

Waiting for Godo

Richard Goldstein

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(UNDERGROUND PRESS SYNDICATE) The three-year-old kid, as the story goes, answered the door, took a cool look at the policeman standing there, raised his full blue eyes and declared: ‘Fuck off, cop.’

“Where’s your folks, son?”

The kid brushed his white cotton-hair out of his eyes. It fell in swirling puffs down his shoulders. “Fuck off,” he repeated, without blinking.

So, naturally, the policeman left.

The legend is one of many traveling the Los Angeles underground these days concerning a sapling who struck like a wet branch and went by the name of Godo.

For the time being, Godo is dead.

His father, one Vitautus Alphonsus Paulekas, is the chief of a vague tribe known as the Freaks. In the legend, Vito is part teacher, part artist, part dancer. His hands and feet are instruments of magic; his eyes are sorcerer’s eyes.

Vito is not the most articulate of insurrectionaries, but he comes on booming like a big — city rebel His theories make meager sense, but they are expounded with a galactic joy that threatens to burst into thunder any time he opens his mouth. His eyes jolt from briar patches of wrinkles, and there is a phosphorous giggle tacked onto every statement to let you know that behind the dogma is the fizz of experience.

His apartment, crammed below a busy men’s gymnasium, has the look of a shrine. The living room is slung with webs of beads and drapery. The bedroom is small and dark like the passage of a good sized sewer; its only window is shrouded in leaded glass. The whole place resounds with canned patter from a radio turned up Up UP to compete with the bouncing medicine balls and bar-bells above.

All over the house, on every wall, hang pictures of Godo’s immaculate face. In the basement, where Vito teaches sculpture, work by father and son stands in a row along walls caked with clay. Godo’s water colors run to bold resolute patterns. No merging shapes or colors—just simple, certain form. Vito’s busts look like Ed Roth’s busy work. They are leering, lipless people with gaping teeth and breasts. They are super-detailed, bug-eyed monsters crying out in Los Angeles terror.

Vito’s scene could double as a set for one of those 1950 Hollywood exposes that took you behind the scenes into a “real” beatnik pad, where chicks danced bra-less to bongos while some collegiate-looking cat read poetry and smoked a jade pipe.

Vito comes on like a living cliché. He is everybody’s favorite professional beatnik. This adherence to form explains the attention Vito gets from film-makers, TV producers and editors of girlie magazines. He looks too much the rebel to be one. His familiar blend of Love Work Marxism actually renders him benign, because that is what we expect from artists. Vito is cast as a nut, and tolerated as one. He has made frequent appearances on the Joe Pyne Show (“to establish communication with the people of Los Angeles”) where he makes an ideal sparring partner. The rumored friendship between “Iconoclast-Vito” and “Joe-the-Brute” is no coincidence; both are roles which seem too simple to be real.

So it comes as no surprise to learn of Vito's forays into exploitation. A skin magazine features a photo-spread about "a name that represents nonconformity, artistic freedom, originality...one of the most diversified sculptors the world has ever known." Vito is featured in films like *Girl on F Street* or *Mondo Bizarro*, neither of which will make them drool at the editorial office of *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

"Any publicity is good publicity," he reflects. "You go through all this routine with naked girls, and they pan over and show your sculpture. I believe in the object itself; once they show that, they can say anything."

If there were no Vito, the L.A. cops would have to invent him.

His peculiar fraud is what the scene has made of him. He takes his wife Sue and his people (a group of 35 kids, costumed, energized and ready to dance) and hops from club to club grooving with the city's best rock bands. To watch the tribe dance is a revelation. There are leaps and bounds, swaying strands of hair and bouncing, stomping feet. Sue moves like Fay Wray caught in some frenzied Kong embrace; neck taut, shoulders erect, hair streaming free. In the center, Vito flays the smoky air and roars. It is pure, awkward energy, but under all that rampant spasticity is a certain go-go grace. This is because when Vito dances he lets his eyes take over his body, and all that glittering blue shows.

Vito's formal education encompassed four blurred years of his life. All he chooses to remember is an early penchant for sculpture. "I used to fool around with clay. While the other kids were busy learning to be useful citizens, I was sculpting naked women."

Dancer, sculptor, danger, scofflaw. He will never come of age says the legend. His eyes will never wrinkle. It is beautiful to watch Sue and Vito play.

His son Godo was a child's child. *Life* magazine described him as "the most beautiful child in creation, with pure blond hair to his shoulders...pudgy little cheeks and blue eyes that are steady and make you want to weep."

Godo is still central to the Freak mythology. He is Apollo-Jesus, the golden boy, the realization. At two-and-a-half, Godo was reputed to be an expert drummer.

In the midst of Vito's ugliest statuary stands an angelic bust of his son. It is a stylistic reversal: no torment, no suspicion, none of the envy-condemnation Vito feels and shows for the straight world, just a father looking at his son.

"Every place he went, Godo had an intensity with every human being," says Vito, "He sized up people long before I did, and he would tell me about them. He made love to everybody."

Once Godo kissed an old lady in Kanter's delicatessen, in medias bagel.

"Godo is dead," Vito mutters. The wrinkled lids blink shut. A silent cough. A rasp in Vito's throat.

It happened last December, on Vito's roof. Godo encountered a rusted trap door and started to play with it. It opened and Godo fell in.

At the hospital, the doctors called it nothing serious and let Vito see his son. Godo lay strapped and spreadeagled on a metal table. A sterile towel covered the hole in his head. His fists were pale and clenched.

Vito opened his blue eyes wider than ever as his son cried over and over: "Help me."

An hour later, Godo had hemorrhaged and died. No earthquake, no fire-and-brimstone accompaniment, no final revelation. Just a real baby dying, and two infant eyes asking a father to help. Absurdity kills myths.

"Godo is dead." Vito hardens, straightens, narrows.

"The D.A.'s office is trying to get something on me for this," he explains in spurts. "I heard from people in their office that they tried to find evidence of drugs on Godo's body. It wasn't a rotten trap door they were after; that's legal. But drugs..." No one has to accuse Vito; the subjective responsibility comes up by itself. Why wasn't a tracheotomy performed at the hospital? Why did they tie Godo down to a table? Why was the door left to rot? An old friend of mine came to see us afterward," Vito recalls. "She said, 'Vito, your baby is dead. God punished you for doing the things you did with him.'

Vito's laugh becomes a nervous giggle. "My son was killed by a bum trap door, not by any God," he demands. No one says anything. No one accuses. But Vito feels weight on his shoulders anyway.

Somewhere behind those brash blue eyes lies Vito's wound. The Chief Freak of Los Angeles, the ultimate iconoclast, has his own superstition: God is punishing him for immeasurable evil. Godo is dead and God, in the form of a cop, isn't through with Vito yet.

But myths never die; they only transmigrate. Godo was necessary solder. He held the legend together. He was living proof: the second, Freaky generation. So the underground awaits his resurrection and the occasion may not be far away. Sue is six months pregnant, and sewing clothes. A box of lacy nightshirts waits in anticipation.

“My baby is dancing already in Sue’s belly,” Vito exalts. “Sue was dancing right in this kitchen while she was in labor. When Godo was born he came out with his mouth already open, making noise.”

The living legend has a new inspiration. A child messiah will be born among the Freaks. Lightning will strike Beverly Hills. Thunderbolts will shatter over Sacramento. Sunset Strip will hiss, crack and split.

Chief Vito’s sorcerer’s eyes will twinkle as—amid the stucco ruins—Godo is risen.

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