

## **"The Uninviting" Invites the FBI to Artists' Home**

*by Aron Conaway*

The FBI is finally on our trail and I can't believe it took this long. On one hand, Hallie and I are excited about our ability to stir things up a bit. On the other hand, we're a little bit freaked out.

Early Thursday afternoon (6/7/07), after stopping at Chuck Rubin's and buying a couple of flash diffusers for a wedding we are shooting this weekend, I was at home testing batteries to find a good lot for our flash. There was a knock at the door and without much more than a glance out the front window and seeing a huge white pick up truck parked the wrong way behind my car, I opened the door to two rather large men. I asked, "What's up?" and the guy on the right says, "I am agent so-and-so with the FBI and this is so-and-so from the Sheriff's Department."

I stand there, staring back with a t-shirt that has an upside down Eagle printed on it, 8 AA batteries in hand, and a battery tester with red and black electrode wires hanging down. I'm wondering what the hell I did exactly to deserve this kind of attention, and then defaulted to a level-headed preparedness to be taken away.

So the guy who did all the talking asks me, "Are you Aron Roberts... (flips page)... errr, I mean Aron Conaway?"

"Yup."

"Your vehicle was identified at such-and-such chemical company for being on the property photographing the premises."

"Oh yeah, my wife and I were down there the other day taking pictures for a photography project." Thinking about all the photo equipment that we have in our living room, the flashes, cameras, and tripods I had just laid out in the kitchen, I felt that the quickest way to clear the confusion was to invite them in, show them all the gear, and bring out the photographs.

"Do you want to see the photographs?"

"Yeah, that'd be great," they answered. We headed in and squeezed by several bikes in the foyer. In the living room, I pointed out the already set up professional soft box lighting kit that we are borrowing, the green screen tacked to the wall that we have been shooting on, and the mess of gear in the kitchen.

I told them to wait a minute while I went to the bedroom to get my computer that the photos were stored on after we scanned the negatives. Needless to say, I was uncomfortable in leaving the room. I figured their business was to snoop or plant a surveillance device, but I didn't really have an option except to ask them to follow me or step outside for a moment. I decided that wouldn't look so good, so I went and got the computer.

When I came back into the kitchen to set up the computer on the kitchen counter, the agent prodded me for details about our doings in the west end of Louisville. Right off I think they recognized the reality of the situation and our harmless intentions. He filled out a few lines for his report as we waited for the files to open, which I explained were about 100 megabytes and would take a minute to load.

Standing and waiting was awkward and painful, so to kill the silence I told them about a public service announcement we heard on the radio a few months ago when we were in the suburbs shooting photos and video of the suburban landscape. It stated monotonously, "The Department of Homeland Security in Kentucky urges you to keep a lookout for suspicious individuals who are photographing and videotaping." As artists, we found it to be a pretty stupid and threatening message, but I didn't say that to the agent and the sheriff.

Anyway, the pictures of the chemical plant and other uninviting landscapes finally opened. I also pulled up several portraits we had shot over the last couple of weeks of our models performing innocent activities such as eating ice cream, blowing up balloons, and standing in a giraffe costume punching a pink balloon. I hoped this would offset any threatening interpretations.

Right off I explained the concept of our series "The Uninviting" and they immediately agreed that these places were in fact very uninviting. Upon seeing the assortment of silly portraits of our friends, and a series of carefully composed medium format landscapes, the authorities seemed satisfied and headed out the door. I chickened out on photographing them or even asking their names, which I regretted immediately after they left.

I immediately called Hallie at work to tell her what just transpired in our house. We're worried that we're going to have trouble flying to San Francisco in July. I don't really know what the likelihood is that this incident would place us on a watch or no fly list, but we'll anticipate needing to be at the airports more than a little bit early. Now I feel paranoid about being watched. Ultimately, I guess life is too short to be any more paranoid than I already am about the government.

This is the second incident in two months where our art or art-making has made a bit of a stir. Our mural at the 'Pulp Funktion' Tarantino party at Glassworks was censored because on April 19th (two days after we painted two body outlines in pools of blood, and an image of Tarantino with a gun up to his head painted), that insane guy shot up Virginia Tech. By request, Glassworks had the curator cover the windows and lock the doors, leaving interested parties to request permission for admittance into the gallery. Life is just strange like that.

If we keep at it, we might just disappear!

You can see images of our mural "Oh, I'm sorry. Did I break your concentration?" at Glassworks by visiting [http://hallieandaron.com/pulp\\_funktion/](http://hallieandaron.com/pulp_funktion/)