



PHUN PHACTORY: IT WILL BLOW YOUR PHUNKY MIND

by Roosevelt Franklin (a.k.a. Mister E)

First time I saw this place, the 7 train had just come out the tunnel on the El into Long Island City, Queens. I'd heard about the place before, but could never take the time to make the journey. Looking out the window that day, I understood. The 7 took me right past overhead, giving me a bird's eye view of a huge warehouse completely covered with graffiti. I don't just mean tags by mad bombers, but fat burners done all along the rooftop and big, colorful, illmatic masterpieces that cover the walls of the building top to bottom. The visual effect is the same when you turn the corner of Jackson and Davis. BAM! All up in your face. It's just like I was told; the world's largest outdoor aerosol museum, a.k.a the Phun Phactory.

Located off a dark side street in a not too populated part of town, it sits in the shadow of the Citicorp skyscraper. To get to the office of it's director, Pat DiLillo, I had to walk down a golden brick road. I caught him coming 'round the corner, a big white guy built like a polar bear, walking with a 31/2 foot crowbar like it was a pimp stick. He looks like one of those old school cats who wouldn't hesitate to break his foot off in your ass if you went the wrong way with him. I gave the man his respect, he told me his story.

THE LORD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

It all started while he was running with a crew called the Graffiti Terminators, a neighborhood watch group that cleaned graffiti off buildings, etc. in the community. His constant exposure to the art form became a source of inspiration and enlightenment. Recognizing it's intrinsic beauty, he began to lobby instead for a program to help kids do their art legally and get them off the street at the same time. Not everyone in the community was feeling that. Many would have rather seen the little fucks thrown in jail rather than waste time or money. The big man had a plan, though, so Pat went for dole. He convinced the owner of the building he's in now to let him use the deserted warehouse for his experimental program. With grants from local businesses and corporate sponsorships from HNIC's like Citicorp, he secured the funding needed to get up and running. It wasn't

long until people in the area began to comment on how there was less graffiti going on in the streets. Pat's perspective was, "Of course. It's about respect. Give the kids a little bit and they'll give you some."

ROOSEVELT FRANKLIN: What makes these kids do what they do?

Pat: Rebellion. It's all rebellion. See, the mayor here, he's a little prick. He cut the Dept. of Youth Services \$27 million over all in 3 years. He basically told all the black and Latino kids "Fuck you; If you ain't white, you ain't shit". And that's the way this fucking administration goes. Look at the Diallo/Dorismond thing. This Guiliani administration, it's all about the kids on the upper east side. They pay \$800 for the YMCA up there. These kids can't afford that. Most of them are coming from (working class) single parent homes. They just can't afford \$800, so they do the next easiest thing - graffiti.

As a non-profit organization, the Phun Phactory works as a multi-purpose corporation. Its primary mission is to serve as a safe haven and advocacy for the aerosol artist. It also provides free wall space to writers who must show their portfolios to the Board of Directors (which includes Ruben Maldonado and DJ Blowout) for final approval. Heads who've represented over the past few years include old school cats like Blade, Fuzz 1, Bama, Wicked Gary/Ex-Vandals and IZ the Wiz (who serves on the Advisory Board). Many generation next kids like Toofly, Dona, Kasp, Skz, Bust and Teck/BS are showcased also. Most of this work is done in the main gallery up on the walls of the buildings interior on the ground floor. This is where the kids throw raves on the weekend and the kind of Hip-Hop jams where cats still b-boy. They've even started building a skate ramp in the back. If they





run out of room to paint, Amtrak has donated the wall space along their tracks from Bangor, Maine to Virginia Beach.

TRUE SKOOL RULES

They don't even do it like this anymore. This gigantic psychedelic shack is a throw back to the days in New York when people partied in the streets and art was free, it was everywhere. Places like this are what helped NYC get it's reputation as the cultural capital of the world before the draconian days of doody faced Rudy with the cancer up his booty.

Pat told me he had a disability, but y'know, I don't believe him. He's got to do too much hustling to keep this place going. Every kid who's a member pitches in one way or another and there's a crew of 6 who help maintain on the regular. The day to day business, however, is handled by Pat. He works out of an office smaller than a jail cell, roughly the size of a walk in closet. You know he ain't getting paid, either. He draws a small salary for handling Phactory biz, but he ain't making no money.

RF: What makes you wanna do all this?

Pat: Not wanting to sit at home all day and do nothing. I have a disability check. I don't have to work, so I came here. This is like my job. Just to be able to say I've been able to do something for these kids who basically everybody threw out on the corner and said fuck you.

Through the Phun Phactory, Pat introduces kids to a more grassroots form of activism as a way to focus

their energies in fighting the system. Coming thru in a custom designed bus dubbed the Phun Mobile, they go to different protest rallies throughout the city, dealing with issues ranging from freedom of speech to unjustified police shootings. When they're not shoveling snow in the winter for senior citizens, the kids at the Phun Phactory are putting the phinishing touches on their Feed The Homeless program. There's a Recycle Paint program where thousands of gallons of paint have been donated to different churches, community groups, and resident writers. The Phactory even has a contract with Time/Warner to remove graff from hundreds of cable boxes on the streets of NYC. Pat uses the contract to give many of the kids part time jobs. You'd think with all the good work being done, corporate sponsorship, etc, NYPD wouldn't be so much of a problem. Not quite; he still has to escort them off the property when they illegally come through looking for "outlaw" writers.

RF: What's the reaction been from police?

PAT: They're a pain in the ass. They're the biggest pains in the ass. I don't know why they give these people funding because they just waste so much

money. It's a bunch of adults with guns running after little kids with spray cans. C'mon, how ridiculous can you get?

A LEADER IS REALLY A SERVANT

Despite his battles with the city, in recognition for his work he's won the NEAP award from the Citizen's Committee of NYC the past 6 years in a row. In the process, he's helped to create something legendary. It's a testament to a culture going strong for 30

years, the last great graphic art form of the 20th century, a revolution in the world of art as well as advertising/marketing. Cats come through from all over the globe to see this place like they do Jerusalem to touch the Holy Wall. Dozens of photographers (such as Richard Avedon) shoot here every week. Unfortunately, the entire building will be torn down in 2-3 years to make way for a commercial office building, so I took a last look around before I bounced.

On the other side of the building there's even more flavor. There was a muslim kneeling on a mat laid out on the sidewalk making evening prayers as I scanned for fly hieroglyphics. Espo's got a joint up, Part, Deck, even Stan 153. Walking back up to the ave., I noticed that the performance art space PS1 was right across the street. I stood on the corner of Jackson + Davis. At night, there's a beautiful view of Manhattan's downtown skyline. It could have been the weed I smoked before I went there, whatever, the Phun Phactory had me tripping. Just when I was about ready to give up on Hip-Hop....That cat Pat was never even a writer, although he got his name Tap 45 by some of the kids out of respect. These are shorties who ain't trying to hear shit from teachers, adults, or big bad 5-0. When Pat speaks, they listen. Maybe it's the purity of the mission; basically, to have a place for kids to meet and hang out as opposed to running the streets doing stupid shit. I don't know.

Pat: They aren't going to stop it. Vandal Squad is not going to stop it. What they need is more permission walls for these kids, they need more programs. They need more than just a fucking jail cell.

phor phurther inpho.

phunphactory.org or **(718)482-PHUN**

