

## FrameWork 2/13:2

### Liz Magor on Simple Present Future Anterior

I'm sure that all the artists who work with Susan have experienced her ability to provide unusual support for projects and passions. She's concierge-like in her arrangements for securing funding, making donations or finding a seat sale. She's paralegal in pursuing insurance claims, getting into or out of contracts, and checking the fine print.

I have learned to value her input on both professional and personal matters and absolutely trust her discretion and fairness. More than once I have leaned on her with problems so pathetic that I choose to suppress them from memory. On the occasion of celebrating 20 years of partnership with Susan I involuntarily recall this story.



At some point in the mid- 1990's I developed a passion for poodles. Not the big ones with their classy continental cuts, or the tiny toys sitting in tea-cups. My focus was on the mid-size version, the "French Poodle", called miniature by their breeders. This interest was triggered by a Lynda Barry comic strip featuring a poodle with a spikey haircut; "he's small, he's black, he's mad as hell, he's Poodle with a Mohawk!" and confirmed by a sighting in Trinity Bellwood Park of a ragged-coated miniature giving the rout to a bruiser of a Rottweiler.

It wasn't until I moved back to Vancouver that my obsession really bit. A fascination with the history of bloodlines led me to pedigree charts which I cross-referenced with listings in the breeder section of dog magazines. Eventually I came to the conclusion that the epi-center of miniature poodle production was in a swath of townships just north of Toronto where two kennels based their breeding program on direct descendants of the American champions of the 1940's. No doubt the inaccessibility of these places honed my imagination as I pictured the rolling hills of Bobcaygeon populated with frolicking, collectible poodles all tricked out like the vintage dogs in the old books.

In 1996, on the occasion of my third exhibition at the gallery, I begged Hobbs to help me get up there, just for a look. This was too embarrassing a request to lay at any other door, and even Hobbs sounded worried at the weirdness of it, but she picked me up at the airport and we headed straight to King City in dark, nasty weather. I had contacted a kennel famous for developing a line of "red" dogs and the only one with bloodlines from the original imports from France. The breeder reluctantly agreed to let us visit at night, no doubt hoping to "place" one of her less than perfect pups.

He knew what people thought of his kind:  
"High Strung." Spoiled Rotten." French."  
But in the next 24 hours, He's going  
change all that...

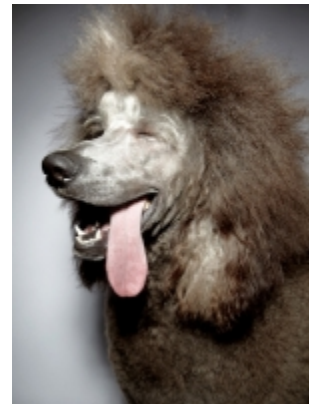


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In a rural area zoned for acreage we found the house at the end of a long, unlighted driveway. We were ushered in through a door at the side of the building straight into some sort of rumpus room thick with the scent of urine and cluttered with dogs. This room operated as the infirmary/boarding kennel/family room, where old dogs spent their declining years and boarding dogs strained at leashes tied to doorknobs. It was outfitted with two Lazi-boys, a television set, and a rudimentary kitchenette.



I guess I was expecting something like a tour of a wine cellar, so I knew immediately that this visit was a mistake. As the dogs came to greet us in good poodle fashion I could feel Hobbs pull herself in tight, hoping to avoid contact with the moth-eaten reception line. One old girl had mucky, bug-eyes and a tongue stuck permanently out of the side of her mouth. All the dogs were geriatric; faded, matted and ungroomed, skittering across the floor on long horny toenails. Except for a chestnut coloured dog who appeared young and handsome. He rolled up, staring at us with eyes as white as marble, the victim of a tragic, genetic disease particular to poodles, rendering the afflicted stone blind by the age of 3. We were surely in the land of the damned.



I couldn't help Hobbs. I know she is fastidious and this scene was the opposite of that. I was obliged to proceed with the basic requirements of a visit, asking questions and making positive sounds at the story of the breeding program. I remember a nursing dam was brought in from the kennel for my inspection; named 'Tia Maria. I imagine this was in reference to her liqueur-coloured coat. I was offered a place on the "waiting list" for one of her pups; sired by Jazzy Jake. I expressed appreciation for this privilege and used the transaction to move Hobbs toward the door. With promises of follow-up we slipped out of the house, ran to her Probe, and locked ourselves in. I loved the smell of vinyl we found there. We were saved.