

# the PARIS REVIEW



## All the Kitsch

By Dan Piepenbring  
January 5, 2017

John Ashbery is eighty-nine. In the last two months, he's published a new collection of poems, *Commotion of the Birds*, and launched an exhibition of his latest collage work, which appears through January 28 at Tibor de Nagy.

What have *you* done in the last two months?



A DREAM OF HEROES, 2015, MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE, 15 3/4" X 20 1/2"

If you, like me, are a third of Ashbery's age but have accomplished neither of those things, ever, you can still take solace in Ashbery's work: it's rambunctious and joyous and seems much more the work of an impish spirit-animal than an eighty-nine-year-old man. As always, his collages, a selection of which appear below, work in enchanting synchrony with his poems. Both radiate the same lambent heat—you can imagine him putting on thick mitts to slide them out of the oven of his mind.

Writing about *Commotion* in *Harper's* last year, Ben Lerner noted that Ashbery's "mixture of familiarity and foreignness is at once funny and profound—many of the formulations are ridiculous, and yet it's as though Ashbery has invented an Esperanto through which we have access to the kitsch of all possible worlds. We hear, as if for the millionth time, what we have never heard before."

If the poems are the Esperanto, the collages are maybe the semaphore or the pictograms—a new language to convey all that kitsch, to smash together the familiar and the foreign. His collage *The Pause That Refreshes* could be subtitled with a line from "Hillbilly Airs and Dances": "vintage treat, vintage street." And looking at that guy in *To the City*—the seated one, giving the thumbs up in short shorts—I thought of the couplet that opens "A Funny Dream": "His aunt was accepted. / How cool is that?"

Very cool, John. Very cool.

# TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

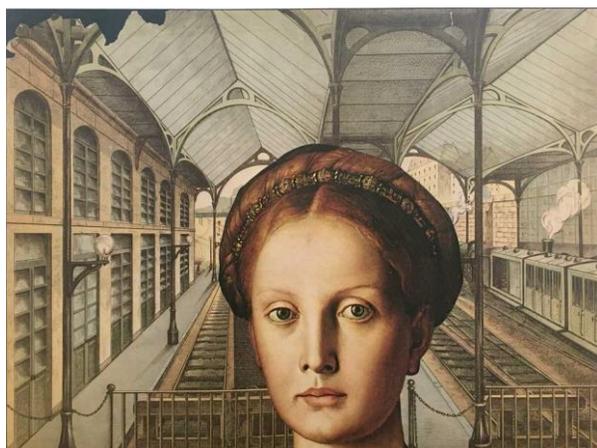
ESTABLISHED 1950



*Departure Mode*, 2016, collage on paper, 4 3/4 x 6 inches



*Pie in the Sky*, 2016, mixed media collage, 11 x 8 3/4 inches



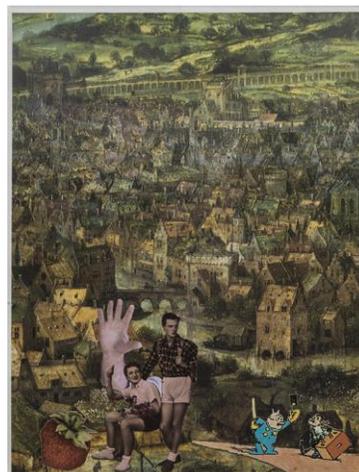
*Salle d'Attente*, 2016, collage on paper, 14 1/2 x 18 3/4 inches



*Still Life*, 2016, mixed media collage, 11 x 8 1/2 inches



*The Pause that Refreshes*, 2016, collage on paper, 11 x 8 1/4 inches



*To the City*, 2016, mixed media collage, 11 x 8 1/2 inches

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