

JOHN KILDUFF

Kilduff Motors Advertisement, 2014
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

JOHN BALABAN

Showgirl

For Tally Richards (1928–2008)

Like Mary of Egypt, her patron saint,
she roamed the desert and her travels weren't easy,
4th Runner-Up at Miss World in London, 1952,
getting to Taos by way of The Sands and The Copacabana,
running off from the chorus lines in Vegas
with \$400 to her name, viewing an A-bomb blast
out in the desert with Jimmy Durante
who liked to call her "Richard."

She loved the revues, her rhinestones and ostrich plumes
and said it was all going pretty well until the night
she got tipsy and mocked a mobster who followed her
to her hotel room and pressed a greasy tire iron
against her perfect face for laughing at him.

Oh, such a long way from the Catfish and Pee Dee rivers
and the small Georgia town where her father ran a store and
where, boy-crazy at 15 and hot to trot, she ran off with an older kid
and was married for a few weeks until it was annulled.

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Years later, in Taos, she'd sit with her cigarettes in the cool dark
of her adobe gallery and joke about the men she liked,
their mayhem and punch-ups, the painter who shot a guy
in the nuts for coming on to his son, her aging Greek boyfriend
who owned the hotel on the plaza where he lived with his mother,
the antics of actors, writers, and provocateurs. The painters
whose early work she showed until they got famous or dead.

Little explains her eye for art,
her sharp, elegant prose in *Art in America*, her fierce
enigmatic feuds, the rubble of her romances, her
long melancholy life alone... with Pinky, her dyspeptic cat
painted by Fritz Scholder, or her soft languorous voice
sifting through smoke across the gallery's crepuscular room
weaving like mist through longleaf pines.

John Balaban is the author of twelve books of poetry and prose. He has received the Academy of American Poets' Lamont Prize, a National Poetry Series selection, and received two nominations for the National Book Award. His *Locusts at the Edge of Summer: New and Selected Poems* won the 1998 William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. Balaban is emeritus professor of English at North Carolina State University in Raleigh.