exhibit is organized into sections by character, setting, and plot development, and visitors are invited to share their observations by writing text for the wall labels.

\$6.50–\$7.50. Tue–Sat 10–5; Sun noon–5. 1701 Pacific Ave, Tacoma. 253-272-4258 / www.tacomaartmuseum.org

Western Bridge

Apr 24–Aug 2 You Complete Me In the exhibit, visitors literally complete the art. Walk through a tunnel and watch as your weight triggers a pump that sprays gouache onto the walls. Or wade through a room filled with balloons five feet deep and help complete the creative process. Thu–Sat noon–6. 3412 Fourth Ave S. 206-838-7444 / www.westernbridge.org

BOOKS & TALKS

Elliott Bay Book Company

Apr 6 at 2 Gary Chamberlain In *Troubled Water: Religion, Ethics and the Global Water Crisis*, the Harvard professor of economics discusses the importance of water for life and its role in religious and social practices.

Apr 9 at 7:30 Jeff Gordinier With much wit and many a pop-culture reference, the *Entertainment Weekly* writer argues in *X Saves the World* that Generation Xers, unfairly painted as lazy and unmotivated, have done much to, in his words, “keep everything from sucking.”

Apr 10 at 8 Sloane Crosley The essayist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times* and the *Village Voice*, reads from a series of vignettes about leaving the suburbs to make it big in New York City. Familiar themes of quarter-life crises are reinvented with the humorist's quick sarcasm and delightfully dry observations about everyday life.

Apr 11 at 7:30 Karen Joy Fowler The best-selling author of *The Jane Austen Book Club* reads from her new novel, *Wit's End*, in which a 29-year-old woman visits her murder-mystery writing godmother and discovers a mystery of her own.

Apr 15 at 7:30 Jane Smiley Winner of the 1992 Pulitzer Prize for *A Thousand Acres*, the author reads from her

ON THE TOWN

Henry Art Gallery

Thru Sept 21 *Matthew Buckingham: Play the Story* In three installations the New York-based artist investigates the social role of memory with videos about writer Mary Wollstonecraft, motion-picture inventor Louis Le Prince, and feminist activist Charlotte Wolff.

Thru Oct 19 *The Violet Hour* Taking its title from a line in T. S. Eliot's "Wasteland," the exhibit imagines the world in the aftermath of massive political strife and environmental destruction.

\$6–\$10. Tue, Wed & Fri–Sun 11–5; Thu 11–8. 15th Ave NE & NE 41st St, UW campus. 206-543-2280 / www.henryart.org

McLeod Residence

Thru Sept 27 *Robert Zverina* Backseats of taxis, passenger-train sleeper cars, and sidewalk stoops are a few of the New York photographer's subjects. The exhibit also includes short films of Zverina's artmaking such as one

in which he arranges 1,044 smashed soda cans into an ever-growing spiral. Thu–Sat noon–6. 2209 Second Ave. 206-441-3314 / www.mcleodresidence.com

Seattle Art Museum

Thru Sept 21 *Inspiring Impressionism: The Impressionists and Art of the Past* Manet, Degas, Cézanne, and others launched a new way of painting. Affinities between the Impressionists and the Old Masters they scrupulously studied—then rejected—become clear, thanks to more than 100 drawings, sketchbooks, and classic works.

Thru Oct 26 *Kodiak* Transplant yourself to a remote wilderness shack on Alaska's Kodiak Island. Architectural and glass artists Oscar Tuazon and Eli Hansen constructed the 30-by-40-foot structure with concrete, lumber, and handblown-glass windows. The exhibit is the first installment of contemporary art curator Michael Darling's SAM Next series, introducing emerging artists. \$7–\$20. Tue, Wed, Sat & Sun 10–5; Thu & Fri 10–9. 1300 First Ave. 206-654-3100 / www.seattleartmuseum.org

Seattle Asian Art Museum

Thru Dec 7 *Inspired Simplicity: Contemporary Art from Korea* The exhibit juxtaposes pieces from the Korean Choson

period (1392–1910) with contemporary Korean abstract-painting pioneer Chun Sung-woo's large-scale oils and Park Young-wook's ceramics. \$3–\$5. Tue, Wed & Fri–Sun 10–5; Thu 10–9. 1400 E Prospect St. 206-654-3206 / www.seattleartmuseum.org

BOOKS & TALKS

Elliott Bay Book Company

Sept 17 at 7:30 *Helene Cooper* With *The House on Sugar Beach*, the *New York Times* reporter presents the story of her war-torn Liberian childhood, her family's flight to America, and her reunion 20 years later with the foster sister they left behind.

Sept 22 at 7:30 *Chuck Klosterman* See "Out of the Mouth of Chuck," this page.

Sept 24 at 7:30 *Irvine Welsh* Another jolting novel from the author of *Trainspotting*, *Crime* follows a detective trying to recover from a cocaine- and work-induced mental breakdown. A vacation to Florida with his fiancée leads him into the dark side of the Sunshine State, where he must rescue a sexually exploited 10-year-old girl from a gang of pedophiles.

Free. 101 S Main St. 206-624-6600 / www.elliottbaybook.com

Seattle Arts and Lectures

Sept 17 at 7:30 *Richard Russo* See *Met Picks*, page 191. \$10–\$50. Benaroya Hall, 200 University St. 206-621-2230 / www.lectures.org

Seattle Public Library

Sept 11 at 7 *Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer* Former President Clinton speechwriter Liu and founding Amazon.com investor Hanauer argue that patriotism is progressive in their manifesto, *The True Patriot*.

Sept 18 at 7 *Paul Auster* The best-selling author of *The Brooklyn Follies* and *Timbuktu* reads from *Man in the Dark* in which a retired book critic distracts himself from the harsh realities of his wife's and granddaughter's boyfriend's recent deaths by imagining a world in which all of America is collapsing.

Free. Central Branch, 1000 Fourth Ave. 206-386-4636 / www.spl.org

Third Place Books

Sept 15 at 7 *Kathleen Flinn* After ditching her high-powered corporate job, the sometime-Seattleite (and sometime-Floridian) pursued her lifelong dream of attending the prestigious Parisian Cordon Bleu cooking school and shares her discovery of love, language, and life in *The Sharper Your Knife, the Less You Cry*.

Sept 23 at 7 *Michael Greenberg* The London columnist shares his daughter's struggles with mental illness in *Hurry Down Sunshine*.

Free. 17171 Bothell Way NE, Lake Forest Park. 206-366-3333 / www.thirdplacebooks.com

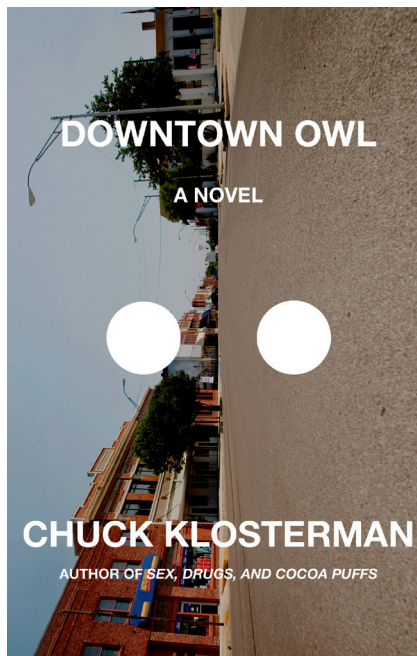
Town Hall

Sept 8 at 7:30 *Slavoj Žižek* The Slovene cultural theorist employs philosophy, history, literature, film, psychiatry, and humor to examine the interaction of the terrorism, racism, economics, and politics of *Violence*.

Sept 15 at 7:30 *Garrison Keillor* The *Prairie Home Companion* host and writer introduces *Liberty*. The latest installation about life in Lake Wobegon revolves around auto mechanic Clint Bunsen, who is looking to snag a seat in Congress despite his questionable background.

Sept 17 at 7:30 *Rick Shenkman* As we gear ourselves up for the presidential election, the frequent CNN and MSNBC guest tears us down in *Just How Stupid Are We?: Facing the Truth About the American Voter*.

Sept 22 at 7:30 *Bernard-Henri Lévy* The reporter for *The New Republic* and *Le Monde* has traveled to Afghanistan on a diplomatic fact-finding mission, reported on genocide in Darfur, and researched ongoing wars in Colombia and Sri Lanka. His latest, *Left in Dark Times*,



OUT OF THE MOUTH OF CHUCK

CHUCK KLOSTERMAN
Sept 22 at 7:30; Free
Elliott Bay Book Company, 101 S Main St
206-624-6600 | www.elliottbaybook.com

Asksed to explain his recent foray into writing fiction, Chuck Klosterman, columnist for *Esquire* and author of the essay collection *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, said he got tired of being beholden to what people actually say. "I wanted to be able to make characters say things—to have a third person say things I want them to." Ah, *that's* why the dialogue in the best-selling pop-culture critic's newest book, *Downtown Owl: A Novel*, feels a little...forced. His smart, incisive essays on topics from the appeal of the Sims video game to the sociopolitical implications of the Lakers-Celtics basketball rivalry have earned the poster child for literate hipsters a generation of avid fans. There's no question his reading will draw an enthusiastic crowd—one Klosterman hoped might include Sonics shooting guard Kevin Durant. "Unless he already moved to Oklahoma City," he joked in his charmingly awkward way—kind of like he was making himself say it. —*Wilson Diehl*

LEFT: COURTESY KAMILLA KRACZKOWSKI.
RIGHT: COURTESY SCRIBNER

Going Old School

A case of love at first sight interferes with a budding romance.

Within a week of our first date, Dr. Boyfriend declared he never wanted to go out with anyone else. Then he started talking about me moving in. We're both intense people—an emergency-medicine physician (him) and a poet (me)—and old enough to know what we want. We were standing in the master bathroom of his spacious Craftsman in Madrona with views of Lake Washington and the Cascades and, from certain windows on clear days, Mount Rainier. I looked over at him next to the deliciously deep claw-foot tub, a maple tree in full leafy glory perfectly framed by the window behind him, and laughed, "Yeah, that's never going to happen." He looked stricken. I didn't mean *never*, I quickly backpedaled, I just meant not until we're, um, married. The problem isn't religion or morals or timing or even location. The problem is I'm already in love—with my apartment building.

Growing up in Iowa, I was a bookish kid with a fondness for playing "school" with the neighbors and, when they were unavailable, my dolls. When I was six I spent my allowance on three copies of the same *Dick and Jane* book, plus the teacher's edition. I dreamed of living in one of the little white clapboard schoolhouses dotting the Iowa landscape the way sailboats dot Puget Sound each spring.

IT WAS NEVER MY INTENTION TO LIVE IN AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY. FOUR YEARS OF DORM LIFE WAS ALL IT TOOK TO INSTILL IN ME A FEAR OF THE WORD "COMMUNAL."

For four years I lived contentedly in a small one-bedroom in an awkwardly divided Wallingford house. Then the gas leaks began, and the screams. The seventh time I was woken up in the middle of the night by my downstairs neighbor yelling "I'm going to fucking kill you!" I grabbed my laptop and frantically Googled "Seattle affordable housing." There it was: the school of my childhood dreams. I drove to West Seattle first thing the next morning and toured the four-story brick school with wide hallways

lined with lockers, giant room numbers painted on heavy wooden classroom doors, seven-foot-tall windows, built-in chalkboards and glass-front bookcases, and drawers marked Paper Scraps, Fabric and Leather, Social Studies, Math, Reading. I grabbed the manager by his shoulders, looked him square in the eye, and said, "You *have* to let me live here."

Sure, the kitchens look like they belong in a tract home, all particleboard and veneer, and the bathrooms could be from a renovated Days Inn. But the phrase "apartment building" doesn't do the place justice. The Delridge community banded together nine years ago to convert the dilapidated school just south of the Nucor steel mill into a cultural arts center with three floors of housing for low-income artists.

Lucky for me, someone had just moved in with his fiancée, leaving one studio vacant. I filled out five hours' worth of paperwork confirming that no, my single-person household didn't make more than 50 percent of Seattle's \$54,500 median yearly income; yes, I made enough money to pay the \$649 rent; no, my household assets didn't exceed \$5,000; no, I wasn't a full-time student; and no, I didn't own a dog weighing more than 25 pounds. Then I was interviewed by the Artist Selection

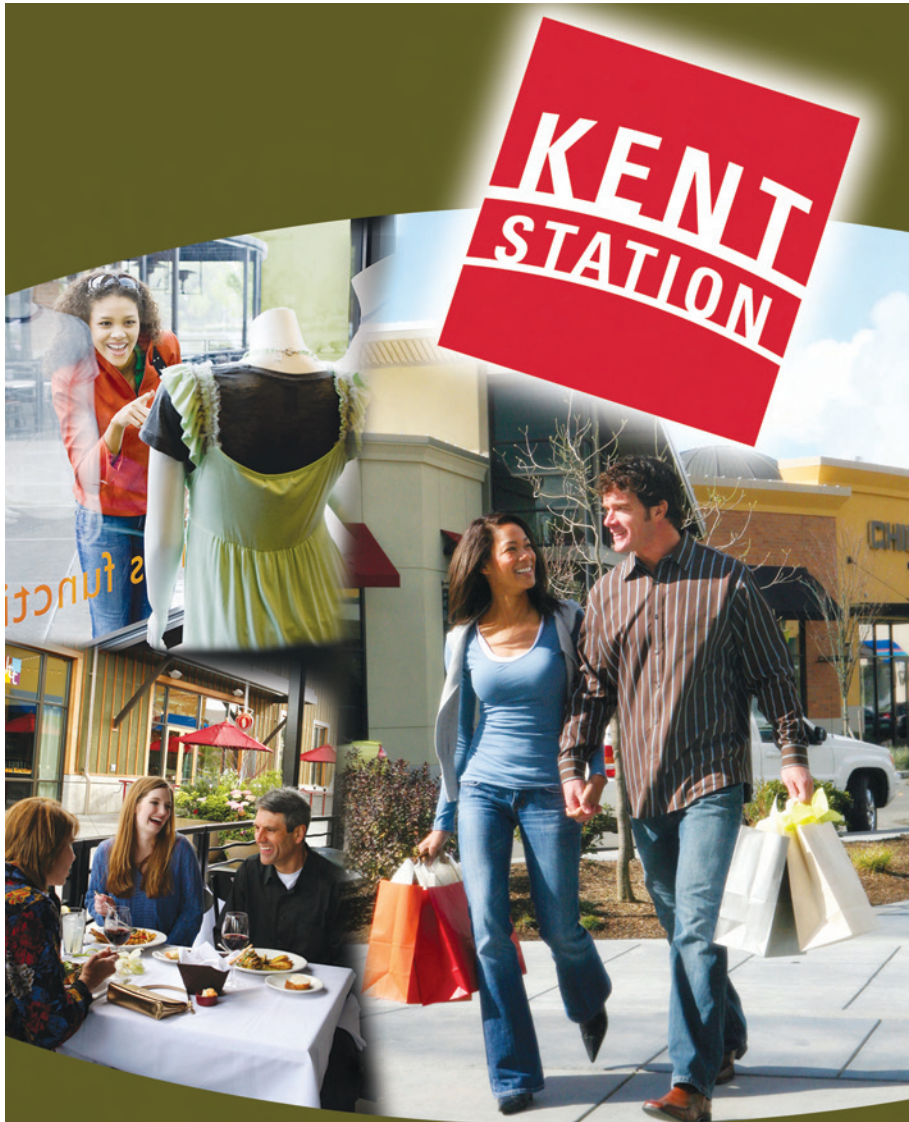


Committee to prove that yes, I am an artist; no, my art isn't just a hobby; yes, I'm interested in contributing to the community; and yes, I have long-term artistic goals.

I exaggerated slightly in the "community contribution" portion; if Cooper hadn't been an old school building, I wouldn't have wanted in. It was never my intention to live in an intentional community. Four years of dorm life was all it took to instill in me a fear of the word "communal." I want the dishes in the sink to be ones I put there, and when I empty the strainer covering the drain, I like to know what I'm sticking my fingers into, if you know what I mean. There's only so much bathroom chit-chat a person can take, particularly a person fond of solitude and silence and privacy.

The building itself lured me in, but the community keeps me here. I've grown fond of the sound of Ben playing his Japanese bamboo flute in the stairwell and the smell

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of dead leaves wafting from Seth's studio as he prepares for an upcoming installation. I forget that outsiders assume we're freaks. Then we hold an open house and I am reminded. Once or twice a year we sweep our floors, buy a few bottles of three-dollar wine and whatever cheese is on sale, and arrange our drawings, paintings, sculptures, chapbooks, homemade clothing, necklaces, and pet photographs on top of the lockers and along the lips of the chalkboards on our walls. The question visitors ask again and again is not (to our dismay) "How much are you asking for this?" but "Where do you go to the bathroom?" Apparently they don't notice the five-by-eleven-foot room with a sink, tub, and toilet built into every studio, perhaps because they're distracted by workbenches strewn with hammers and awls and more kinds of adhesive than they ever knew existed.

I want to say, "Didn't you notice the chamber pot in the hall with all the cameras pointed at it? Ian's gathering footage for a multimedia installation at Burning Man." Instead I point out that we all have kitchens and sleeping lofts and, yes, bathrooms. We're not living in a commune but a building of 36 separate studios with doors that lock and everything. Theoretically we could be as distant and isolated as people living in any big-city apartment complex. But almost all 43 of us (excluding the five babies) know each others' names and cat sit, loan sugar, walk dogs, sign get-well cards, and do all the other things people do in small towns—at least in Iowa. Living at Cooper is more traditional than living in a single-family dwelling in Madrona.

When I think about moving to Dr. Boyfriend's house, I picture my coffee table made out of an old card catalog in a home that *didn't* used to be a school, and I ache. I can't imagine leaving Cooper. And with a waiting list a few hundred people long and an average of one vacancy per year, I can't count on being able to return. Dr. Boyfriend will have to wait—until I tire of the community, until maintaining two households drives us insane, or until, as I said to him that day in his lovely bathroom, we get married. I can't just leave, no matter how dreamy the man or his house or the view out his windows. Truth is, my heart belongs to Cooper. ✨



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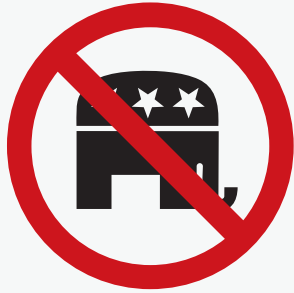
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