

The Rolling Gees.

THE ARTIST dressed hyper-casually, his hair pulled back in a ponytail. It was Saturday morning; the weather was fine; attendance at the art museum would be high. Bourgeois suburbanites had thick wallets. The day was full of possibility.

He set up his wares in the sidewalk sun below his second floor studio on Kirby, not far from the parking lots for the Detroit Institute of the Arts. Unlike some of the struggling idealist Bohemians in the Cass Corridor, he harbored no qualms about being both a commercial painter and an artist. The first supported the second.

He would not stoop, however, to kitsch. There would be no cute tigers, no dogs playing poker, no Elvis Presleys, except for when he skewered them. He painted Elvis, overweight and bursting out of his white jumpsuit, on all fours on a leash, being walked by a bipedal hound dog. He painted in sharp, vivid strokes and colors.

Codell, on a roundabout route to the library, stopped to look.

“Do you like it?” the painter asked Codell. “The dog’s singing ‘you ain’t nothin’ but an Elvis.’ Can you hear him? Can you hear Elvis howl? Can you see the dog gyrate his hips?”

“No, not really.”

“Maybe you’d like this one.” The painter conjured up The Rolling Stones. He had them in a large frame, all five frozen in the same choreographed Disco pose. They all had one hand on their hips and the other arm raised, index finger pointing skyward. They dressed alike, like some 1960s Motown group. Behind them were wall-to-wall mirrors; above them was a red Disco light ball.

Written by K.G. Jones.

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“Can you imagine the painting come alive?” asked the painter. “Imagine the light spinning, flashing off the mirrors. Red shafts of light spatter around them as they perform. Can you imagine stepping into the painting with them?”

“No,” Codell said. “Why would you paint this?”

“Because something’s going on in music. Not just punk and new wave. Something with Disco.”

“The Stones don’t do Disco.”

“These Stones do.”

“Disco’s dead, man,” said Codell.

“No one told Disco. No one told Mick Jagger. Disco doesn’t want to die.”

“Disco’s staying alive because of Mick Jagger?”

The painter nodded confidently. “The person you would least expect.”

From around the corner on Woodward, a black limousine pulled up. The Rolling Stones piled out. They wore matching silver lamé jackets over wide lapel shirts. A young man with them lugged a huge boom box to the sidewalk, and the Stones spaced themselves out, Jagger, the quintessential front man, front and center.

A punch of a boom box button started Charlie Watt’s drums and then Billy Wyman’s base line. Jagger bobbed his head to the beat and sang falsetto:

Is there nothing I can say / nothing I can do

to change your mind? / I’m so in love with you

You’re too deep in / you can’t get out

You’re just a poor girl in a rich man’s house

"That girl needs some help," said the painter.

"I know this singer, Theresa, *she* needs some help," said Codell.

The Stones moved like the Spinners, choreographed and synchronized. Jagger puckered his lips and made over-the-top faces as if he took himself seriously and you should, too. Keith, Ronnie and Billy put on rowdy grins. Charlie, the emotional counter weight to Jagger, looked the way he looked in every song every year. Impassively droll. Unimpressed. As if to say, *what the fuck am I doing here*. They sounded like the Bee Gees:

Don't you know promises / were never meant to keep

Just like the night / they dissolve off in sleep

Passers-by took note. "Is that Marvin Gaye?"

"No! It's Mick Jagger!" A crowd gathered.

I come to you / so silent in the night

So stealthy / so animal quiet

I'll be your savior / steadfast and true

I'll come to your / emotional rescue

"That sounds like me and Theresa," Codell fantasized.

"That's Gibberish" [sic], said the artist.

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