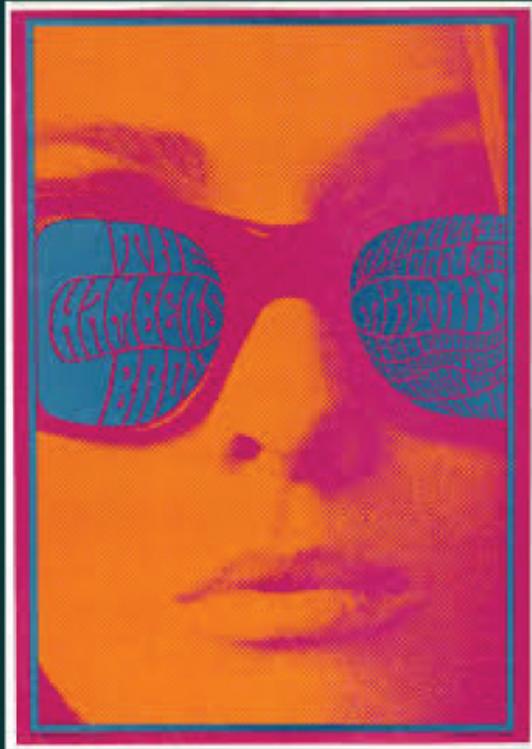


Victor Moscoso

Interview



with Michael Erlewine

Victor Moscoso

Interview

Notes

by

Michael Erlewine

INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design.

Michael@Erlewine.net

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Interview with Victor Moscoso

by Michael Erlewine, May of 2001



Victor Moscoso

[Victor Moscoso is an original and independent all the way around, both as an artist and a person. He was seminal creative back in the day and continues to be in the present. You can never put Moscoso in a box. Don't even try. Just enjoy his creativity and incredible poster work.]

Moscoso: Yeah, let me, get the meter going.

Moscoso: Ok. There we go. Now you got your tape. I've got my tape. You got.... See, the reason I had to do that, is because I....

Michael: You want stereo!

Moscoso: No! I'd say, "Ok, I'll do the interview but, you gotta' send me a dup!"

Michael: Well, I could do that too.

Moscoso: Well, one out of twenty people would send me a dup! I figured: fuck this man, you know. I'll just get my own tape and I'll do it, that way they got their tape, I got my tape. They're both the same tape, you know, and then they don't have to bother with sending me a dup and that's it. Job is done!

Michael: Well, I'll send you the transcription.

Moscoso: Oh! That'll be excellent.

[Victor has a photo of Rick Griffin, on the other side of his worktable]

Moscoso: Ok. Anyway, when I was doing the cover to Zap Comix #13, which was a tribute to , you know, I talked to the photograph and said, "Ok, Rick, I'm leaving now. [Laughs]. If you feel like [laughs] ... if you feel like doing anything on the drawing while I'm sleepin', go ahead. You know. Feel free!" [Laughs].

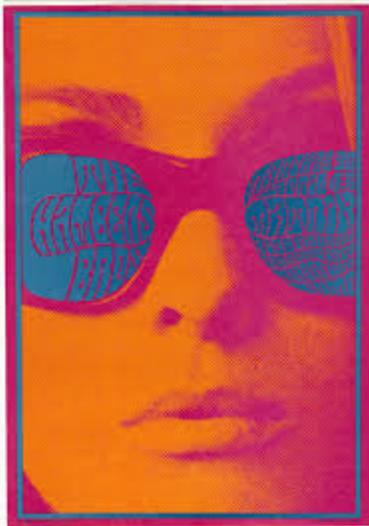
He didn't, you know, so I had to do all the work. But the poster that he has under his foot there is the probably the most influential poster that Rick did on my work, because at that time, in October of 1967,

Gail and I went to New York. I'm from New York, you know. And I figured, well, being a New Yorker, you know, the only place to make it is New York. So I figured, now, with this portfolio, you know, of what they did... I had been in Life Magazine and all that, I figure I'll go to New York and I'll make it. All right, so I went to New York, you know, and then I realized that not only had I already made it, but I wasn't a New Yorker anymore... you know. Cause' you scratch New York on a psychedelic surface and there's New York, man ... the gray battleship, that it looked like when I came over the Brooklyn Bridge.

Moscoco: You know, I used to run over the bridge. It's higher than the cars, so you can see the whole lower Manhattan, and it was always gray. It was always gray, and to me it looked like a battleship. I expected it'd pull out any moment, you know, and the skyscrapers were these huge gun turrets, you know.

Anyway, so while I was there, I ran into most of the people that I had looked up to, you know, high school, college buddies of mine, have gone in totally different, you know, just totally different and they weren't droppin' acid they weren't smokin' dope, except for this one guy. So Pablo Ferro is doing the titles to "Doctor Strangelove," the refueling sequence... [singing] "Try a little tenderness." And the atom bomb sequence, which is, [singing] "We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when..." I thought it was **Stanley Kubric**. It fit so well. It was

Pablo Ferro. Pablo, meanwhile, is collecting my posters. He's got them all over his place, but he can't read my name. [Laughs]. He said, "You did these?" I said, "You got my posters all over the place." He said, "I didn't know you do these, man." He says, "Well would you do a Christmas card for me, a poster Christmas card for me?"



Moscoso poster from Neon Rose series.

So I said, "Sure." Now, I had just seen Antonioni's "Blow-Up," and I don't know why it was, but when I came out of there, I understood how to make a film. So, from that point on, I figured, Ok, I want to go into filmmaking. So, because Pablo Ferro was into filmmaking, that was my first sequential poster, There's six panels: one, two, three, four... It tells a little story.

All right. All the principle photography was shot. That's Pablo there. Gail is flying out of the violin case, you know. Pablo's cousin and brother come in from the side, drop the flowers into the violin case. Had all the photography done and had the thing laid out, you know. All I had to do was "do the poster," Ok?

Well, I was living on Church Street, just near the **Mission Dolores**, just above the Mission Dolores, Church and Liberty Streets. And I open up the door and what do I see? That poster. Rick had come and slipped the poster underneath my door. I looked and I said, "Holy shit!" He too was doing a serial poster, you know, but it was a cartoon. Mine was photographic, because of the Antonioni film and being live action, I thought I'd go in that direction. Well, that changed me around, so that was what happened and then we started working together and then I started going into cartooning, which I had purged myself of when I was, quote, a "fine arts painter." Anytime any cartoon influences came up, I got rid of them.



[Victor has a photo of Rick Griffin, on the other side of his worktable]

Well, when we got together, eventually we ended up with, let me see, the **Pinnacle** Poster with **Big Brother and the Holding Company**, **Albert King**, and P.G. & E. (Pacific Gas & Electric), with the orange with sunglasses. An owl eating... This is how we were gonna' represent L.A. [Laughs]. I think it was an owl eating a taco and a pig eating a burrito or something like that. I mean this is L.A. But at the bottom of it, there were three panels. There were three panels that Rick had drawn and then we add color, together. And we came to the conclusion that we should do a comic-magazine book, you know.

This is before even saw a "**Zap**". All right, so we started doing it, started doing these things. I had

made a template, so that both Rick's work and my work would be in the same template, same shape, and then we would just randomly get them together and then color them in. And do what... Actually, what we had in mind was something like the "**Man from Utopia**," or something that Rick did later, like a magazine. Well, then we saw Zap #1 and **R. Crumb** invited Rick and I into a...

Rick said, "Well, we're already working on a book, you know, Moscoso and Griffin," and Crumb said, "Well fine! You know, just put this stuff in." And since **Wes Wilson** was doing his stuff himself and since Crumb was doing his work by himself, Rick and I separated our work to be individual, but if you look at **Looma Tunes** and you look at the other one, you see the panels are exactly alike, you know. And they could be interchanged, you know. But we separated them at that point, and it was ... that was the poster that started it.

Michael: Hmmm. Yeah, I know that poster.

Moscoso: In the same way that Wes' poster for **Paul Butterfield** and then **Stanley Mouse** and **Alton Kelley**'s poster for "**Zig Zag**," you know, influenced me, you know. I mean when I saw Mouse and Kelley do "**Zig Zig**," you know, it's like ... it just about knocked me down on the sidewalk. And the thing about it ... it was like I said to myself, "It's so obvious."

chicken on a unicycle which was, "Eehhh'." At least I got on base, you know. It was a single, you know.

THE QUICKSILVER MESSENGER SERVICE
 BLACKBURN & SNOW ○ SONS OF CHAMPLIN ○

AVALON BALLROOM 9 P.M.
 OCTOBER 28-29
 LIGHTS BY BEN VAN METER & ROGER HILLIARD
 CONCERT DANCE
 SUTTER AT VANNESSE - SAN FRANCISCO

TICKET OUTLETS: SACRAMENTO: TIDES BOOK SHOP
 BERKELEY: MOE'S BOOKS, DISCOUNT RECORDS
 MENLO PARK: REPLER'S BOOK STORE

SAN FRANCISCO: THE PSYCHEDELIC SHOP, CITY LIGHTS BOOKS, RALLY HQ,
 CEDAR ALLEY COFFEE HOUSE, MNASODKA,
 SANDAL MAKER (South Beach), HOT T-1 STATE COLLEGE

THE BOWLING PIN, SAN FRANCISCO

The flower one, "Ehhh." Another single, you know, But then came the "Man with the Spiral Eye Glasses." Bam! Off the back wall deal. A triple.



Man with the spiral eyes.

Ok, finally I was in the ballpark, you know. And at that point, then I started progressing very rapidly. And one of the ways that I did it was by reversing all the rules I ever learned in school.

For instance, I had been told that lettering should always be legible, so I turned that around to say: Lettering should be as illegible as possible. Another rule was that a poster should transmit its message quickly and simply. So, I said: A poster should hang you up as long as possible. Another one is: Do not use vibrating colors; they're irritating to the eyes. So I said: Use vibrating colors as much as possible.

After all, the musicians were turning up their amplifiers to the point where they were blowing out your eardrums. I did the equivalent with the eyeballs.

So I reversed everything that I had learned, and once I did that, then it fell into place. Then everything I'd learned in school began to work for me. I could pick a vibrating color like nobody could. You know when I had that conversation with **Wes Wilson** and he says, "Oh, I use vibrating colors all the time." I said, "Wait a minute. No you don't." Just 'cause you use a green and a red doesn't mean they vibrate, if the value of the green is like 20% and the value of the red is 80%. Uh uh!!

They both have to be ... the value has to be equal and the intensity has to be equal in order for them to vibrate. It's not just using colors from the opposite of the color wheel. The intensity has to be equal. The value has to be equal, so that your eye cannot tell which one is in front of the other. Fucks with the eyes. Your eyes are limited. Your eyes are limited. That's why you can see motion pictures. Motion picture don't move. They're just a lot of still pictures. However, because of our limitations of our eyes, it appears to move. See?

Anyway by then, by that time, you know, I started getting ... then my schooling stopped getting in my way, and I started being able to use what I had learned in school. I was a very good student, you know, and, to this day, I have not been invited to

give a talk, a seminar, or anything at High- School Industrial Art, **Cooper Union**, Yale University, or the **San Francisco Art Institute**. I'm in the **Louvre**, man (laughs). I'm in the Library of Congress, you know. I'm in the Victoria and Albert Museum. I'm in all these places, man, and these people don't like me. Well, one of the reasons they don't like me is because we bypassed their entire, quote, "fine art structure."

We didn't need art critics. We went directly to the people. After all, these were advertisements. Nobody took them seriously at first, and then, in fact, we didn't take them seriously later either. They were still advertisements, you know. We just got better at it because we were competing with each other. And I guess the schools don't get it. They still don't get it, because you still have to go through their channels, their bureaucracy, their point of view, their bullshit, basically is what it is. Their academy.

They're all academies, Academies are good for teaching you certain tricks, you know. You pick up certain craft, although I don't buy throwing plastic casts all that much, really, you know. I mean that's ahh.... But, hey, it's a discipline, you know. And I don't like what's going on in our schools today. In our schools today, we never teach craft.

There's a woman that I know who is putting on this piece where she manages to vomit blue. Wow ... man! Now how much did that cost? Can I hang it on

my wall? I mean what the fuck? What is this, you know? Hey look at me, look at me! That's what it is. There's no craft. Is there a craft in vomiting blue? How do you learn it? You know there's a craft in learning how to draw a figure. All right, there's a craft in learning how to use color.

Michael: It's true.

Moscoso: What's happened is things have changed to such a point, you know. I don't get it all, you know. I mean, I know what I like and I like what I know, basically, you know. But I don't get it. I don't get these performance pieces where you put a foot of dirt in an art gallery and that's art.

Michael: But that's not new; they were doing that in the 1960s too.

Moscoso: It's still there. That gallery is still there. Now how do they make money? Do they sell the dirt? [Laughs].

Michael: No idea.

Moscoso: Do they charge admission? Can you walk on their artwork? I mean you can walk on ... on Pompeii, you know, they had and all of these mosaic floors that you walked on. That's art. I guess you can! Anyway, I don't get that stuff. I think it's all a bunch of crap, really. You know it's a place where somebody with no talent can come up with an idea and get recognized for 15 minutes or whatever.

Michael: Right, but there is a lot of that.

Moscoso: Yeah, that seems to be the case.

Michael: Not just in art, it's also in music.

Moscoso: Yeah. John Cage putting on six different radio stations.

Michael: I remember. I mean in, in the early and mid 60s, John Cage would come to Ann Arbor to work with a local group called "Once Music," happenings. And I lived in the same house with one of the musicians, who later became a really well-known avant-garde composer. We just shared a house so that, it was just like ...

Moscoso: Where was this, in New York or ...?

Michael: Ann Arbor. And so they would put on events, like playing one note on a piano for some number of hours. I'm trying think, that would be an event, and there'd be a hall and there'd be somebody playing one note.

Moscoso: That would drive me fucking crazy! I mean it's like dropping one drop of water on your head every second, man.

Michael: Well, I think I understood what they were trying to say. You know, it's like watching the movie "Fargo." After five minutes, I got it. I could

appreciate what they were doing, but I didn't need that much of it.

ART AS ENTERTAINMENT

Moscoso: See, I see myself as an entertainer.

Michael: Tell me more about that.

Moscoso: I see myself as a graphic entertainer. I'll give you a story. For example, the child-learning experts said children can only learn certain things at certain ages. Along comes "Sesame Street," and all of a sudden children were learning earlier than they're supposed to. Why? Because "Sesame Street" was entertaining. Entertainment means to entertain, that means: Get your attention and hold on to it. Now how do you do that? Not through pain, because with pain, you'll want to walk away. See, playing that one note over and over again is painful.

Michael: No, but there's an element, you'll have to explain to me, that about your work, at least for me. One loves it. I can see your work; it is immediately identifiable right ... anywhere. And there's an emotional element that maybe you're addressing and I'm not getting, where there's an actual ... it's not simple. I think of entertainment as ... with maybe the best entertainment, I could agree with that, but there's something ... It does an imprinting or something. There's something ... there's some kind of appreciation of your work that I don't think of it just

as entertainment, you know. You love what it does to you. I do, and my whole family does.

Moscoso: Well, that's entertainment.

Michael: Well Ok, in a deeper sense of that word.

Moscoso: Yeah, you know, that's entertainment. Looking upon a beautiful woman, like ... I was just thinking of Pret-a-Porte, Sophia Loren is doing a strip for Marcello Mastroianni, just before the fool falls asleep, man. Now that's entertainment. [Laughs].

Michael: I understand, yeah.

Moscoso: Wow!

Moscoso: You know. Forget Marcello! [Laughs]. I thought he was very good, you know. But Sophia Loren doin' a strip is entertainment. More in that area, you know? Something that catches your attention, holds on to your attention, and is pleasing to you.

Michael: Yeah.

Moscoso: That pleases, that you find ... See that to me is entertaining. See? Otherwise you walk out.

Michael: True.

Moscoso: You know, I go into a movie that I don't find entertaining, that I find boring, that I find predictable, that I find poorly made ... I walk out! A piece of artwork, whatever. It doesn't matter, see? So, it's one engaging the viewer. First of all, I'm the first viewer, it's gotta' be entertaining to me. See?

Michael: Amen, that's really the truth.

Moscoso: If it doesn't entertain me, I can't expect it to entertain anybody else. If it entertains me, there's a chance that it will entertain somebody else, and, in fact, that has been what has happened, you know. That goes down to, you know, that fact that you enjoy looking at that piece or listening to the piece.

IMPRESSIONISTS

Michael: Well, there's a mystery in it or something in there for you.

Moscoso: Oh, well, there's a mystery. Of course there's a mystery, because everybody is different. And I don't care what it is ... In a way, the artist is the worst guy to ask. I once read a letter by Cézanne. Ok, in his book "Letters from Artists." It was at the end of his life and he says, "I am a failure." He's writing to his buddy. "I am a failure, I have tried to accomplish..." and he goes into what he was trying to accomplish. I read that thing three or four times, what he was trying to accomplish. I couldn't make heads or tails of what he was trying to accomplish.

However, when I look at his still life paintings, and I see those oranges painted like beautiful, seductive nudes. Then I look at his card players and they look like wooden sticks, you know, and I think, "Well, I can't really say that you're a failure, Paul!" [Laughs].

Michael: Really!

Moscoso: You know, anybody that can do still life like that ... ain't a failure. How can you call yourself a failure? It's expectations. That's where it happens. If you expect certain things to happen and they don't happen, you're disappointed. Expect nothing and you won't be disappointed.

Michael: It's true. Yeah, Cézanne is one of the people I used to really read about a lot. He was obsessed with people stealing his ideas, if you remember.

Moscoso: What are you gonna' do. Put it in a closet?

Michael: No, it was beautiful. My mother was an artist and she particularly loved Matisse. I was raised on an enormous amount of Matisse,

Moscoso: Oh, he's excellent. His "Red Studio," man, knocks me out, man. All these portraits of his lady friend, beautiful.

Michael: Yeah, he was great.

Moscoso: Yeah, Picasso was great too. In fact, Picasso ... one thing he doesn't get credit for, one of his greatest pieces, was the bicycle seat and the handlebar for the horns. That was the first junk art ever made. Nobody gives him credit. He gets very little credit for that. You know, before all the other guys came along, who did the junk pieces and stuff like that from the junkyard? Picasso was the first at that, you know. Yeah, those guys were good. I find them very entertaining. [Laughs].

CREATIVE PROCESS

Michael: Well, yeah, I think it's wonderful what you say, and I agree just in my own life and other areas, the idea that in any kind of creative process, the artist ... I know when I've done creative things, that I try to take the thing that is the most moving to me ... that even I can't figure it out, but I'm just attracted to it. And I put that in the center of the stage of the piece, for my own entertainment and it lasts the longest.

Moscoso: Ok.

Michael: If you understand that.

Moscoso: Yes, Carl Jung would say, "I really like the artist." He said it's one of the few people ... one of the few professions that deals on a daily basis with this unconscious. All right, Freud didn't know shit about all this. He was an uptight, puritan

schmuck. He analyzed himself. Falling teeth in a dream is masturbation? Give me a fucking break already, man! Where did you get that one from? Maybe for you falling teeth in a dream has to do with masturbation. For me falling teeth would have to do with death. It's obvious. And what I liked about Jung was that he said only the dreamer can interpret. Only the dreamer can interpret, so the artist is having a dialog with his unconscious. It works perfectly with the muses coming down from Mt. Olympus.

All right? It just shows up there. What do you mean it just shows up there? And I've heard many artists say that. It just shows up there. And I've participated in that, where I watch things appear before me. I'm drawing them, but not consciously. I've done some of my best work without having a preconceived notion of what I was going to do. What's going on there? It's your unconscious talking to your conscious that's holding the pencil. That's the mystery.

And everybody has a different subconscious, because we're all coming from a different place. Even right now, we each occupy a different position. Not only are we bringing our different backgrounds in here, but also we're actually occupying different physical space. We are each seeing a different picture.

Michael: Right, but it's from that subconscious that the future will come, and that's why, when you are

creative, at least when I'm creative, the more I can get into that, that piece, whatever it is will last, in time, longer. I mean it'll fascinate me, entertain me, to use your word ...

Moscoso: Mmm hmm.

Michael: ... For a longer period of time, before I outgrow it and I have to find a new ... Shakespeare's words have transfixed, hypnotized generations without being unraveled. People haven't seen through them, because that was how powerful they were and still are ...

CRITICS

Moscoso: Well, I would say this: Everybody has their own interpretation of Shakespeare. I went to see "Romeo and Juliet". Some girl, when her boyfriend couldn't make it, said, "Do me a favor. Come see 'Romeo and Juliet with me'." So I took a bottle of brandy with me, you know. I would make it entertaining, you know. And I always thought of him as stodgy and all of that, because of schools. Fucking schools turn you off, man. Art schools turn you off of art. And when the line ... when Juliet is gonna' go and visit Romeo to have a liaison with him, her nurse, her lady in waiting says, "I will pray for you today, my lady, for tonight the burden will be on you." It cracked me up, man. I didn't know he was funny.

He was writing for the whole strata of society, from the penny pit to the boxes up on top, man. So, the upper class is gonna' have a different interpretation than the lower class.

Michael: But he did something to the language that you just pointed out that affected everyone.

Moscoso: Oh, it certainly did. But interpretation is constantly changing. I once saw a chart of "Whistler's Mother," the painting, and what point it occupied in the, quote, "art world." And, you see, it goes up. At one point, it was considered very valuable. Then it went down 'til it was like kitsch, you know. And then it went back up again, you know. And if you look at art history, I mean Raphael at one time was THE guy. After all the Pre-Raphaelites, figure painting stopped. It was Raphael. You know, give me a break there. How bout Rembrandt and Vermeer? They were pretty good too, you know. Art is whatever you want it to be, to anybody. In other words, it's everything to everybody. There is no one interpretation of art. Anybody that says that don't know what they are talking about and your interpretation of a piece is as valuable or is as right or is as true as anybody else's. I don't care what school they went to. In fact, when I was at Yale, I went to an art history soiree, where all the art historians were getting drunk and one guy came up to me and he says, "All art historians are frustrated artists." [Laughs].

So what's a frustrated artist, you know, who's passing judgment on artists, gonna' do? Well, my favorite story is when some one of the artists got a bad review from, was it Greenburg or one of the guys doing the abstract expressionist days. I forget his name. Anyway, it happened at the Caesar Bar in New York. Because the artist that had gotten a bad review, he kicked the critic's ass that night. [Laughter]. I wish I'd been there, man.

But see, that's because the critic at that point had that kind of pull and the posters bypassed it completely. That's why the museums don't like me or that's why the San Francisco museums don't like me.

Michael: You mean the critics didn't even look at it?

Moscoso: No, they didn't consider it at all.

Michael: It happened in music too. There's a whole branch of jazz called "Soul Jazz" that was completely ignored by the bop-oriented critics, who just considered it like the lowest ...

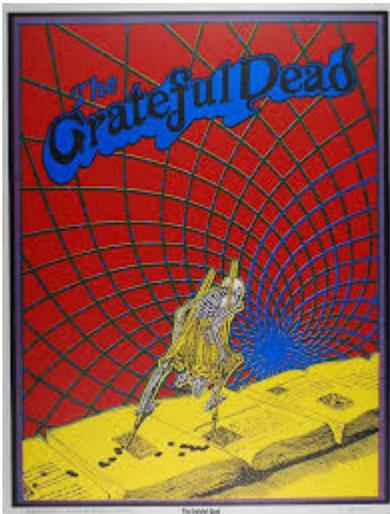
Moscoso: Yeah, you get that. A critic's job is supposedly a guide for the uninitiated. My feeling is this: Fuck the critic. All right? I can figure it out for myself. See and that's what the posters did. There was no critic. You didn't have to explain these things. You didn't have to say, "Okay, the Bob Fried poster, where the skeleton ... that means." Hey, it means whatever you wanted to mean, you know. I

like it 'cause it's pretty. I like it cause it's got a skeleton and I'm a Grateful Dead fan and therefore I want it. You know. It's anything to anybody, you know. Anyway.

BOB FRIEDS GRATEFUL DEAD POSTER

Michael: Well, this poster to me has one of the most sophisticated concepts that ever got into psychedelic posters, that particular one. Perhaps it is because I'm an astrologer and I sort of study time, and for me this poster is about time. It might be not to you.

Moscoso: No, you're absolutely right. I mean, I didn't see it that way. I saw it as an alms to the Grateful Dead.



Bob Fried's translucent poster.

Michael: Well, that's cool. It is a Grateful Dead poster.

Moscoso: Which is what he was trying to do. Grateful Dead stuff sold well. That's why Bob did this.

Michael: Did Fried want this as celluloid, a translucent thing?

Moscoso: Oh yeah. It's was supposed to go in windows.

Michael: It's interesting.

Moscoso: Yeah, it was like a stained glass window, which makes lots of sense, because look at how much brighter the colors get when you hold them up to the light. See, with a poster, the light bounces through the inks, hits the white paper, and bounces back. With a stained glass window, the light comes right through it into your eye. No reflective light. It's straight light into your eye. That's about as bright as you can get.

Michael: Yeah, it's beautiful.

Moscoso: When he gave it to me, I didn't put it up on the window. You know, the artists were giving each other posters all the time, you know. We'd go down to the print shop, there'd be stacks of posters, and we'd, you know ... I'll take some of these and you take some of those, you know.

Eric King: Very few of these survived, because most people did put these in their windows. Most of the people did destroy them.

Michael: I think you could back-light it, framed.

Moscoso: You would have to use something like a cold light, fluorescent light.

Eric King: Anything that generates heat is gonna' damage the thing.

Moscoso: And put it ten feet away. [Laughs].

Michael: Well, I think you might be able to have small fluorescents ...

Moscoso: And you only put it on for two minutes a day. That's it, man, you know, because light eventually ... See, these are dyes. These are dyes, these are not pigments.

Eric King: I have it framed on top of a white sheet.

Moscoso: You're probably better off.

Eric King: That's as close as it comes. I just don't want to risk the thing deteriorating on me.

Moscoso: Because light will fade it. Do not put it in your window.

Eric King: We know from experience that this thing is extremely fragile, because I've seen them, after very limited times, that this thing deteriorates very quickly.

Moscoso: And light will make the plastic fragile too.

Eric King: That's what I'm saying.

Moscoso: So that it gets brittle and cracks.

Eric King: Yes, both. And that's why I have it on the far wall of a room that gets not much light, and if I want to show it to somebody, I turn the light on.

Moscoso: Right. Turn the light on and then take the light off.

Eric King: It jumps, because the light will pass through and you can see the white through it

Moscoso: Yeah, and it will bounce off the white ...

Eric King: And it will bounce. It's close. It's not like the effect you get when you hold it up to a window.

Moscoso: Right, but it's pretty close and it's a lot safer.

SEPARATE THE ARTIST FROM THE PERSON

Michael: Right, but I know Bob Fried's work pretty well. You knew him as a person. I never met him, but to me he's very subtle, for me. He does gestures

more than a lot of you. Not this one, particularly, but a lot of things, like the Euphoria poster. Just very gentle. Was he a gentle person?

Moscoso: The man was an asshole when it came to printers. Yeah, printers hated him. He was a real bully when it came to the printers.

Michael: But how did he do this very gentle ... His stuff is not is not ...

Moscoso: Separate the man from the art.

Michael: Yeah. You have to.

Moscoso: I mean Richard Wagner, all right, who wrote some of the most beautiful melodies. Fuck him, the ring cycle, man. That's boring.

Michael: It is boring to me too.

Moscoso: But he wrote some beautiful melodies. He was an asshole. The client would take him in. He'd take the guy's money, fuck his wife, and then leave. He would go to another client and do the same thing. Not a nice guy.

Now, if you're gonna' judge him as a person and judge his art likewise, you're not going to be able to enjoy some beautiful music.

Michael: Absolutely.

Moscoso: So what you gotta' do is you gotta' separate the artist, you know. A person said that to me, he says, "Oh, any good artist is a good person." Uhh-uhh, uhh-uhh. I mean, they can be assholes. I mean Sarah Vaughn, the great Sarah Vaughn ... Harold Jones, a drummer who lives down the street here, said she'd cancel a tour and ask for the advance back that she had given to musicians, after tying up their time. Now here is a woman that came outta' the ghetto and she's treating her musicians like niggers. Not very nice, but she had a great voice. And she was an excellent musician. I got to hear her and she was ...

Michael: Well, her early stuff is incredible.

Moscoso: Yeah.

Michael: It's some of the best there is.

Moscoso: Even when she was old, she was good.

I mean, it was like she was like an opera singer. She had that kind of control over her voice, you know. So you have to separate that, you know. What do you mean, that taking back the advance you gave to your musicians after you hung them up?

You know that's bullshit. But you can't let that get in the way of the art. If you do, you're shorting yourself.

Michael: I don't know graphic arts that well, but I've interviewed maybe a hundred or close to that ... of blues and jazz artists and most of the great ones, you know. Some of them were wonderful people and some of them were, as you point out, real assholes.

Michael: But the music was good for all of them.

Moscoso: Right. That's why you're attracted to them, not because of their personalities. After all, what do you know about a musician's personality or an artist's ... What do I know about Rembrandt's personality or Vermeer's personality? It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, you know, because it's the work that I know, and people come up to me and they say, "Hey, I know you." Well, they don't know me, but they know my work. But, yes they do know me, because I'm in my work. Yes, you do know Bob Fried. He's in his work. I mean, not the personality, not the good parts/bad parts, but the part that created this, which is him. You know, based on all that has come before. I mean nobody invents art. It gets handed down to you. I mean we are speaking English. Did we invent English? But we each speak in our own voice. And we can each write in our own language.

ART AS DECOR

Eric King: It is one of the things that the people who own them frame it. I mean, that's one of the reasons this thing is as valuable as it is. People collect

posters and stick them in portfolios. There are posters that become décor. People do not buy this poster to put in a portfolio. They buy this for the décor of their houses. That's what makes it so valuable. I mean, that's why some of the best things that you've done, Victor, people do not buy them to put in portfolios. They buy them to put on the wall of their home.

Moscoso: Well, originally, they were stapled. That was one of the nice things, man. I'd go into a stranger's house, somebody who I'd never met ... I mean somebody who I'd just met, never seen before, you know. I'd go into that house and the whole wall would be covered, not just with my posters, but, you know, everybody's. But there is my work.

Michael: That's great.

Moscoso: You know, his was the real museums. Talk about museums without walls, you know. That Malraux coined. That was great. These walls without museums. [Laughs]. You know, and I'd go in and I say, "Oh ...Cool man. Far out."

WATCHING THE ART ON THE STREET

Eric King: The one thing that you told me, Victor, that I was enchanted by, was the story about you watching on the street, watching people cross the street to look at your posters on telephone poles.

Moscoso: Yeah, I would. I did it in galleries, but usually I didn't spend that much time in galleries. I would just stand out on the street, you know, like outside the **Trieste**, because the Trieste was on Grant Avenue, and I spent a lot of time there. And I could even stay inside the Trieste and watch. And I would just watch people, as they passed, you know. Some noticed, some didn't, you know. Some would come across the street to see. And I wasn't aiming just for the heads, you know, the ones into marijuana or acid takers. I was aiming for anybody, like the fisherman throwing his net out. I'd catch whatever I could and one of the reasons I used vibrating colors is because it's kind of like neon lights flashing. The neon colors ... ah excuse me ... the vibrating colors will catch your eye.

The other thing that catches your eye is contrast. Stop: Black and yellow. But that's not all that interests me. You can read that from across the sidewalk and continue. The neon ... the vibrating colors will catch your attention and then "what's going on?" brings you over. The other thing that hangs you up is complexity. Make them complex. A poster should not transmit its message quickly and simply. They'll be gone man. I wanna' see if they could stay there an hour. I wanna' see if they can stay there a whole week. [Laugh]. They wouldn't stay a week; they'd have to go get some lunch or something.

POSTER IMAGE

Eric King: Things like this one, the one with the lettering and the circle (the number "53"). I mean, it took a long time to see who performed that weekend at the Avalon. I remember seeing that in the window and I stood there and I'm turning my head.... And that's the whole point.



Family Dog

Moscoco: That was advertising. That was the only advertising. There was no newsprint. There was no TV, no radio. The only way that those events were advertised was by those posters, which we made as hard to read ... I made as hard to read as possible, so that the other guys, to some degree or other ... I mean each one has his own thing, you know. And it worked. The halls got filled up, because of those posters. They started getting torn off the wall. Then you could buy them for a dollar. So here was a

unique situation, where not only are you advertising the event, but you're selling it while you're advertising it at Ben Friedman's shop. They go up at the Trieste and catty-corner from the Trieste was Ben Friedman's poster shop. They'd be in Ben Friedman's for a dollar. So, here's advertising coming at you from, from both sides of the corner. A dollar!

PLANNING A POSTER SERIES

Michael: I have a question for you. One of the things that I really admire about your career, that's starting to be emulated by artists like **Mark Arminski**, is that when you did the **Neon Rose series**, you had a method about producing a set of posters and you were totally aware that they would be collected.

Moscoso: Oh yes.

Michael: I believe that's something that only you did.

Moscoso: Nope. **Bob Fried** came up with the company called "**The Food**."

Michael: But did he produce a series?

Moscoso: Yeah, but not ... again, not as many. He did the **Orange Groove**. I think it was "The Food." All right? See, he saw what I was doing, and, in fact, his early posters, he copied my lettering, the way I copied Wes' lettering, you know.

Michael: But my question is: How did that come about in your mind? I mean, how did you know to set about creating something that would have some legacy effect, back then, when most people just spontaneously were not thinking of that at all?

Moscoso: When it first started, for instance, when I did the "Stone Façade," I had no idea, nor did anybody else, that these ephemera would not disappear. We all thought it would just, like anything else, go into the garbage, you know.

However, when they started getting sold for a dollar ... hey, I took art history. I know that the **Toulouse Lautrec** and **Jules Cheret** posters started getting ripped off the walls. That's when the poster stores opened. Hey, poster stores open. Instead of selling just personality posters, **Ben Friedman** then started showing the psychedelic posters. After a while, the personality posters started shrinking down in amount in relationship to the increase in the psychedelic posters that were taking over, you know.

For lo and behold, I said to myself, this is what happened in Toulouse Lautrec's day. If it happened in Toulouse Lautrec's day and it looks like it's happening now, well, then it's happening now. Just like it happened in Toulouse Lautrec's day. And so what I did, so as not to be a dependent on either **Chet Helms** or forget, man. All I wanted do was invent posters. Not free posters, not white rabbit posters, not **East Totem West** posters.

I didn't want to do those. I wanted to ... I guess because of the historical value, I somehow intuited that these were events, historical events, with dates, and that's all I wanted to do. And I didn't want to be dependent on Bill Graham, Chet Helms, or anybody else at that point. I said, "Okay, I'll set up my own company," and I went to the **Matrix** because the Matrix, the Matrix was playing the **Doors, Big Brother and the Holding Company**-- the same groups that were at the **Avalon** and at the **Filmore**. And I said to the guy at the Matrix ... I forget who it was. There were two guys running it at the time. How would you guys have me do some posters for you? Already, I've been doing posters at the Avalon and they already were good. They already were good. And they said, "Sure, we'd love it, but we don't have the money. We can't afford it." I said, "No problem. I will give you 200 free posters for your event. I will pay for them and I'll run off as many as I can afford and sell them." Sure. Well, here they're getting 200 free poster, you know, one of the top poster artists at that time, you know.

Moscoso: So I commissioned the poster, I designed the poster, I produced the poster, and I sold the poster. I was selling posters to Australia, the other side of the world.

Michael: To me, that's brilliant. That was, to me, an important event in the history of posters at the psychedelic level.

Eric King: Nobody else thought of that.

Michael: Yeah. I mean people are only now trying to emulate. **Mark Arminski** is trying to make a business out of his series.

Moscoso: **Frank Kozik** does it. The young guys are doing it. The young guys are doing it. Yeah, they're doing it in silkscreen, as opposed to offset, which we did. Our numbers are a lot more. Basically, the principle is the same, you know. Kozik, **Mark Arminski**, **Coop** ... they are doing what we did, only for the present, the younger generation, now. We are dinosaurs.

Michael: Yeah, but you're the only one who did it then.

Moscoso: Yeah, then **Bob Fried** did it, but only with a few.

Michael: I wasn't even aware of that.

Eric King: He did about a half a dozen or so.

Moscoso: About that. Again, if he had started when I had started, which he could have, he would have been a major figure.

Michael: Also, in your series, the **Neon Rose** series, which I have collected all of, there is a tremendous sense of continuity of ...I don't even know how to

even describe it, but obviously they all go together really well, in general.

Moscoco: Yeah, well that's because of me.

ARTIST CONTROL

Michael: And it was because you controlled the whole process.

Moscoco: The whole thing.

Michael: And no one was directing you, right?

Moscoco: And nobody directed me for the Avalon, either. I never, at that time, never showed a sketch.

Michael: So **Chet Helms** was not....

Moscoco: Nope. Never showed a sketch.

Michael: **Wes Wilson** says that was why he left the Avalon and Chet, because he didn't want direction.

Moscoco: Oh, boy did he get it from .

Michael: He did?

Moscoco: Oh man, he had fights with Bill.

Michael: About the readability. That kind of stuff?

Moscoco: Well, that's direction.

Michael: Yet, there weren't imposed themes, as at the Avalon.

Moscoso: Well, I didn't mind the themes.

Michael: So, you did get themes.

Moscoso: I could have discarded them. Phillip Hammond ... by the time that I started doing posters again, for the "Stone Façade," Chet handed me a postcard. He says the title is the "Stone Façade." Do something with it. Ok, so you could say that was kind of collaboration. But I can blame him, for that. [Laughter]. He deserves half the credit for my greatest failure.

[Laughter].

Moscoso: Ah, but once I started again, Chet was already busy, you know, doing other things and had pretty much dropped out of the poster... I mean he was still selling posters, you know, but he wasn't directing them and was, in fact, when he went to England, he left **Phillip Hammond** to run the **Family Dog**, and Phillip Hammond was into astrology. So Phillip would come over to me, and I was doing a Family Dog poster, and he says, "Like on that one. Not that one, but the one that that's based on, from the playing of **Quicksilver Messenger**. Quicksilver is Mercury, you know, the planet Mercury. In there, in the one with Quicksilver is the astrological signs on which the date fell, and he would give me the

astrological reading for the event and he would make suggestions. I could have done something totally different, but I liked what he was saying and I liked astrology. I didn't know shit about astrology, but I like all the images in astrology.

It was like opening up a whole book of images, you know. So I took his suggestions on that one from the play. They also handed me a photograph of the **Quicksilver Messenger Service** at the **De Young Museum**. Oh fuck, man, it's long that way, while the poster's this way. What can I do with this? I was just gonna' discard it, but where it clicked, it was from the Plains of Quicksilver, which I interpreted from the Plains of Mercury, and then I thought of the planet Mercury. I said, "That's it!" The lettering is gonna' be the planet Mercury, and that's where I just stumbled. I've never seen that before. That's one of those serendipitous events, you know.

And where one line is positive and the next line is negative. Positive/negative. Not only that, it's vibrating colors, so it'd make it really difficult to really see.

So as that became Mercury, that made it easy. And then I realized, hey wait! I've got space up here and space down here. The thing reads either way. Well, now, the photograph of Quicksilver makes sense. Bing! Bing! Upside down. I just flopped them.

Eric King: And the symbology was fully integrated into...

Moscoso: Perfectly. It just worked perfectly, you know, it was like that's the way things would happen. I do the poster, take it down to the printer, have it printed. The first the **Family Dog** would ever see of it was when they came down to pick up the finished poster, already trimmed. They put the thing up and post it. No one ever, in those days, had a thing to say about what I did and also with **Stanley Mouse** and **Alton Kelley**. Same thing.

Michael: Right. Well they trusted you then. Whatever you did ...

Moscoso: It was selling. It was selling man. It was selling like hotcakes, you know. Don't fuck with something that's going a hundred miles an hour man. You're gonna' slow it down, you know.

Michael: Right.

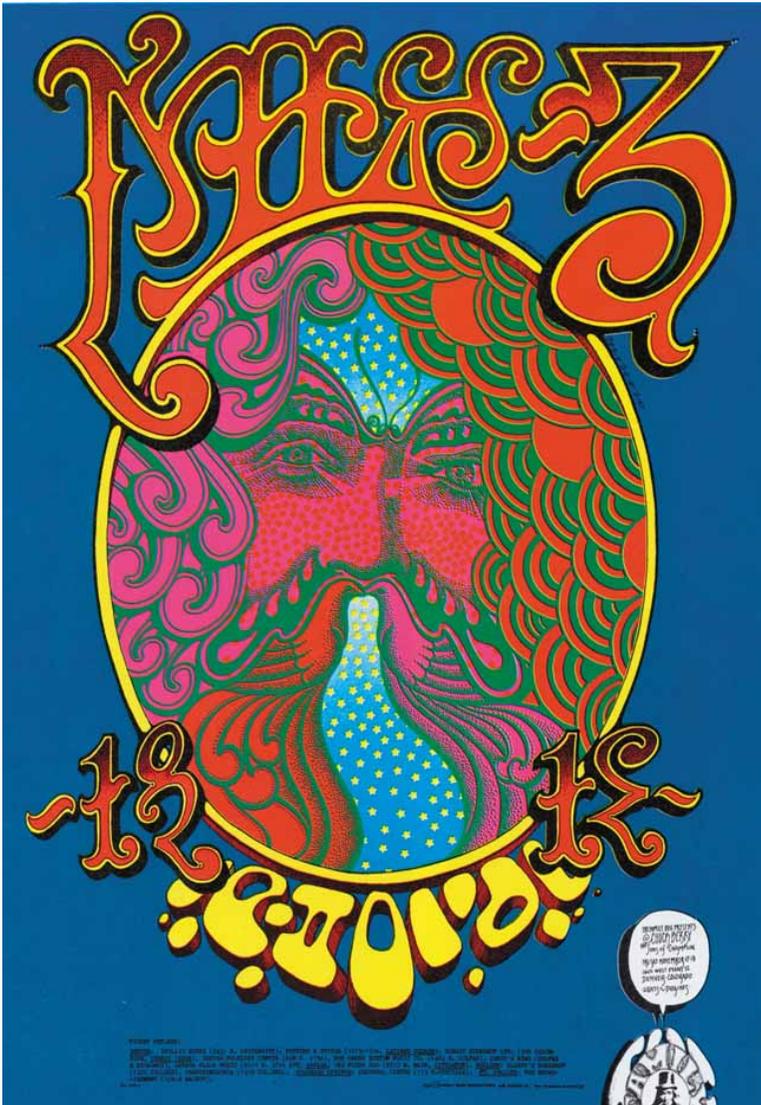
Moscoso: You know Chet and I might have had our differences, but he wasn't a fool, you know, whereas was, because all Bill Graham could see was the bottom line, and he was a bully.

Michael: He was a bully. I even experienced that.

Moscoso: A chicken-shit bully.

ARCHETYPES AND SCHOOLING

Michael: Well, it's synchronicity, right?



Moscoso: Oh, definitely. I was in synch, but Jung speaks about the archetype, that we all have these archetypes. A spiral is one. A circle is another one. If

you look at children's art, it's all the same. I don't care what part of the globe. It's only when they get older and go to school, that you begin to distinguish nationalities. You look at any child's drawing, say at the age of three or four. You can't tell what country they're from. You can't tell what culture they're from. It's only later on, when they are enculturated by the school, by their culture, that they then learn that they can't draw.

Moscoso: I once went to ... when my oldest daughter was in kindergarten. This was in North Beach. It went up to seventh grade and I started out in kindergarten, where she was, you know. The walls were covered with these brilliant paintings. Man, they were just like joyous to behold, you know. And then I got to the rest of them. As you went up in grades, more and more rigid, more and more rigid. The seventh grade, man, they are drawing with rulers. The girls are putting buttons and things on, you know. The detail stuff is becoming very important, you know. The overall effect is lost, for the details, you know, and it's the school at work. It's the enculturation at work, you know, and you could see it from kindergarten to the seventh grade. Man, it was the Jesuits give us a child till he's seven and he's ours for life, man.

Michael: Well, I was raised Catholic.

Moscoso: Then you know.

Michael: Dominicans.

Moscoso: You know and they knew what they were talking about, man. I call it brainwashing, you know, but...

Michael: And I home schooled some of my kids, for the same reason.

Moscoso: Yeah.

Michael: And I never finished high school. I couldn't stand school. I just wanted to be out.

Moscoso: I couldn't stand school either.

Moscoso: The only thing I liked about school was art and the girls and sports. I was into sports.

Michael: I liked literature and philosophy.

Moscoso: I didn't like anything I had to read.

Michael: Right. I liked reading.

Moscoso: Write.

Michael: I can write.

Moscoso: Add... [Laugh].

Michael: I was terrible at math. That was my worst.

Moscoso: You know, all of those things. In fact, I got through school by doing visual aids for the teachers. I would sit in the back. He'd be giving his lesson. I'd be working on his next visual aid, man. I'd get an "A."

Michael: Really.



Moscoso: Not because I knew shit about what I was doing. Yeah, I knew about the Louisiana Purchase, because I did the map [laughter] that got used for the Louisiana Purchase.

Moscoso: Then when I got to **Cooper Union**. Yeah, here I am in college now, it caught up with me. We were in what was called the "dumb English" class. They had a couple of us, like me, who didn't know

how to read, write, spell, or compose a letter, so we'd have to go after school. [Laughs].

Eric King: Oh my god.

Moscoso: ... to the dumb English class. I ran across one of the things I had written. Boy, it was really shitty. I really was a bad writer, you know. I had to teach myself all of these things, later on, because during school it was a turn off. In fact, I remember one guy ... I don't remember his name, but whenever you raised your hand to ask a question, he would say, "That's a very interesting question. Why don't you write a report on it and hand it in to the class."

Moscoso: Aw shit, in no time at all, man, nobody raised his or her hands, man. And that way, he could just deliver the same fucking lecture that he'd been delivering for ten, fifteen, twenty years, which was boring as shit. I don't even know what he taught.

Michael: [Laughter]. Well, that's the way I feel about school at this point. I mean, I just closed my mind for about 12 years and then walked out.

Moscoso: Yeah, well, except for the sports, girls, and drawing. That's what I did.

Michael: Well, girls were good, and I could draw some too. I like art. My mom was an artist, so we were all artists.

Moscoso: Did she make a living at it?

Michael: Toward the end of her life, she did a lot of shows, and, yeah, she was a good artist. Sometime, I may send you some images.

Moscoso: Okay, ah, fine art.

Michael: Fine art. Absolutely.

Moscoso: So, she would sell it to a gallery?

Michael: Galleries, yeah, and toward the end of her life, she did a lot at the Ann Arbor Art Fair, which is the largest art fair in the country, but it's a very good art fair. But, ah, she was pretty old by then.

Moscoso: Hey. Grandma Moses was 80 years old when she started to paint.

Michael: That's right.

Moscoso: Hokusai was 70 years old when he started on his greatest images.

Moscoso: ... the "Great Wave" and the those beautiful ah scenes of Mt. Fuji, you know, were done after he was 70. He was, I think, 89 when he died, and he was bargaining with God. He said, well, how 'bout five more years. And he says, well, how bout three more years, huh? [Laugh].

Michael: Joseph Conrad must have been forty and he started writing in another language. Right?

Moscoso: Oh, that's right. He was Polish.

Michael: Right.

Moscoso: And then he started writing in English, so yeah there's always ...

Michael: There's hope.

Moscoso: You're not 80 years old, right?

Michael: No.

Moscoso: So you can become a painter.

Michael: I'm going to be 60 in about two months.

Moscoso: Oh, you're a young guy, man. I'm gonna' be 64.

Michael: Oh, wow.

Moscoso: I sing that to my wife, "Will you still need me, will you still feed me ... "

Michael: Eric, you and I are the same age.

Eric King: Yeah, we're the same age.

Michael: We are about a month apart. He's a little older than me. I think he looks it, right?

Eric King: Yeah, don't I look a month older.

Michael: Yeah.

Eric King: Titian was 90 years old when he painted the Venus of Mervino, but he won. I mean he still had, you know, that feeling ...

Moscoso: The appreciation ...

Eric King: Right.

Moscoso: Right.

Eric King: The appreciation ...

Moscoso: You don't have to die 'til you die, you know. In fact, in Brooklyn I watched that happen. You can either go into the wire-rope factory or the sugar-packing factory. I mean, these are the two big jobs in Brooklyn. Or do something else, you know, but those were the main things. And I could see my friends getting married, take a job at the wire-rope factory, and basically die. You know, it was like they were shells; they were living and doing it, but that spark that they had when they were kids was gone. See, and I recognized really early on that was not for me.

Michael: No, me neither.

Moscoso: ... you know and the way to get around that is to make ... to do what you would wanna' do for your life, in other words, for your living, you know, to pay the bills.

Michael: I've done that.

Moscoso: If lucky enough, you know some of us are, to do what we would wanna' do anyway and be able to pay the rent with that, you are truly fortunate.

Michael: I agree. I mean I loved astrology and I did that as a business I loved movies and music and I did that as a business; my hobby was with posters and now I'm gonna' try to do something with that.

Moscoso: Okay, all right, now let me put these in writing.

Michael: Yeah, those are beautiful, and I will give some real serious thought to that one.

Michael: I wonder where images exist of that other one. I've never seen that other one.

Eric King: It's not very common.

Michael: It's not as nice a piece of art, but it's just fascinating.

Moscoso: It's nice, you know. It's the Legion of Honor.

Michael: Palace of Fine Arts.

Moscoso: Palace of Fine Arts. Right.

Michael: Yeah, it's cool.

Moscoso: It's nice, you know, naked ladies with breasts. You can't go wrong with naked ladies with breasts, you know.

Moscoso: The magnetic dogs. Who else but would think of stuff like that. Signed "the dumb one."
[Laughs]. He was weird and extremely talented. I still listen.

Eric King: Yeah.

Moscoso: This is nice ...

Eric King: There's just such a sweetness ...

Eric King: Isn't that sweet.

Michael: And it's so big. I really didn't think it would be that big.

Eric King: Yeah.

Moscoso: Ok. So Rick, see you later. Now I'm gonna' put these away. Ok, now what would you like from me Michael.

Michael: I think we're doing fine. What I would love is maybe a few photographs. Maybe a photograph of just these pencils or just some idea of how you work. I think that people are fascinated by how artists, you know... what are they? What do they do, you know. Otherwise, I think we have a lot of material here.



Victor Moscoso in studio.