

## KISS OF THE ART GODS

A Memoir by Dan Corbin

Review by Patrick Newman

The book is wonderful.

I think of Dan Corbin as the kind of artist who fires-up a cutting torch in a damp, dilapidated cinder block hovel-- and starts making things. I think of him that way because that's what he was doing when I first met him. He struck me as an old-school farmer who knew how to fix the axle on a John Deere 620. It was in his presence.

I met Dan in the gutted boiler room of an abandoned laundry. That's where he set-up shop in downtown Chico, in the late 1980s. During that first encounter, Dan told the early life story of establishing a peach orchard with his father. Working season after season and year after year. And how, just when all the labor was about to payoff, everything went to hell. Whether it was flood, frost, fire or an asteroid didn't matter much. Dan lost his taste for farming, then and there.

The next thing I remember was Dan's story of moving a load of ceramic art to market in an old bread truck. As I recall it was a ton of work, representing a large chunk of yearly output. Dan was on his way to a show in San Francisco-- or maybe Berkeley. After some kind of accident, the load was reduced to rubble. This led to a discussion of media. Dan made a case for working with less fragile things. Things that could stand-up to a hammer or a bit of bouncing around in the back of a truck.

So, it was natural that Dan would find his way to the kind of art he does so well. It's the art of broken things, put back together. And, if they can't be broken in the first place, why mess with them? It's in the breaking that lessons are learned. Standing in the wrecked peach orchard, asking, "Where do I go from here? How do I take this and beat it into a new thing--maybe something beautiful. Or something that speaks a language all its own.

I think Corbin's power is in conjuring life from broken things. That pocket full of experiences and discards that lesser spirits cast aside. It's a kind of scrappy heroism, with a long American tradition--Huck Finn comes to mind.

I hope there are more Dan Corbins being made, somewhere in America. My fear is that they are not. So, if you should happen to encounter a young man collecting rusty nails, old perfume bottles, and chunks of broken glass, please salute him. He's the next Dan Corbin.

Patrick Newman: Writer, social advocate.