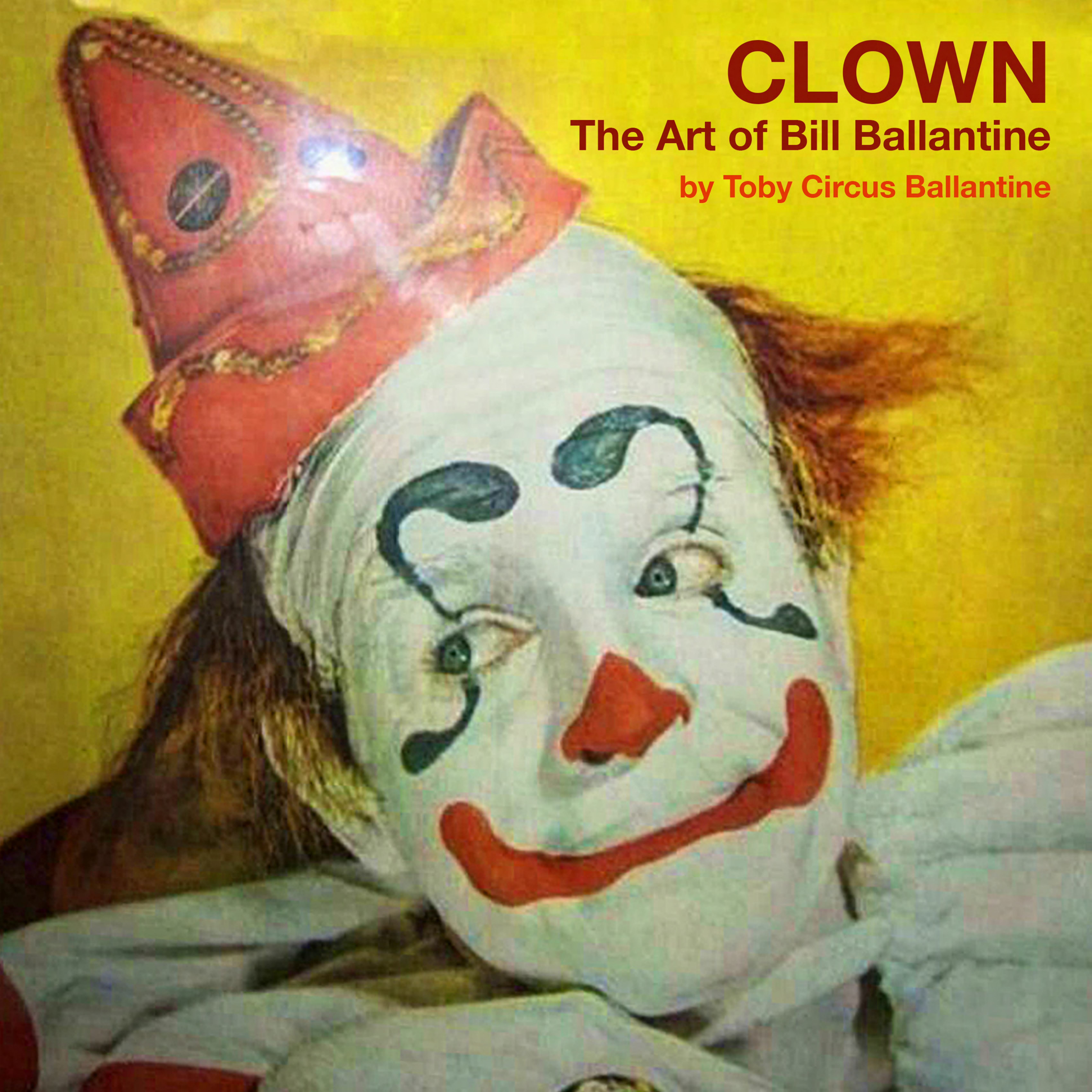


CLOWN

The Art of Bill Ballantine

by Toby Circus Ballantine





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ETERNAL WAYS

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of
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Bill Ballantine will always be remembered by artists and circus folk alike as Murray Horwitz described him in 1999: a man who “proved that it was OK to put real ideas into your comedy” and “showed you that there were different kinds of intelligence and that acrobats and wire walkers could be just as witty in their way as poets.”



INTRODUCTION

Bill Ballantine (1910–1999) was an internationally acclaimed artist and author, circus clown and founder of the very original Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College. Bill's remarkable line drawings and paintings are a priceless documentation of the world of the American circus. The pictures take the viewer behind the surface glitter of the circus, revealing the private world of circus artistes, their nomadic lives, and personal triumphs as seen by somebody who had travelled and worked on the circus trail for many years himself.

Bill first encountered circus clowns in 1916, when his father took him and his older brother Richard to the annual Shrine Circus, staged by the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, in Millvale Pa. He was hooked on clowns from the moment he saw them. He was given a wooden circus toy clown from the Shoenhut toy company and he put together a miniature circus, one toy a year. Billy Ballantine was "proprietor and chief lion tamer".

When he was 14, he made some color sketches of Ringling's star clown, Felix Adler, and from this gained an invitation to spend a day backstage with the Clowns. Bill wanted to join the circus there and then, but Adler advised him to finish his schooling first.

When his father died, Ballantine went to work after school for a local drugstore. Shortly after his High School graduation his brother and Mother died. To pay off the family mortgage, he went to work full time, opening his one man sign shop in Millvale. Later, after art school training, he joined the art staff of a local newspaper and went on to take his chances in the NY art markets. Scar tissue from the tuberculosis that had taken his family prevented Ballantine from being called up during the Second World War, but he did serve, as an artist with the U.S. Office of War Information, and later went overseas with the Office of Strategic Services.

Back in the States in 1945, he was commissioned to write a book on Circus Clowns. The following summer he travelled with the Ringling Show, and his drawings were published in Colliers Magazine. The book never made it to press, but half a dozen clowns who had befriended him during his season of drawing decided he should become a clown the following year, in 1947. He met his wife Roberta Light on the 1948 Circus tour. In 1952, he redesigned the SideShow midway with an ultra modern flair. The midway took in more money than ever before. Bill took on a newly created post: "Special Representative of the General Manager," the Big Top's diplomat, assigned to deal with visiting celebrities, personal guests and journalists.

Bill & Roberta left the Show at the end of 1954, returning to writing and illustrating, raising their family of five children full time. Bill's first circus book, Wild Tigers & Tame Fleas was published in 1958, and Illustrated with his pen and ink line drawings. Other books include Clown Alley, Horses and their Bosses, High West, and Kangaroos in the Kitchen.

When the Circus was sold to Irvin Feld in November 1967, Feld persuaded Ballantine to accept his offer of a job as Dean of Clown College. From 1969 thru 1976, Bill was in charge of the up and coming comic talents the school turned out for its two circus units, as administrator, instructor, heading a team of dedicated, famous clowns, jugglers, mimes, and acrobatic tutors. After 1976, Bill returned to his freelance writing/illustration work. Over his long career, he published nearly 100 articles on circus and travel.

It was to Sarasota Florida, the home of circus folk, Circus City USA, that the Ballantines eventually retired and where Bill Ballantine died in 1999.





RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY

CIRCUS



THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

FAIR GROUNDS - MEMPHIS

TWO DAYS

TWICE DAILY

Memphis American Legion Memphis Post No. 1

Afternoon
and Night

SUN. 19
OCT. 19

Afternoon
and Night

MON. 20
OCT 20

1

THE
GREATEST
SHOW



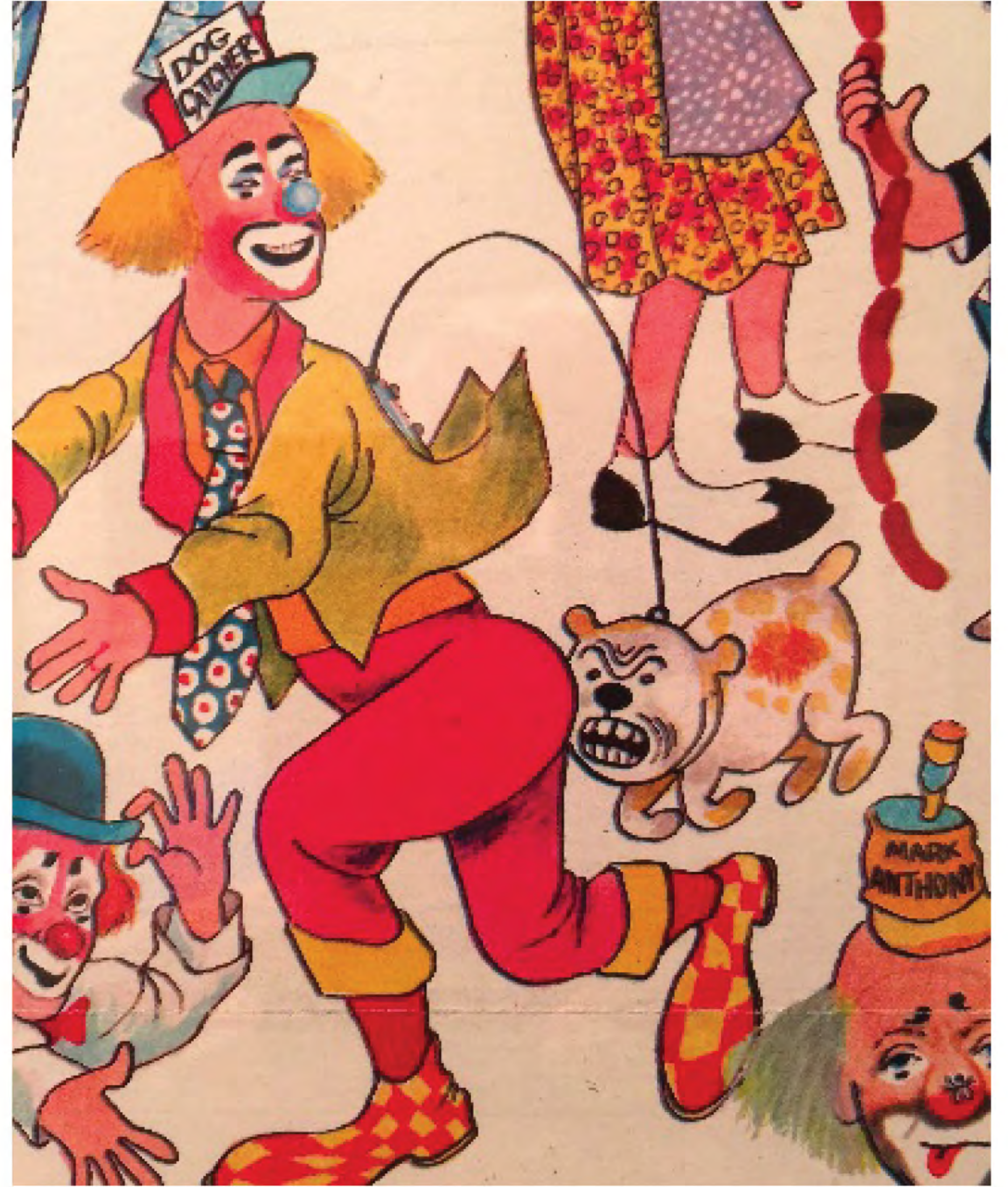
**RINGLING and BARNUM
BROS. & BAILEY
CIRCUS**

THE
GREATEST
SHOW
ON
EARTH

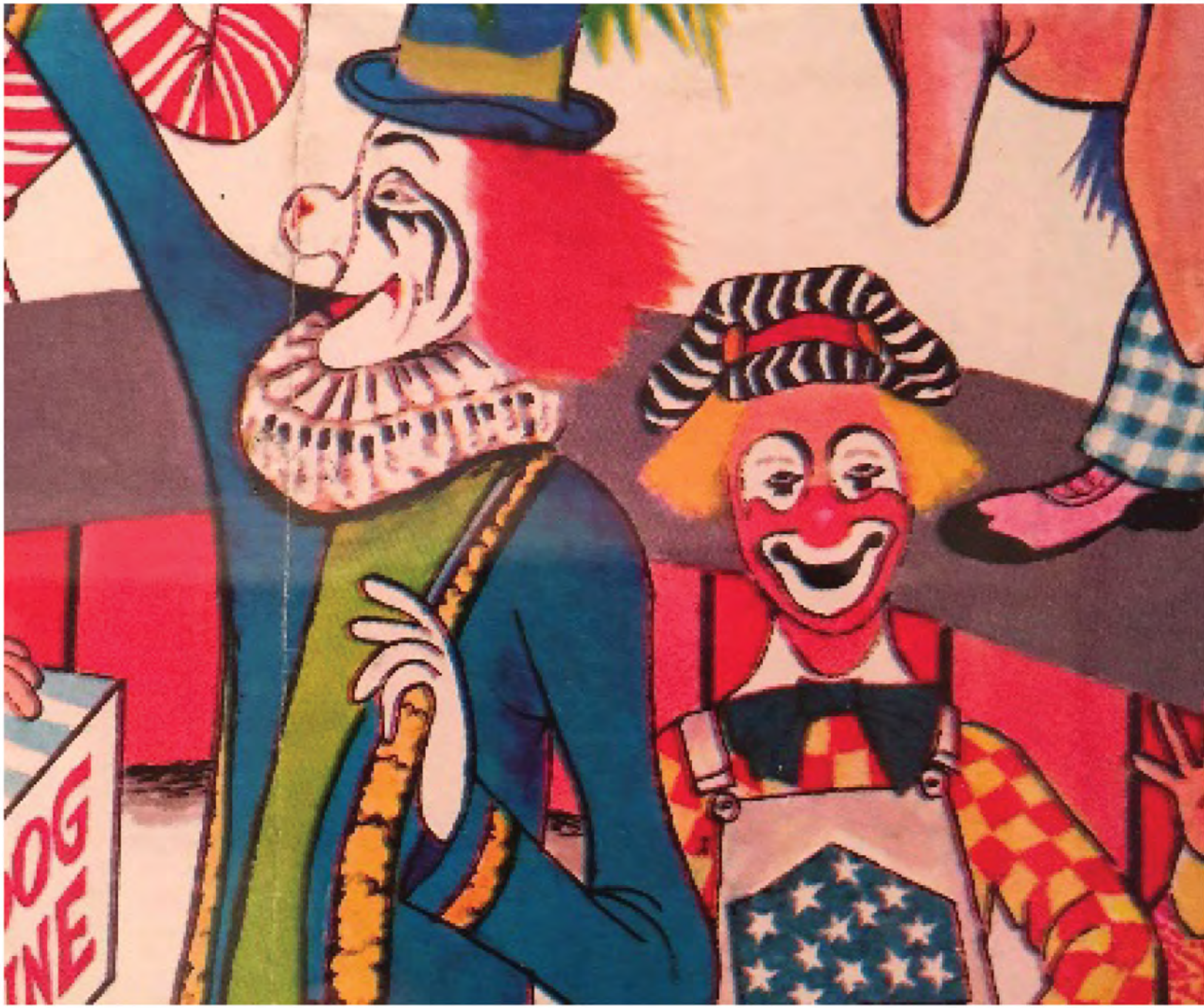


















EMMITT BESANO

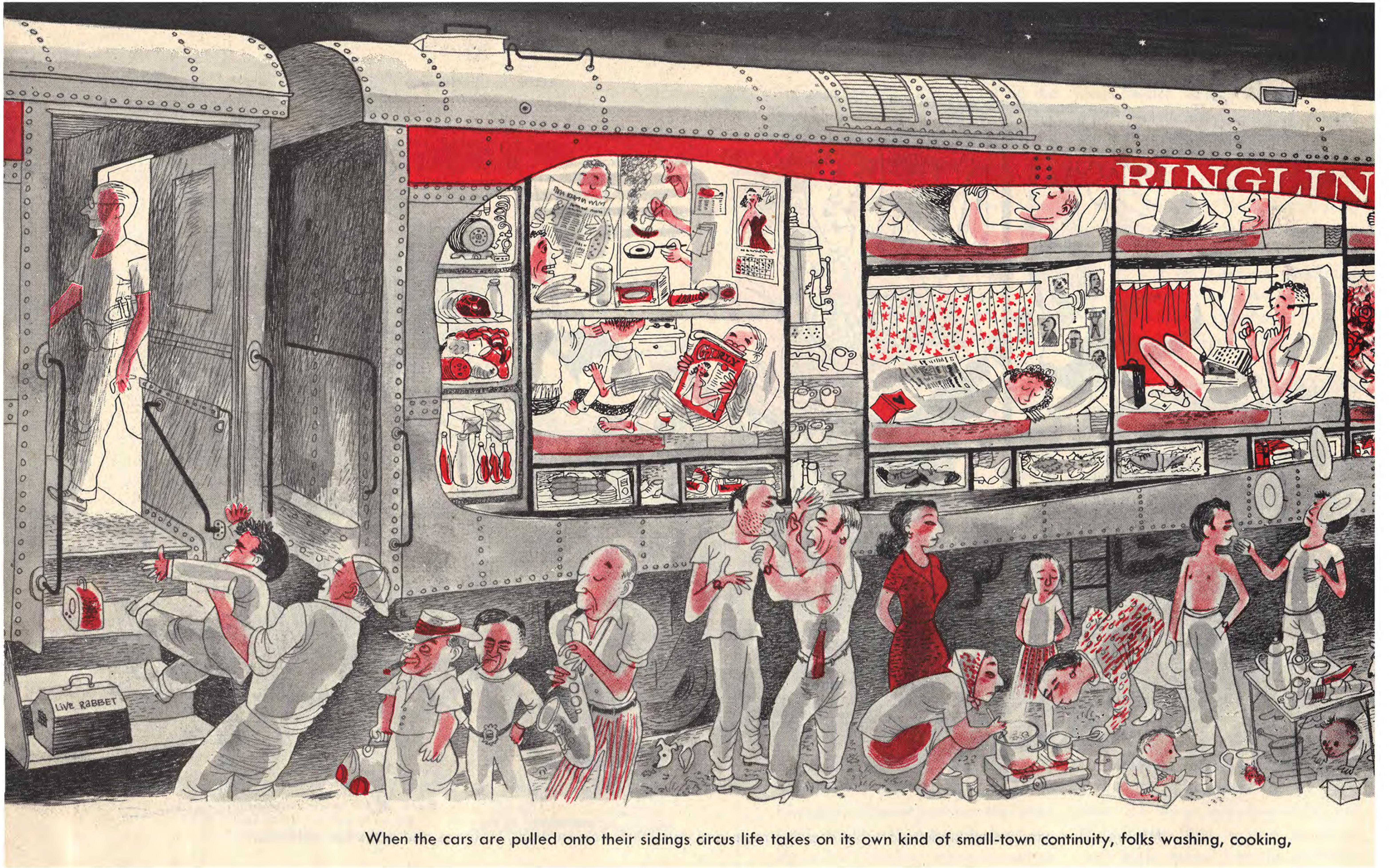
ALLIGATOR SKIN MAN









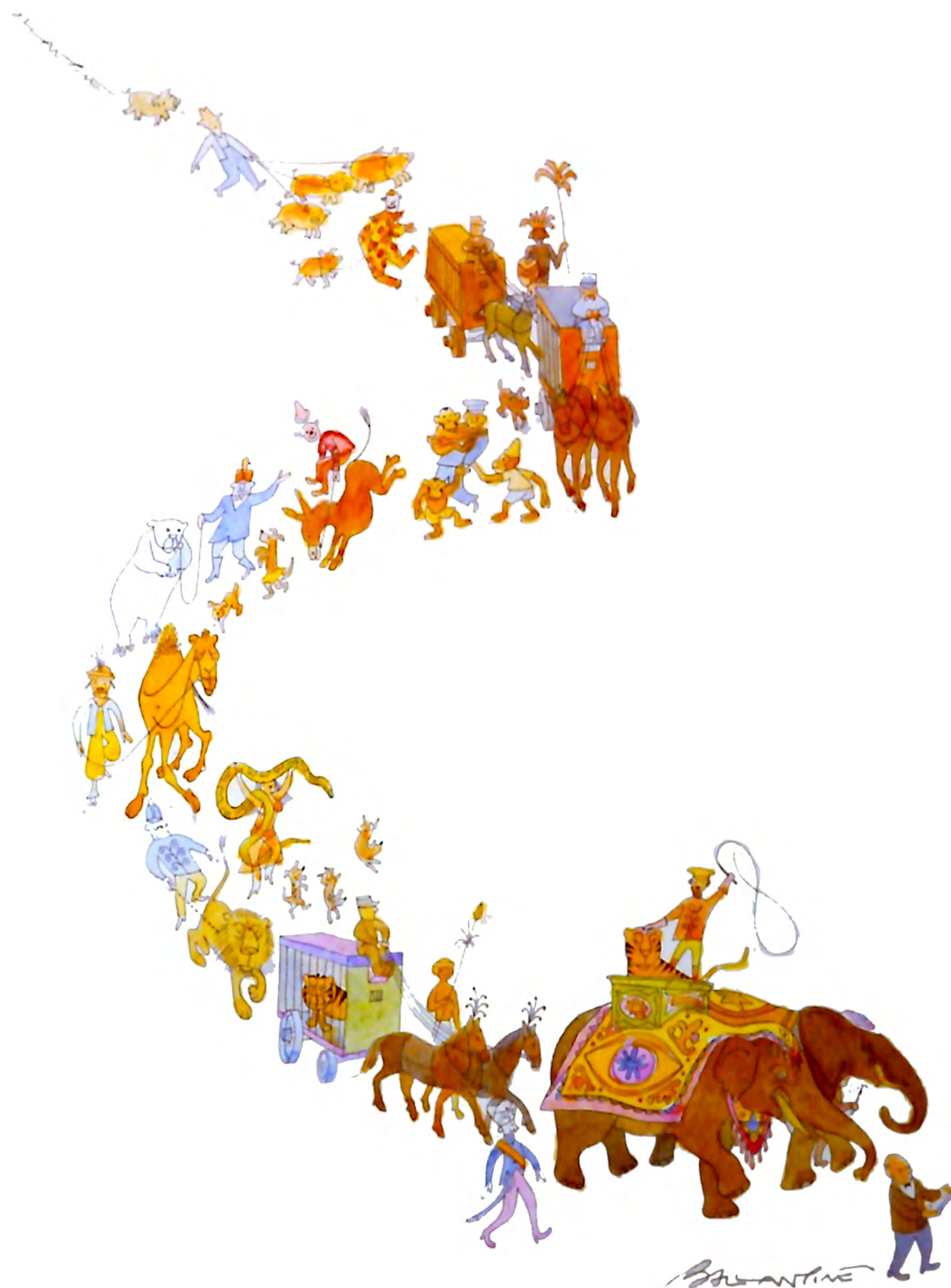


When the cars are pulled onto their sidings circus life takes on its own kind of small-town continuity, folks washing, cooking,











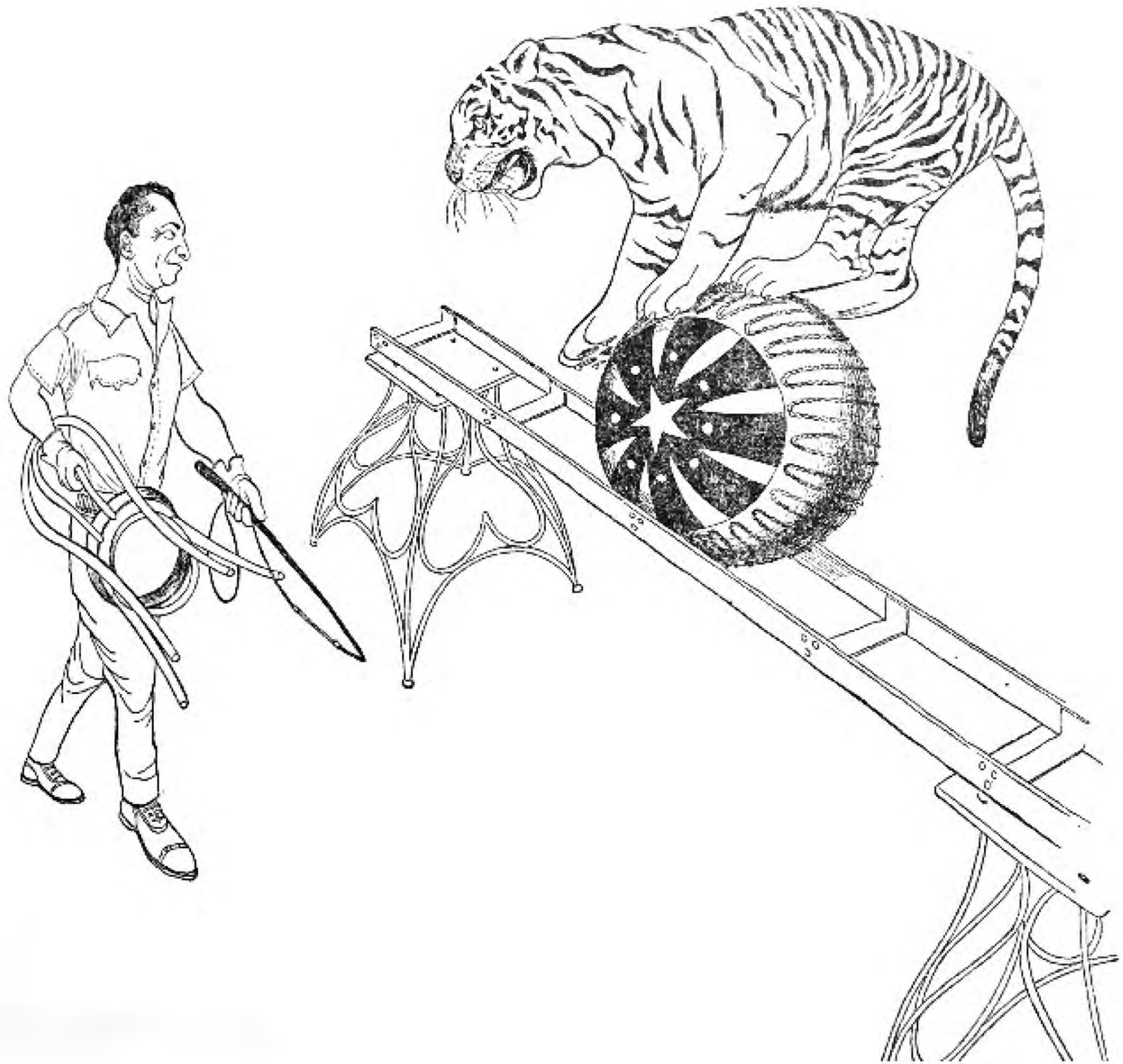
★ CIRCUS ★ BALLEANTINE ★



★ One Performer... An Entire Production ★

2

BILL'S ART
&
LINE DRAWINGS







BACKYARD SKETCHES

BY BALLANTINE



NOT EVERYONE SLEEPS IN THE WINTER



GILDING THE BELL WAGON



WAITING FOR FINALE



"HOOK ME UP"

WALK UP ONE FLIGHT



SALUTO READS HIS RABBITS' NOTICES









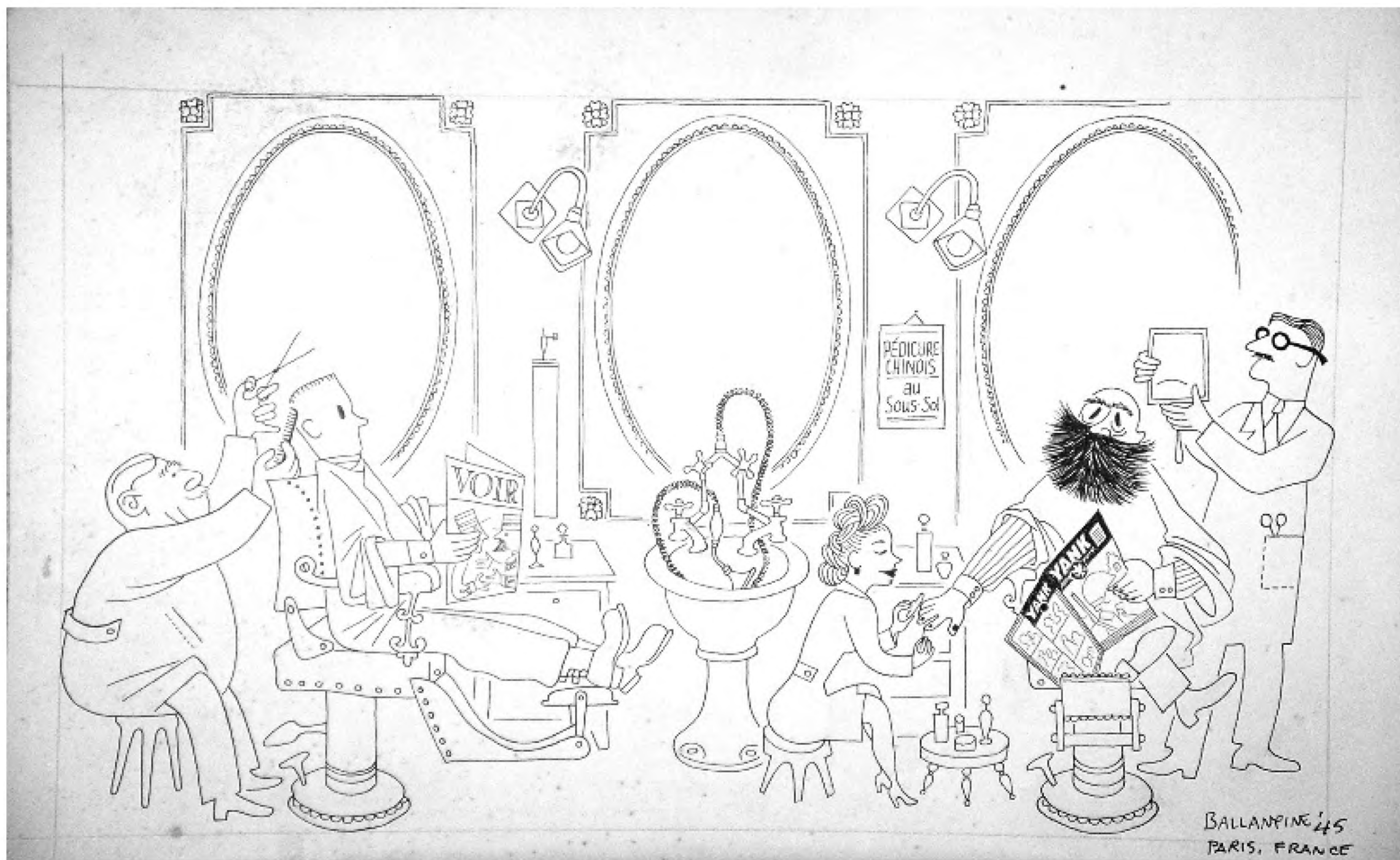
Finally he met Mickey Du Vall. It was Mickey who taught him to juggle three balls

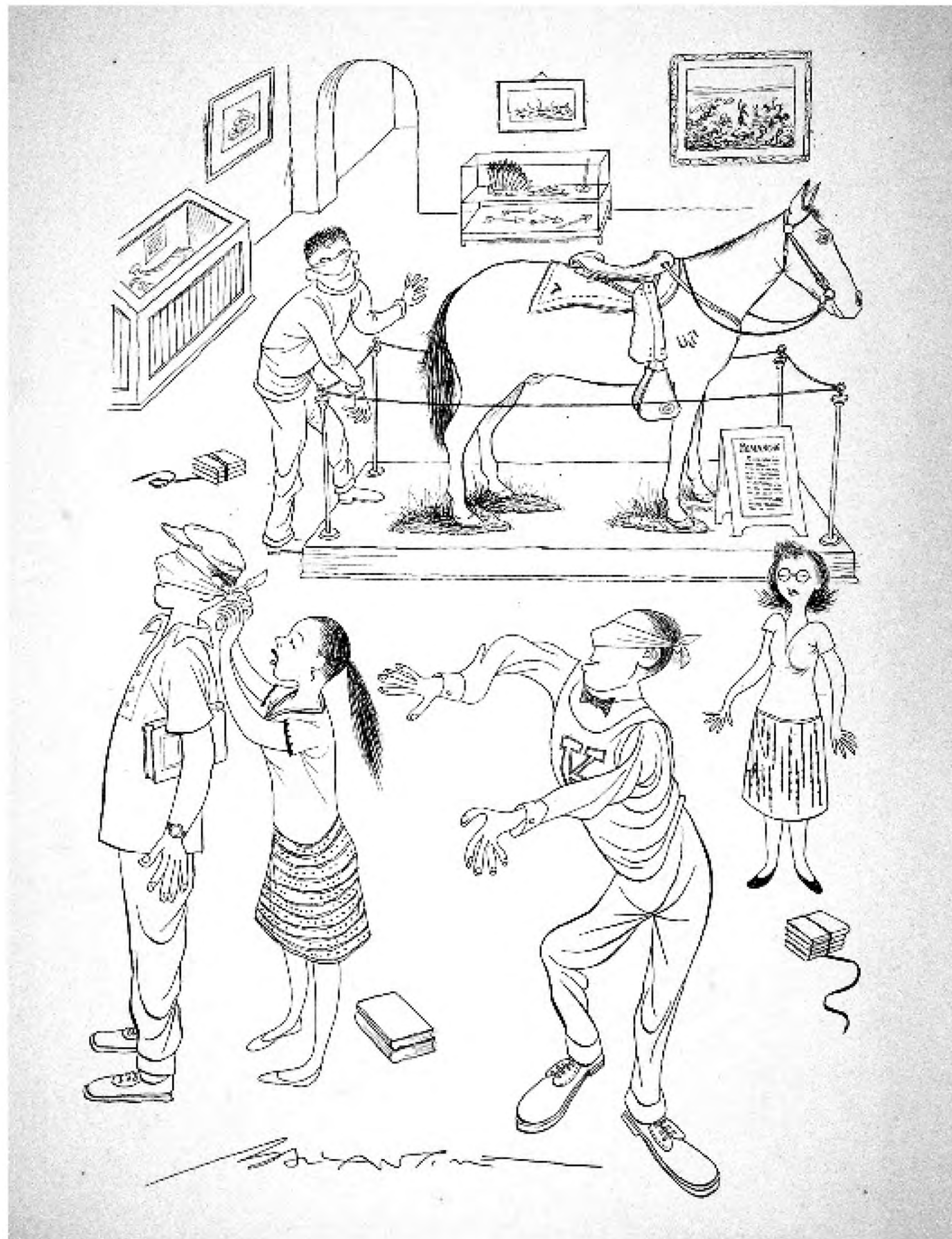














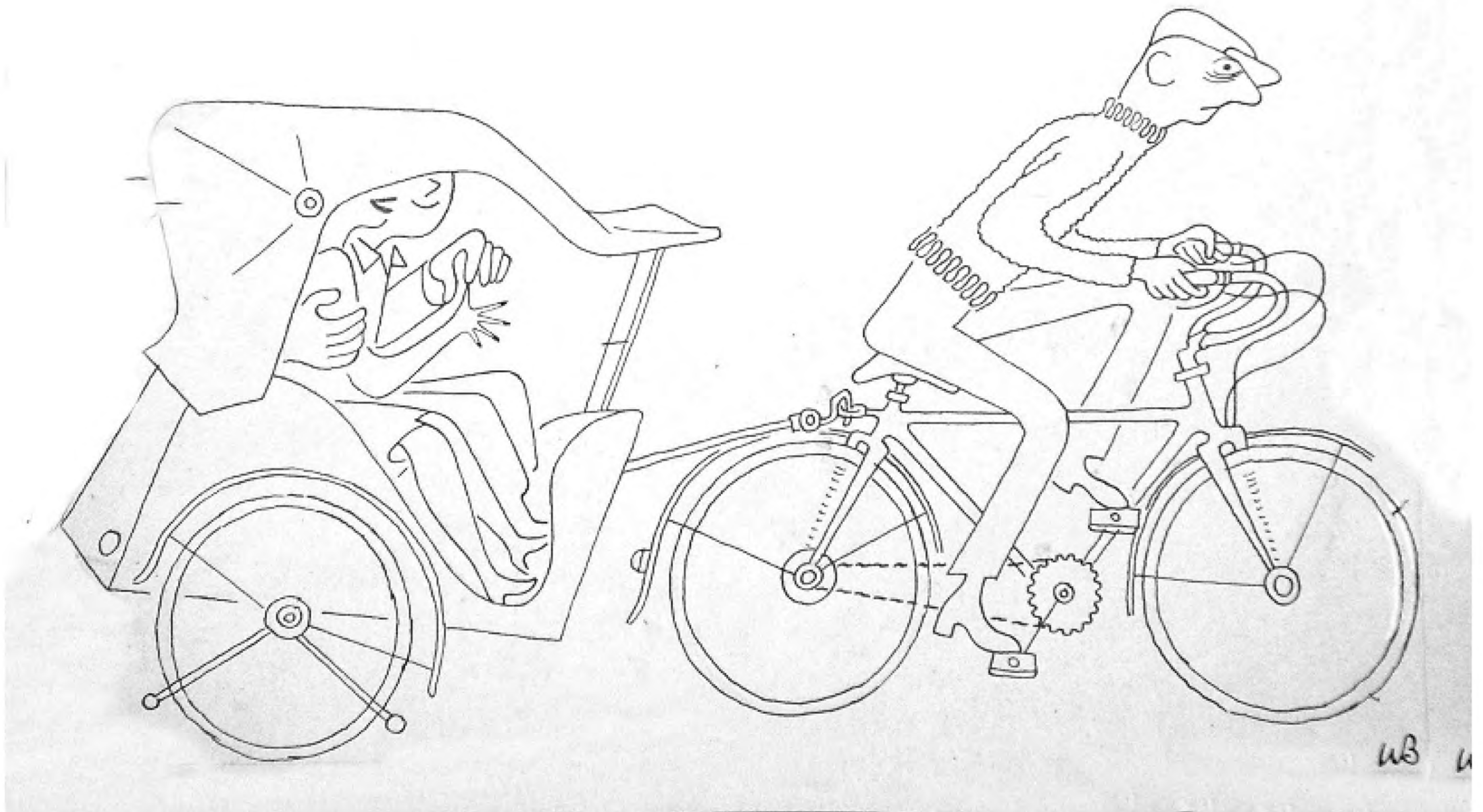








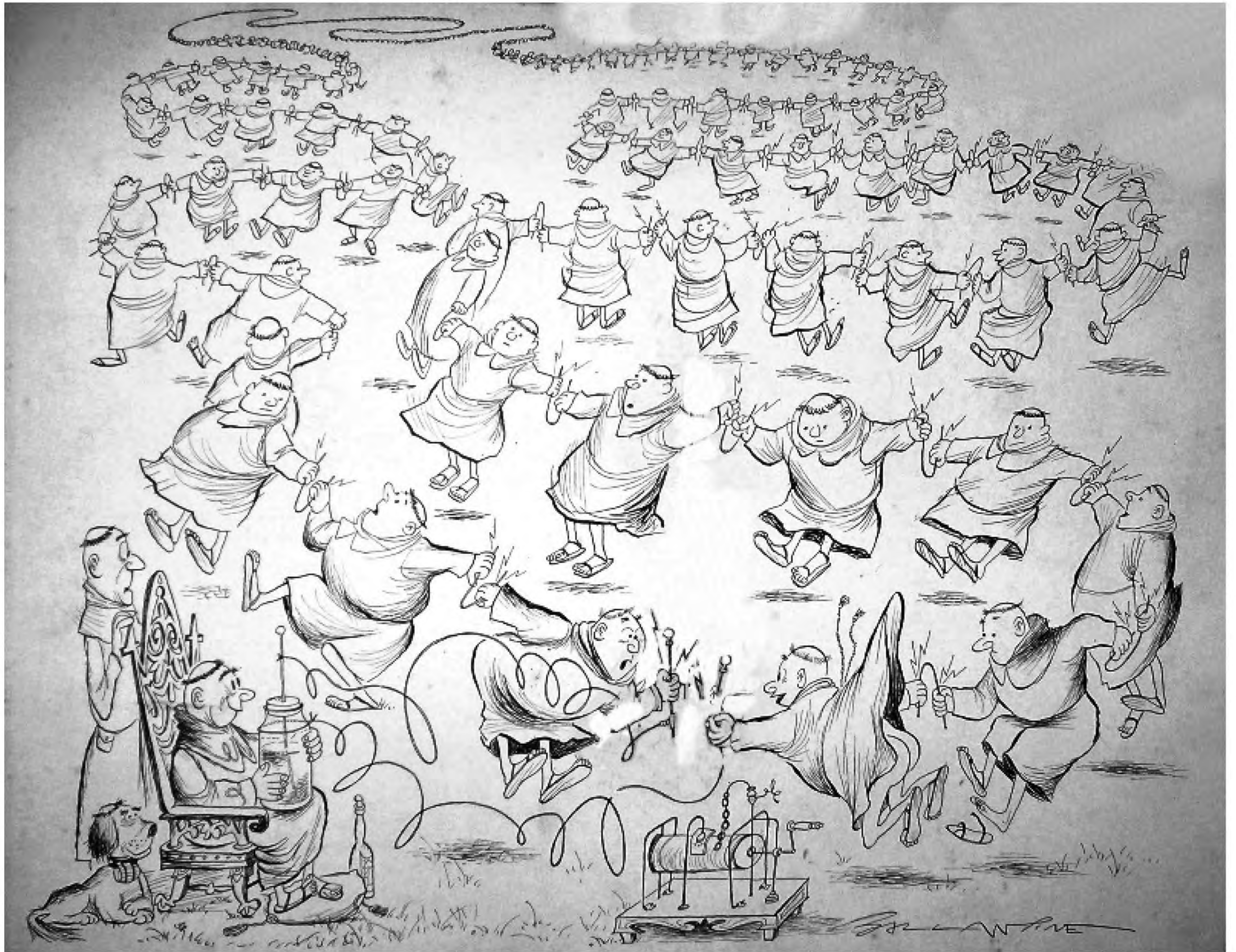








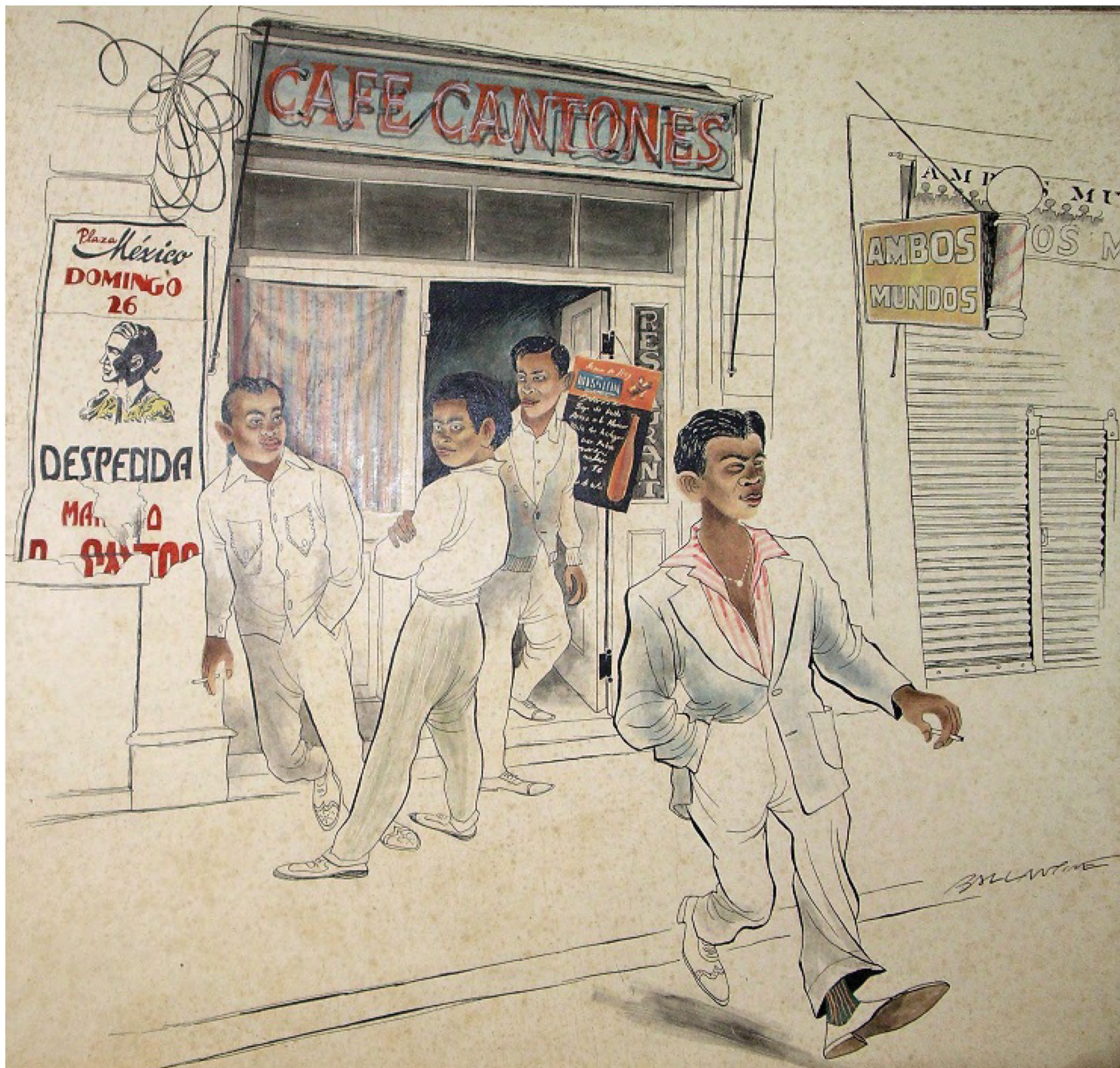






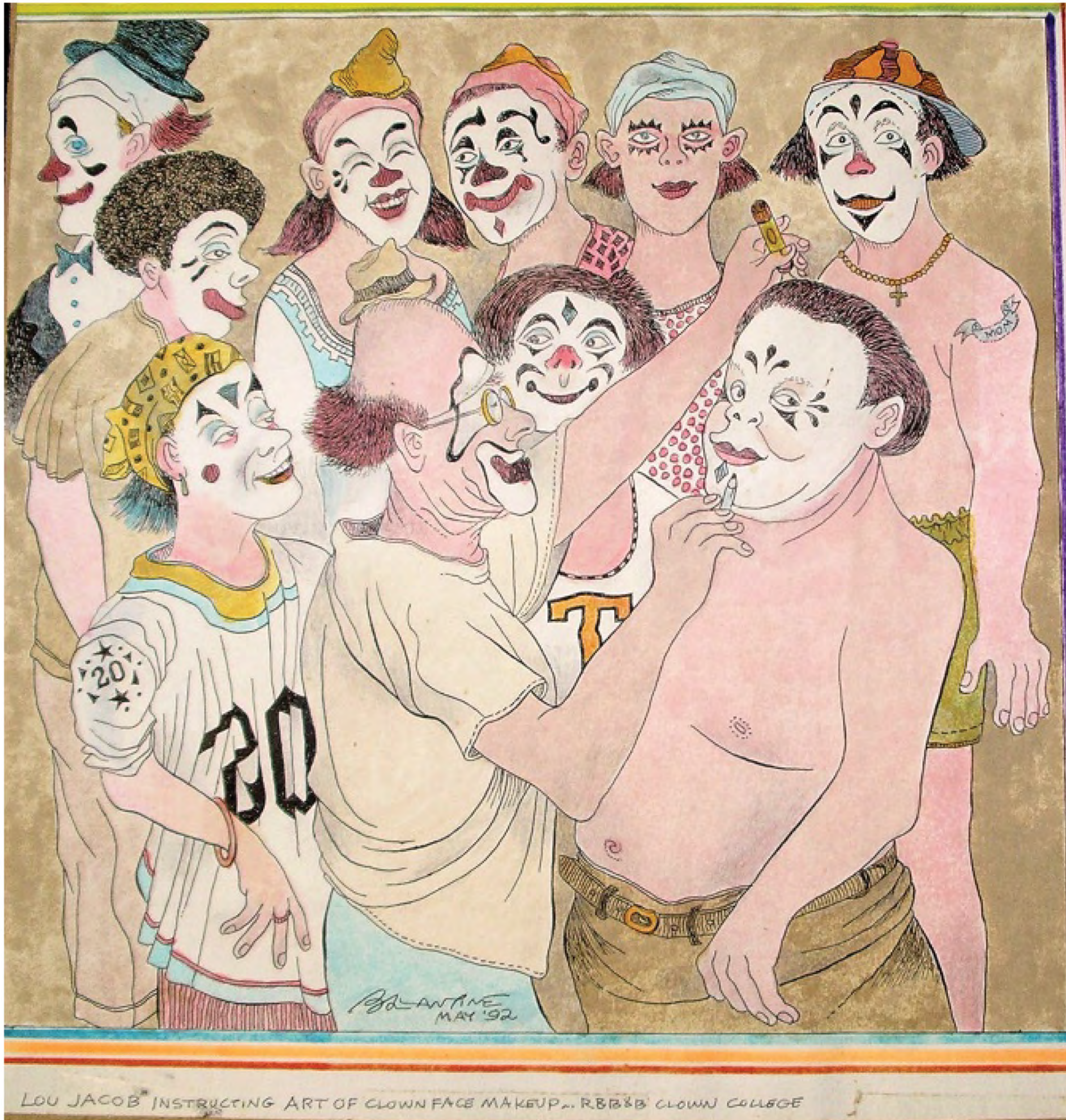






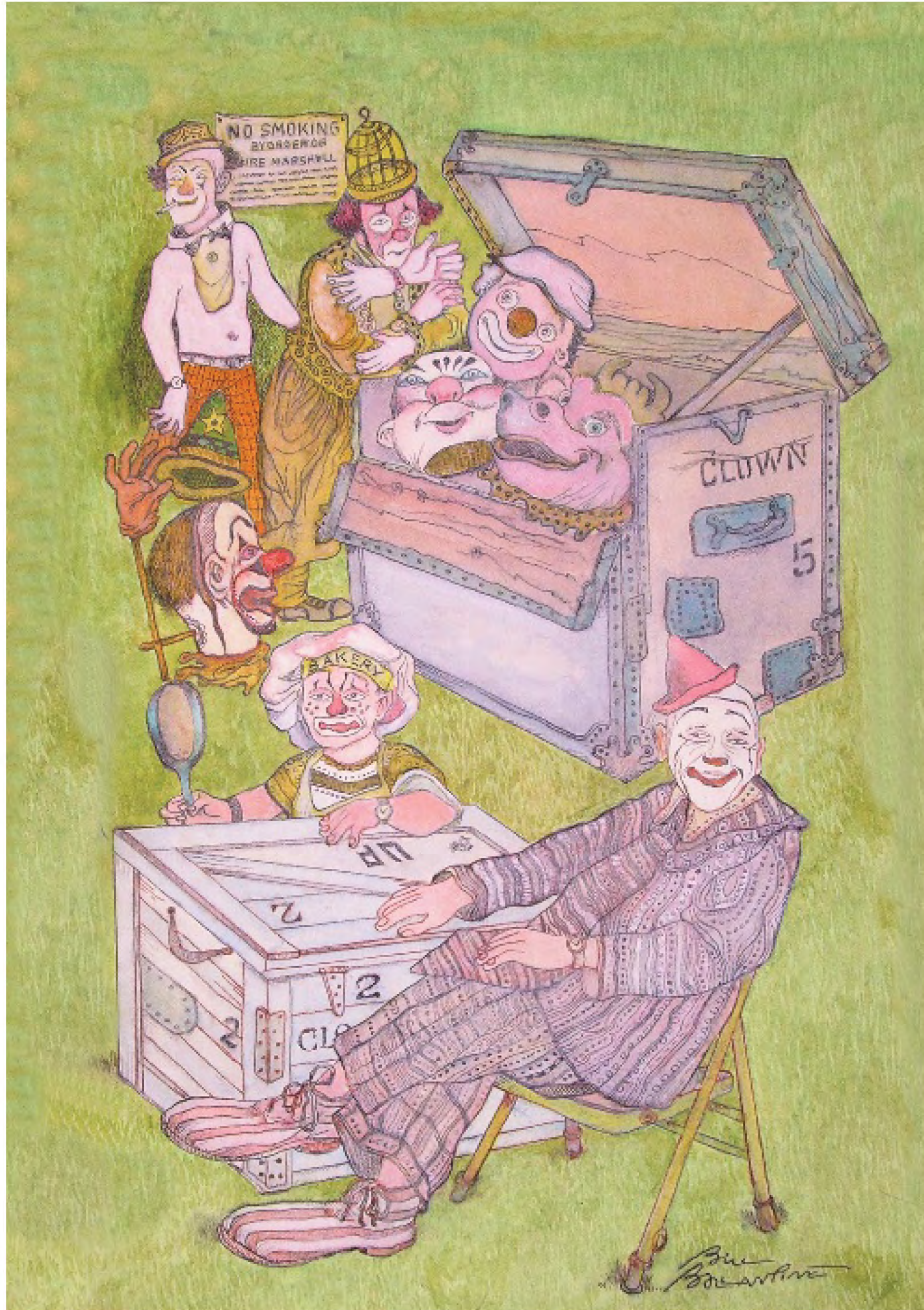






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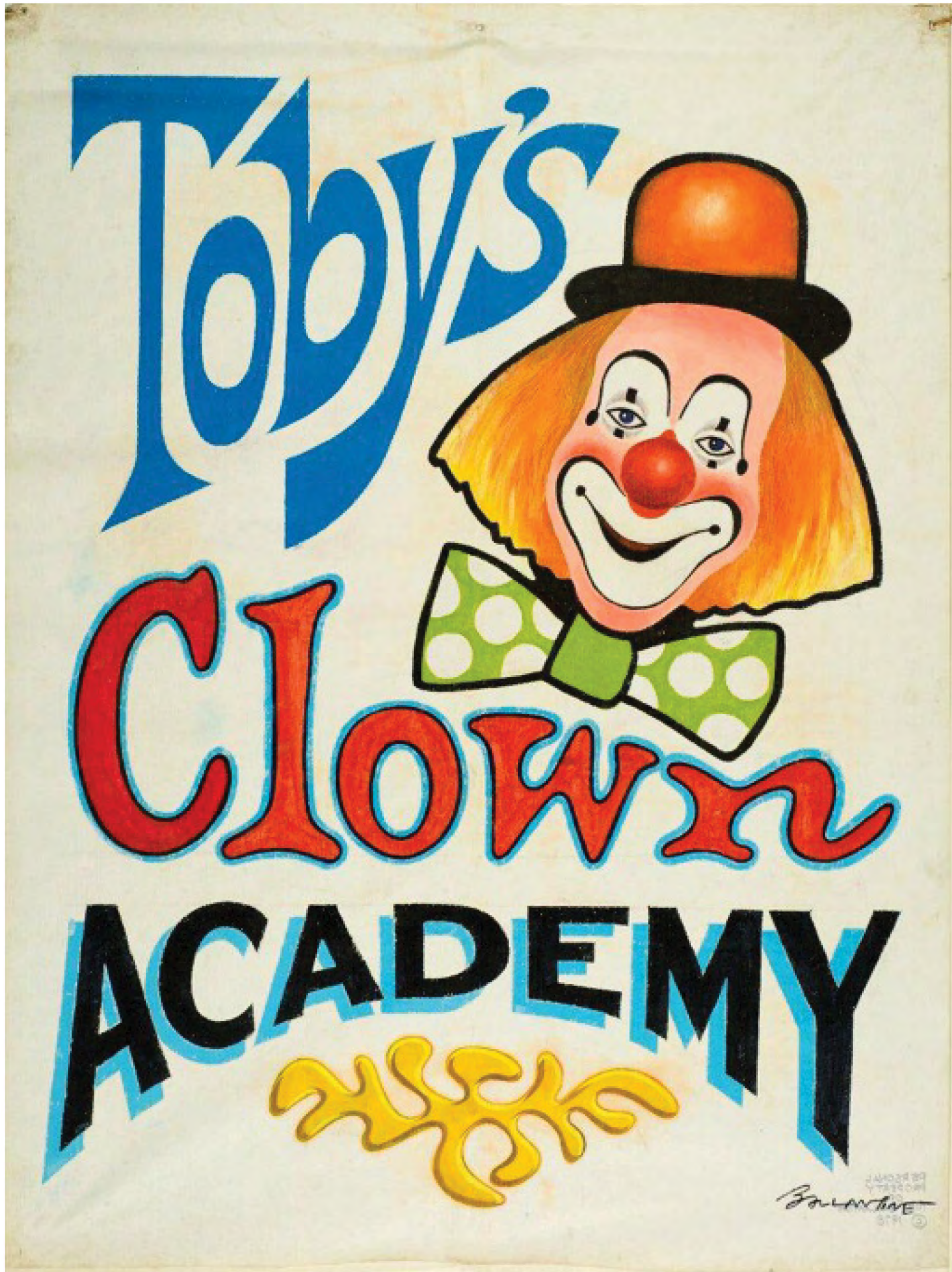
THE
CIRCUS
CLOWNS















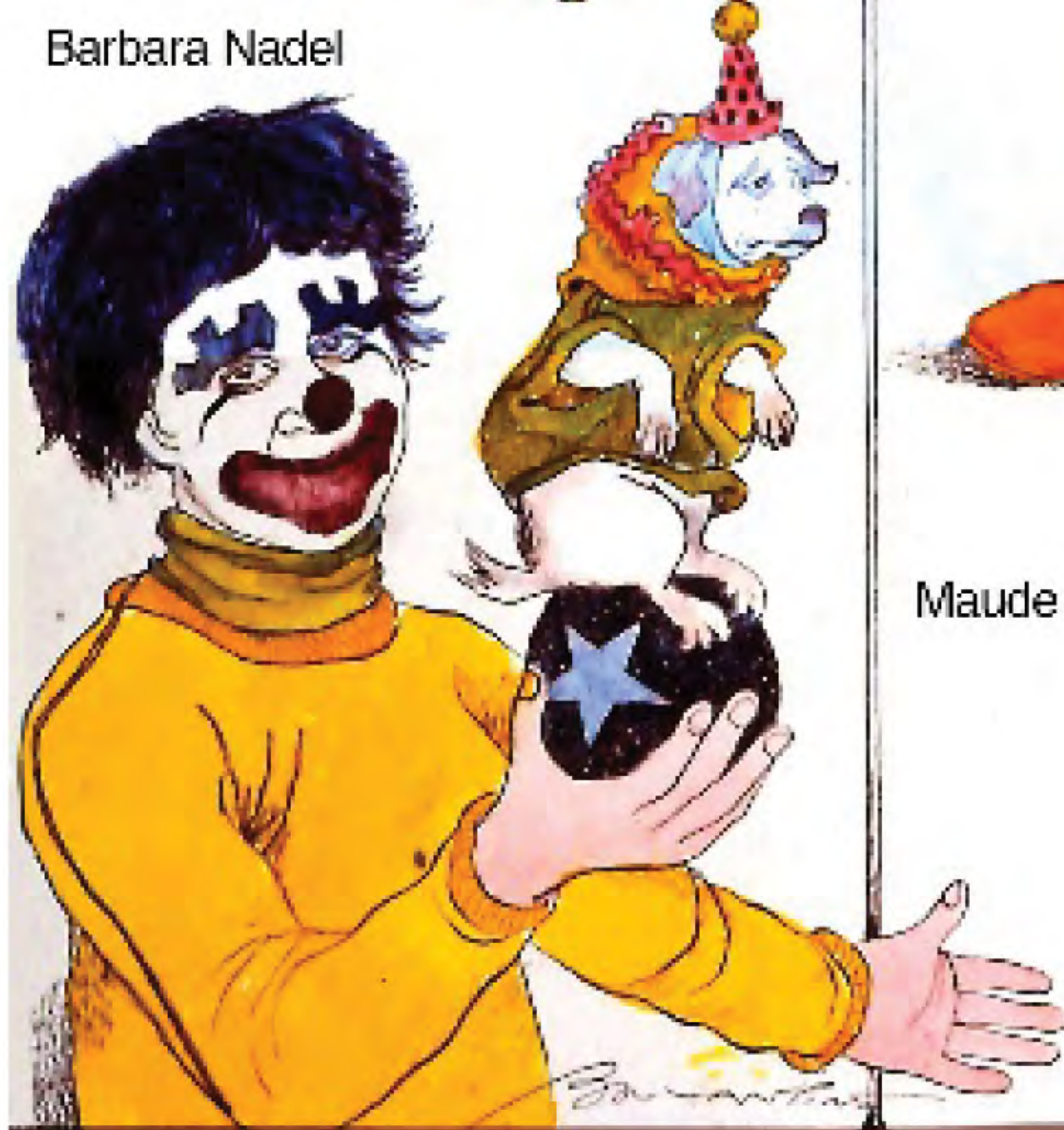




Rose Hanlon



Peggy Williams

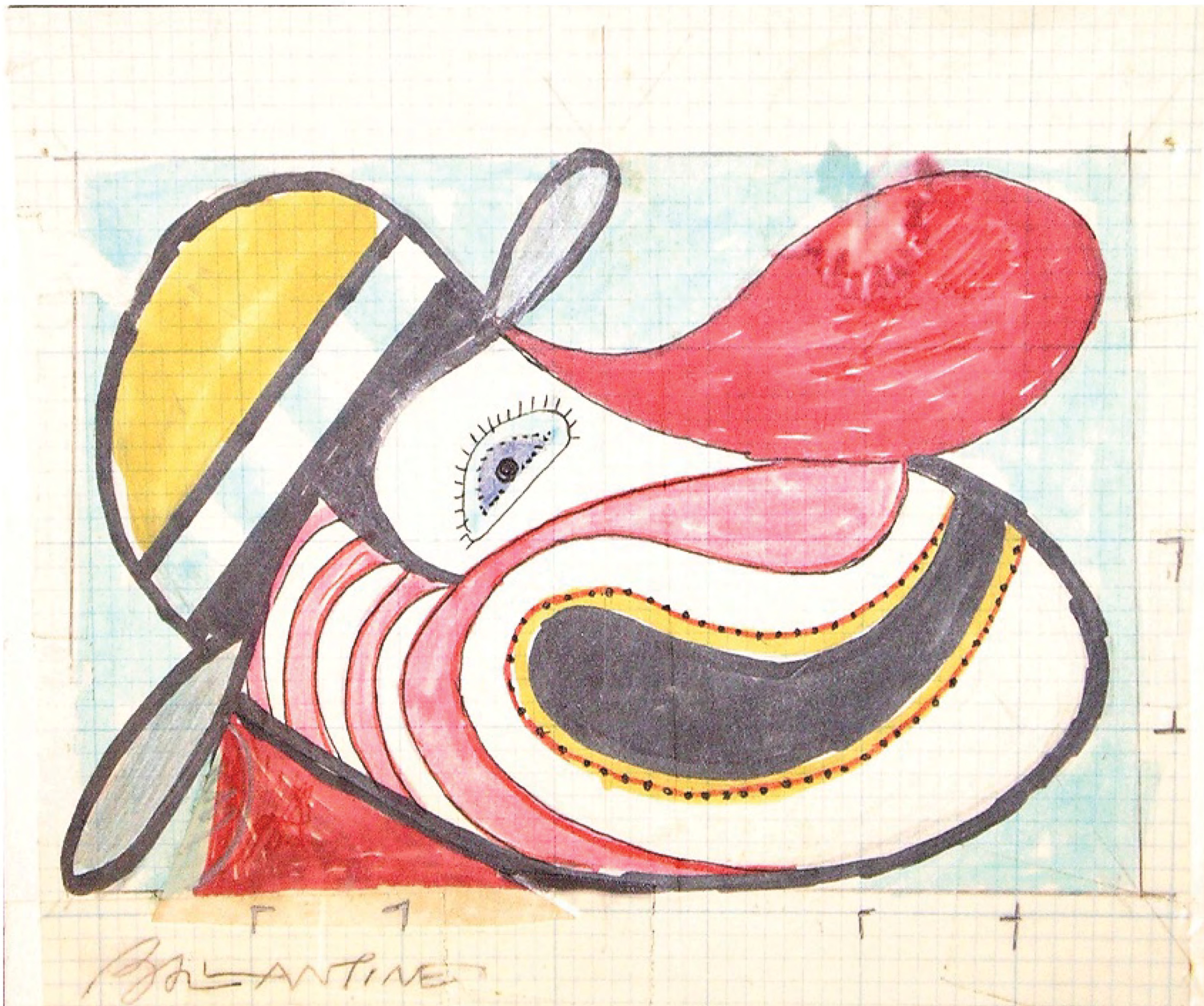


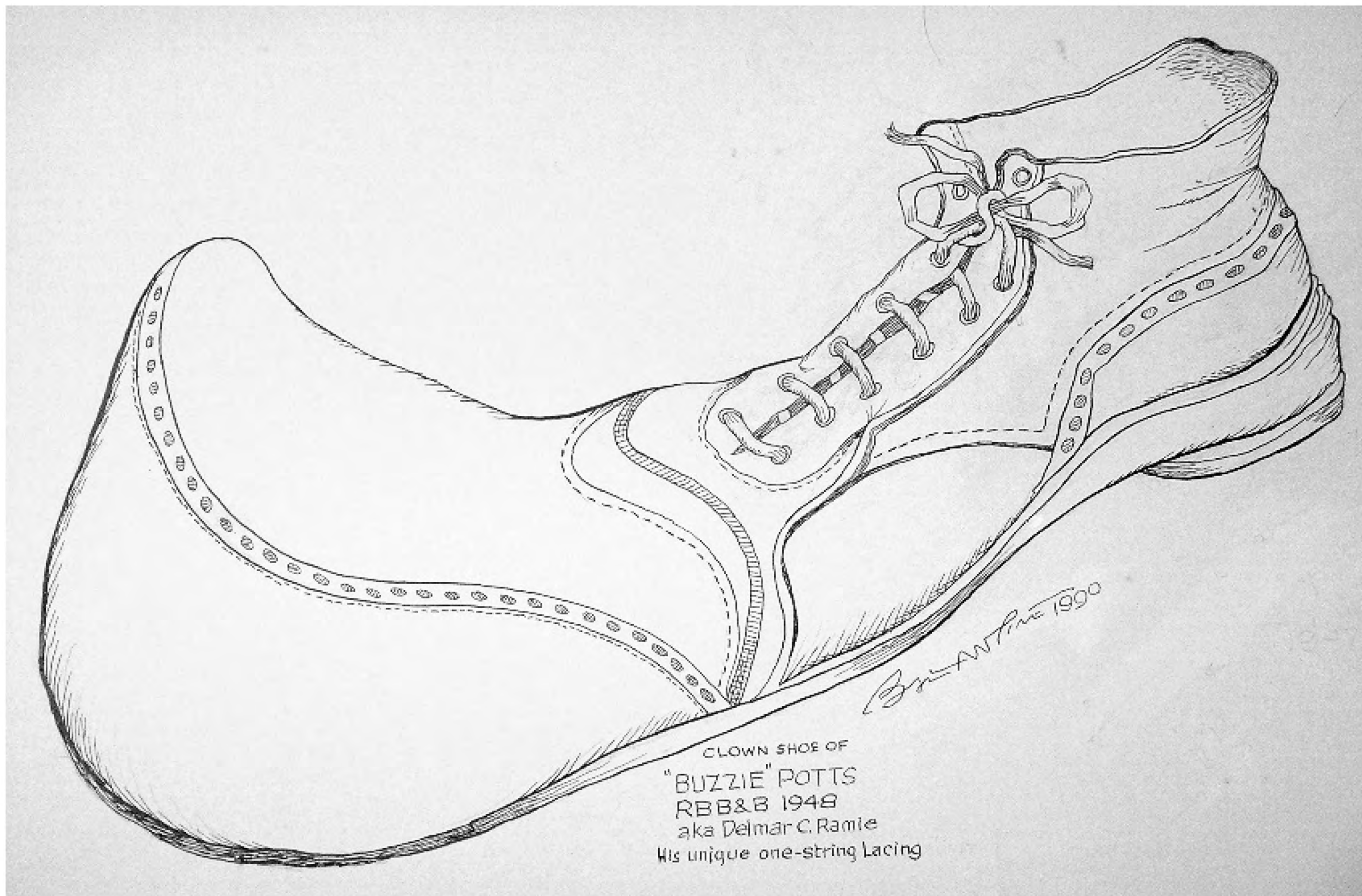
Barbara Nadel



Maude Flippen







CLOWN SHOE OF
"BUZZIE" POTTS
RBB&B 1948
aka Delmar C. Ramie
His unique one-string Lacing







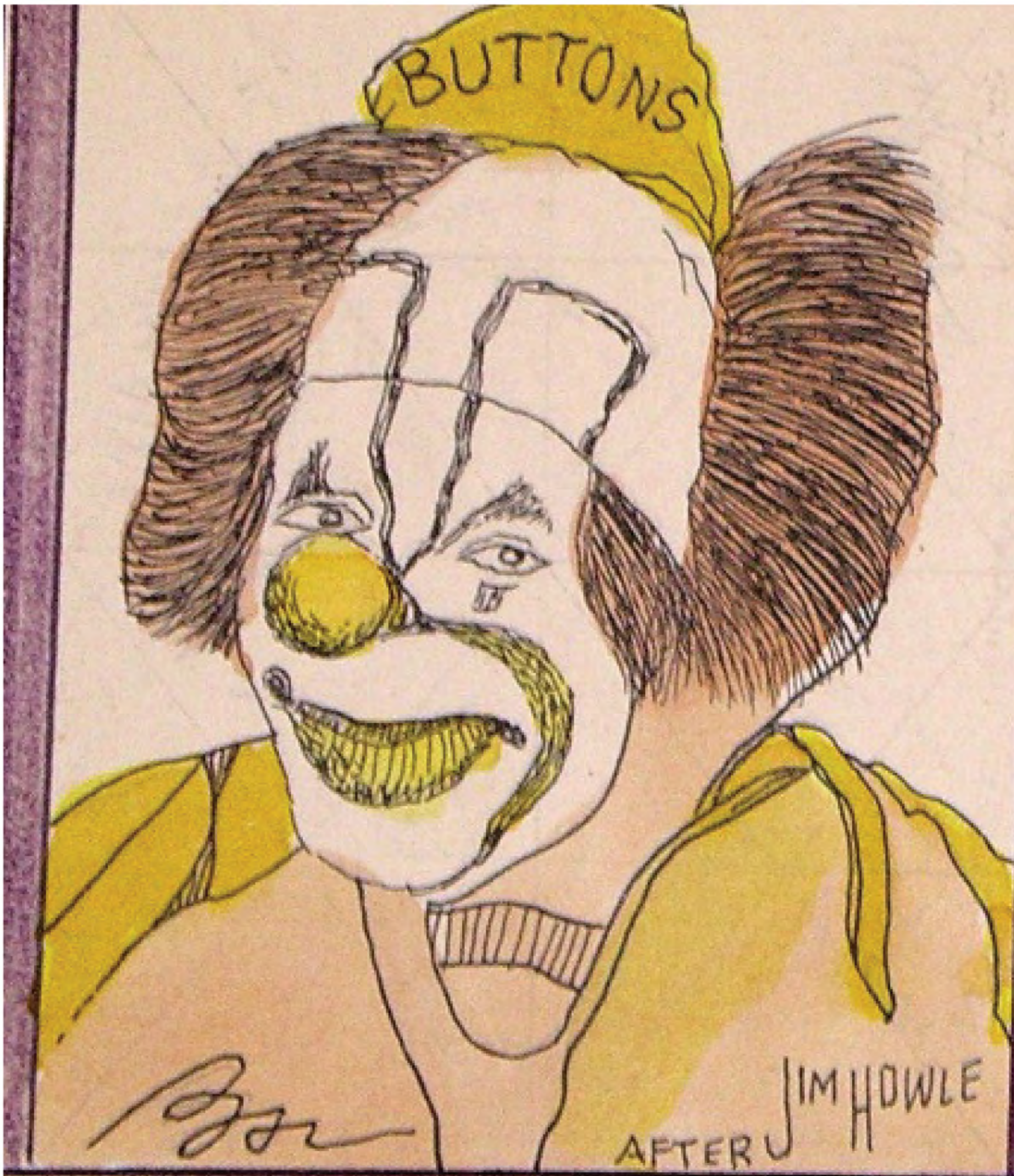
DANNY CHAPMAN



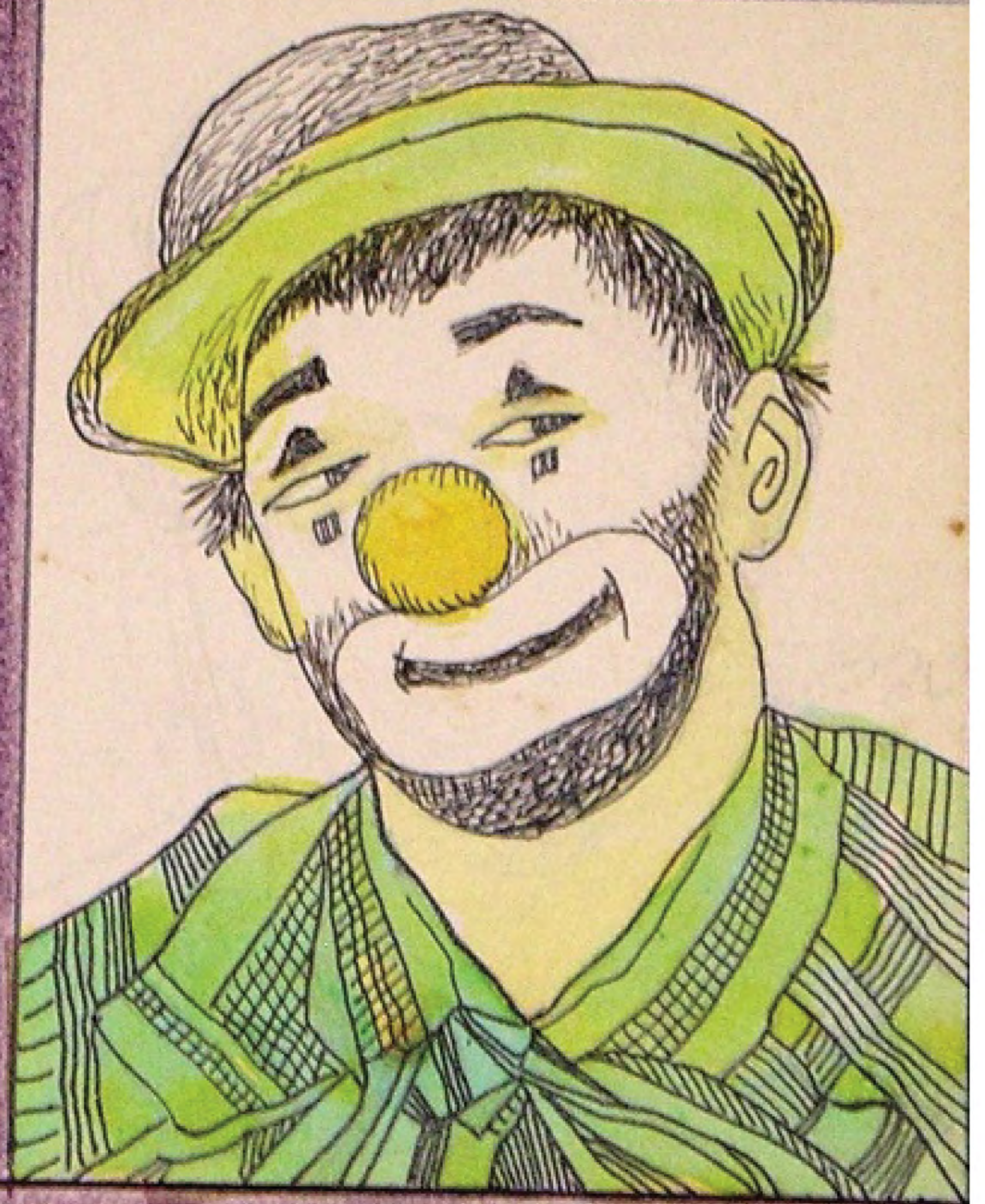
JOHNNY PEERS



JIM HOWLE



LEON McBRYDE



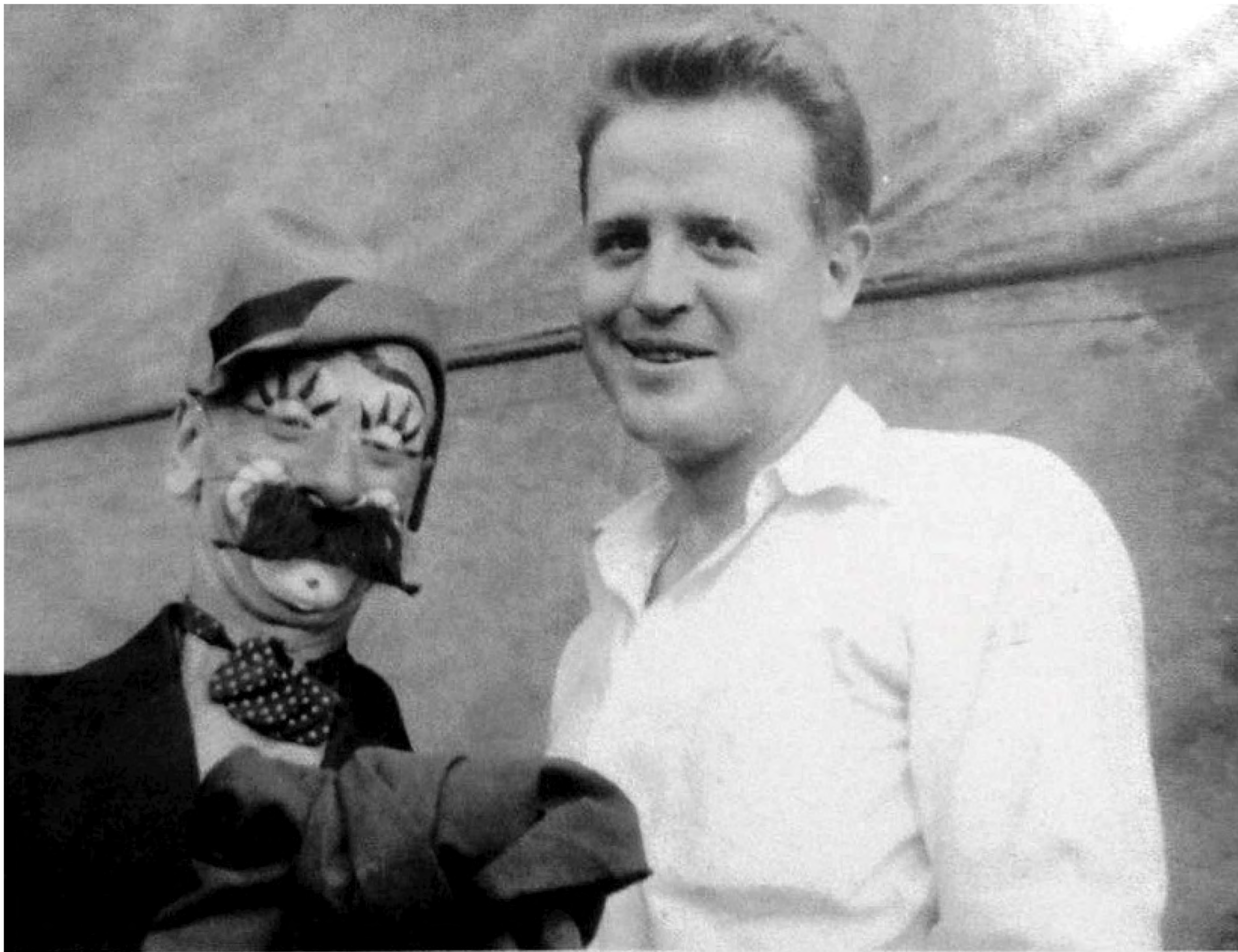
IRVIN ROMIG







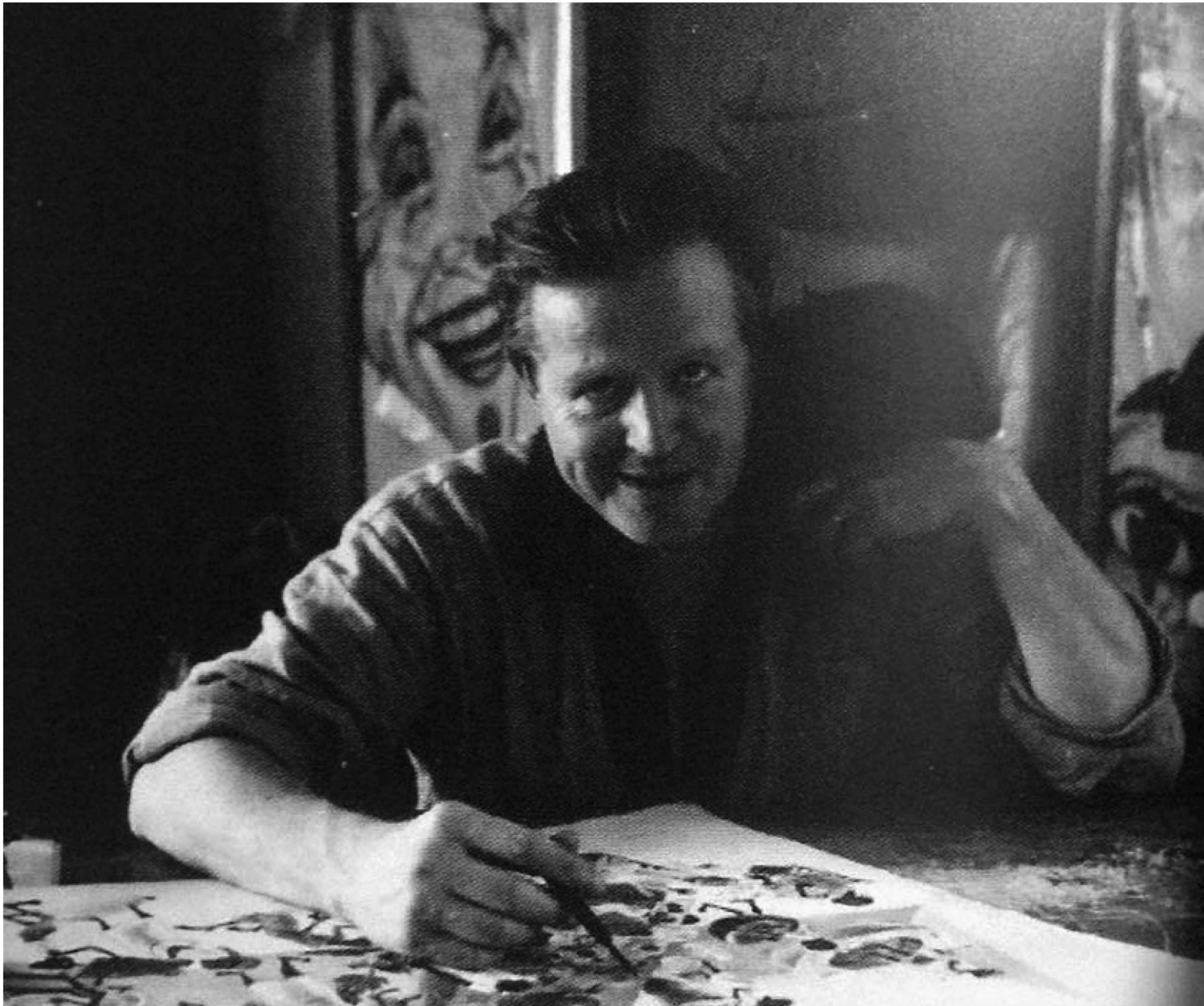
Toby Jorio



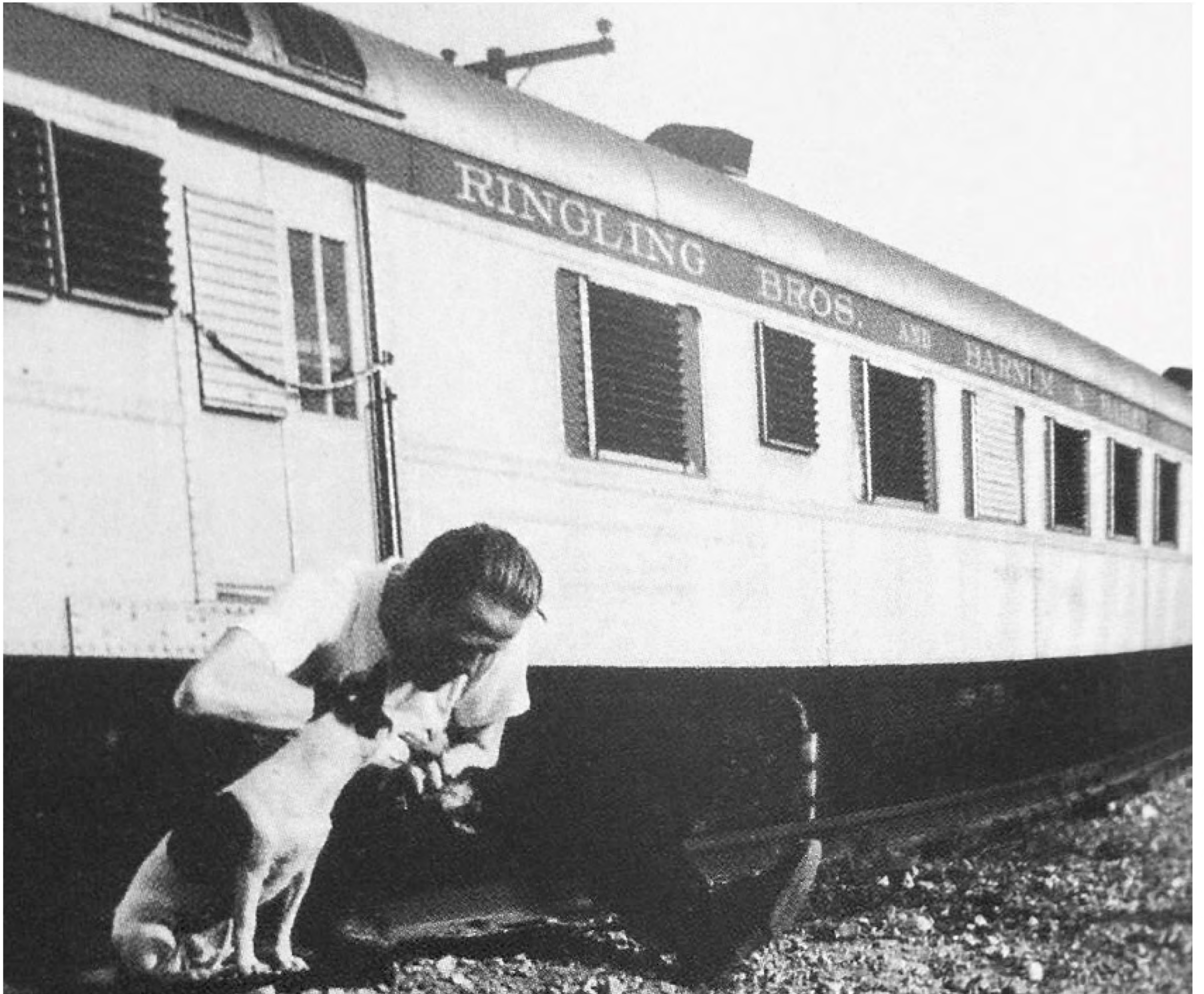
BILL BALLANTINE JOINS THE CIRCUS, 1948

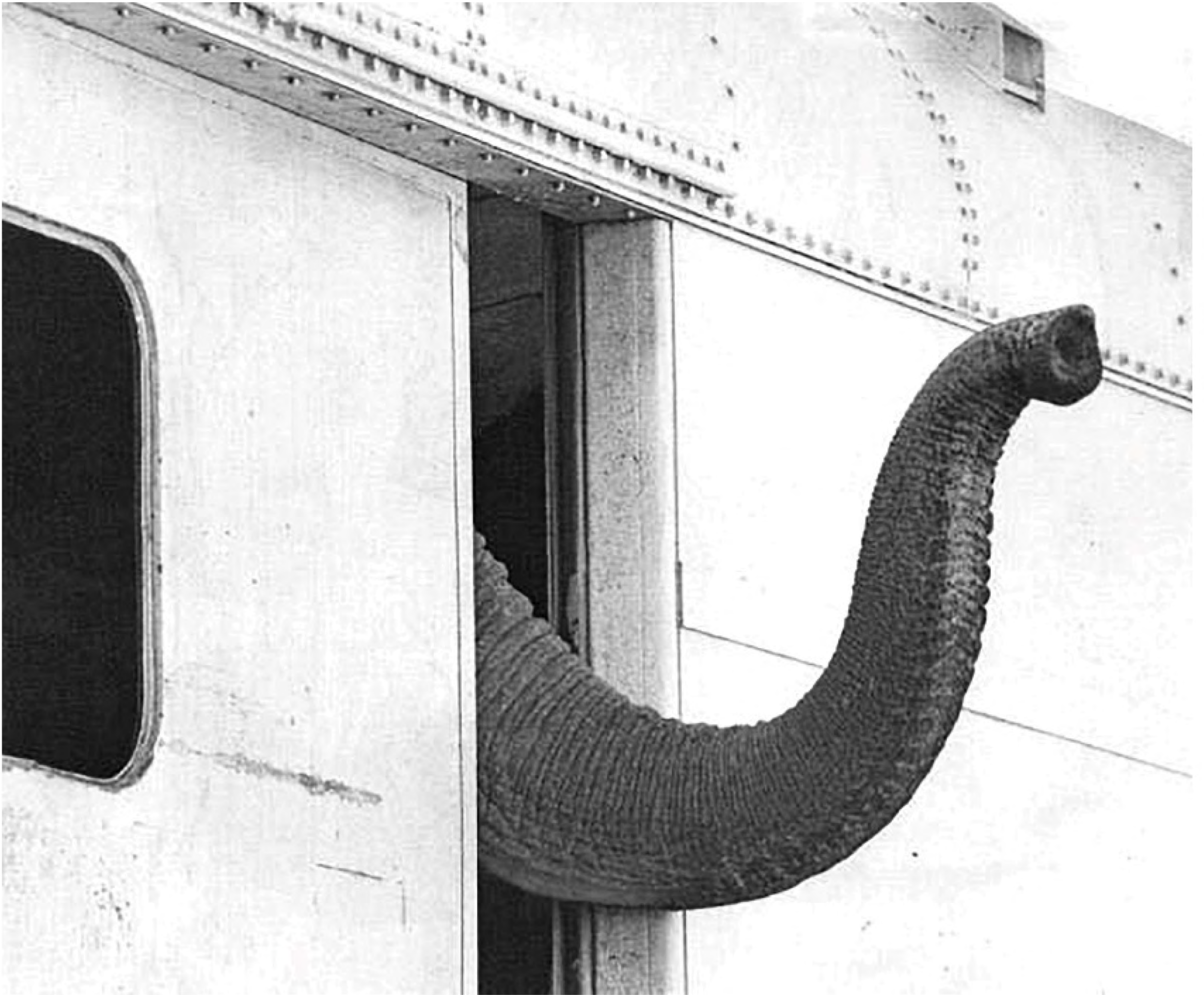


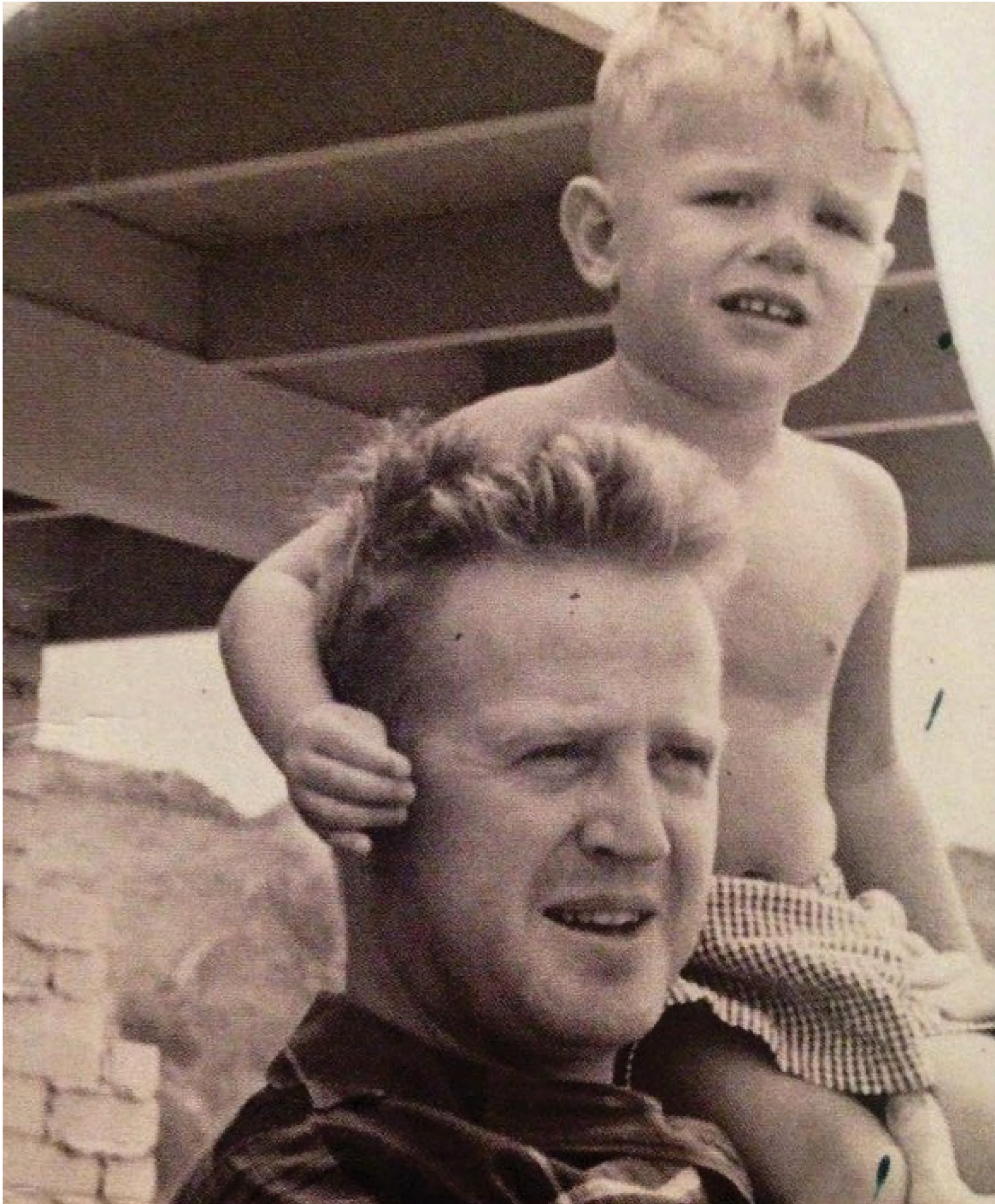








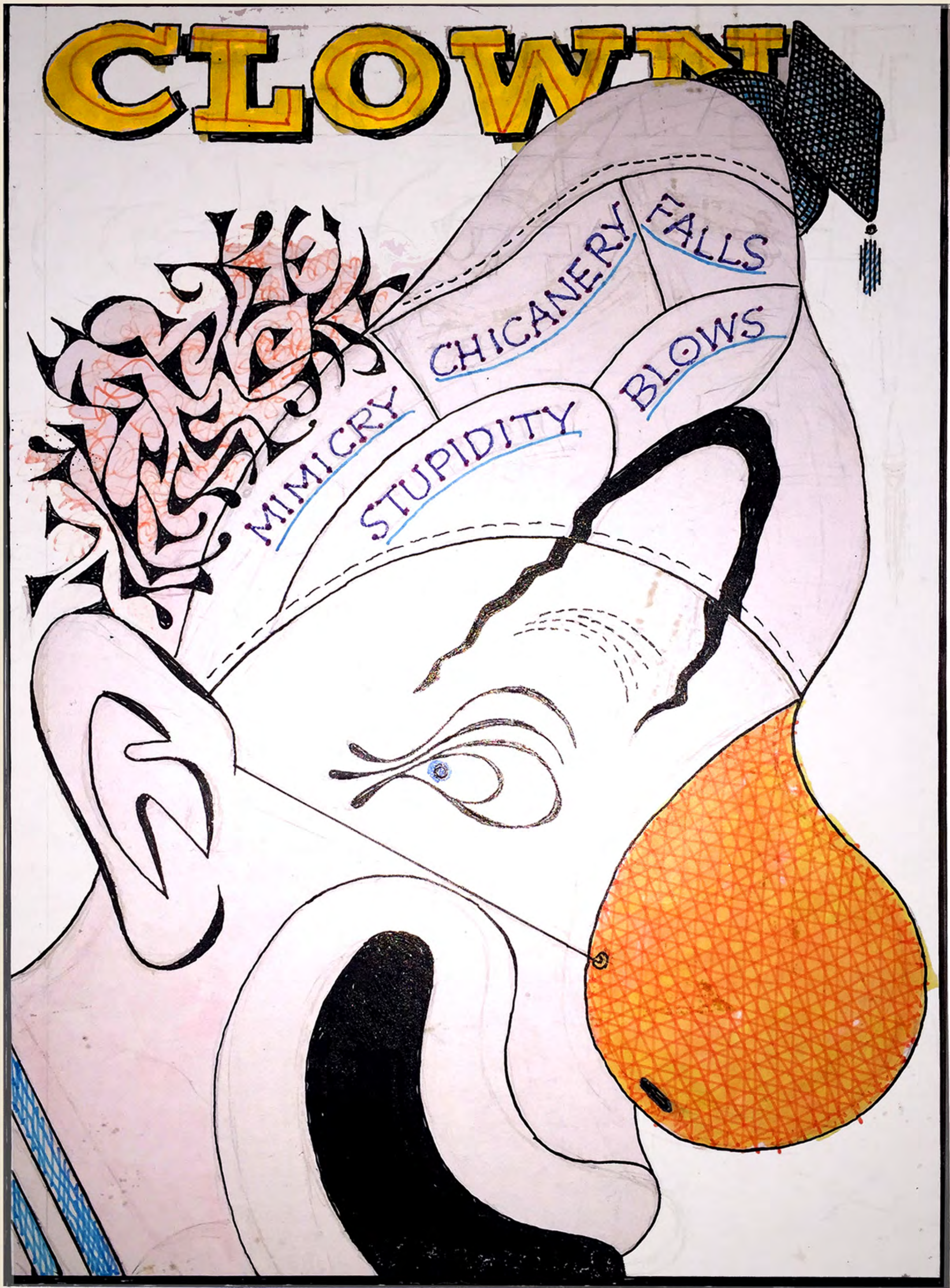












Bob Antine '91