



EIGHT DAYS What a colossal glorious waste of time I call it freedom Chicago to Los Angeles the Great Diagonal Way the Mother Road Main Street of America – Route 66 – for decades the highway that seemed only to go in one direction proud and emblematic of America on the move striding boldly to the future now fading remnants a metaphor for a moment of crisis if ever there was one **we rode around with my brother who is like a brother he builds submarines and being out on our bikes tracking down route 66 was one of the greatest things I've ever experienced I've always wanted to do this but in our teens we had no money and in our forties we had no time** now abandoned and in parts derelict and forgotten no longer given even the dignity of being recorded on printed maps too damn slow and meandering the script rewritten by infrastructure of greater efficiency that bypassed and in many cases doomed the hard scrabble two bit towns along the historical way – Route 66 – officially erased from the United States Highway System in 1985 still lives in the cultural imagination **you know parts of it have been abandoned you're just riding along and it ends in a farmers field we just went with it we had a map printed on paper we didn't fucking twitter and we didn't GPS bitch what we did have is a lot of cowboy steaks and beer thats what we ate and coffee coffee is a vegetable it's bean juice** James Lahey and his brother Patrick set off down this still potent byway of restless youth searching for meaning a painter and a submarine builder driving into the archeology of American signs following the path of freedom the trail of radical independence of movement and thought along the way tasting the sticky residue of speed and power hearing distant echoes of beat poets and sixties radicals in search of a new spirit finding decay abandonment dead ends and faint traces where nature and commerce are taking back the trail we left off James inspired by the persistence and stubborn resolve that keep people still clinging to this heroic pathway finally realizing that the profound beauty of the way to the beauty is by far the most beautiful beauty of all **all I have ever wanted to do was make pictures whatever it takes as long as I could I make pictures for a living not some fucking rusty trombone art world plywood box installation with some screaming stonethrower sitting inside don't get me wrong I got nothing against the stone-throwers I just want to make pictures** searching and never finding

EIGHT DAYS is a project that weaves complex strands of American culture Canadian art and the struggles of an artist with his life and work evidence here of a cri de coeur – a strike for freedom – still with a deep connection and respect for his elders unconsciously linking to the tradition of Group of Seven backpackers as they headed north in this case south to find the majesty they saw in the land **it's a good thing that very few so called important things happen to me because that kind of shit drives me nuts if I have a meeting on a Friday it will ruin my entire week remind me never to do public work** now we hear the distant voice of Ed Ruscha in the embrace of the banal utilitarian signs left by the side of the road the flotsam of Andy Warhol and jetsam of Robert Rauschenberg in the complex image layering and detritus of the roadside garbage culture of the vast American middle connected to the Canadian classic “Going Down the Road” and the road movie tradition EIGHT DAYS in search of the American imaginary **Dad used to call that kind of guy ten pounds of horse shit in a five pound bag back then they didn't say shit they said horseshit I'm afraid of what I've said** EIGHT DAYS connects the diverse practices and passions of James Lahey's decades of practice in photography in full flowing dialogue with his unique mastery of painting for the first time we are privileged to see the work expressed in both picture and painting now combined with his abiding love of speed on two wheels **there is nothing – nothing – like the experience of the road on my motorcycle** – the central visual motif of the work not surprising since the life and work of James Lahey has been a road trip of the imagination keep moving not knowing and here connecting the dots beyond these beauties and bounty the hauntingly evocative postcards of poet Lynn Crosbie **her work is so goddamn beautiful so sorrowful intense a blessing if you go only with what the market wants you get OK and down the road you don't want to be looking at OK we went into a bar in Texas and this guy says hey you're from Canada didn't your Prime Minister strangle that guy that's the whole fucking point Jack wasting time having fucking time of your own to waste** he often travels alone James is an artist.

— BRUCE MAU Chicago 2011



THIS MEANS YOU

The following is a collection of postcards, mailed in the early 21st century (Sender and recipient's names withheld.) The images vary but the series is uniformly black and white. The collection is bound with packing string, and was discovered in a flat, pine box. On the box is a very thin, lettered wooden square painted with a skull and crossbones. The paint is faded, as is the text of these cards, but still legible.

— LYNN CROSBIE

Dear _____,

The yellow thorax of an insect you cannot otherwise describe,
or me, engaging its clutch and speeding away.

In the eclipse mirror: dirt packed skulls, glinting; a sunflower
being blown—by the exhaust—into bits. The legend MOTOR
CYCLE BEAUTIFUL, on a billboard in the pink and orange
of an apron my mother once wore.

And she hands me her heart on a saucer, sprigged with parsley.
It is served rare, the way I like it, you.

All is still and dry, / Placid, / I expect with my art—

I read this line at the Hotel Stryker, took a shower and blotted my feet
with the single towel, lay undressed between the hard white sheet and
the floral pillowcase, with my book and a bottle of Pabst Blue Bird.

the world / Browning, or had Andrea del Sarto say. This is a poem
about the beauty of objects, not their actual utility.

Marcel, the portable man, the French look in his eyes, the
knob fell off and said: At last, I am a portable man.

The fields are filled with noise, the sun is low, the
sun starts to rumble. A hand was also raised, the
hand was also raised.

Three cups of high octane coffee at the Steak and Shake

IL (Budweiser and Jack back at Weezy's where Mr. Tormé and I play mumblepeg until he slices a finger half off,) now MO. Ice Haunting Lebanon, I wanted to write, before my thoughts spread into the grain of the wood hoisting the 66 sign and its 7 bullet holes; into the low backs of smooth green hills and the spikes of cracked pavement; the jagged road itself.

Thank you for the CD you made me with the Cramps and Louis Prima and the Legendary Tigerman.

It works as a soundtrack sometimes: Won't you get hip to this timely tip? I asked the filler at Standard Oil Company who squinted just a little too long, and spit.

The E in SERVICE is a flaming torch.

I bet that keeps you warm, I said and split. I hope this keeps you warm: if you fold it eight times, it makes an abbreviated pillow.

All along the road are stones called ghosts that are fractals, reduplicating the strange shape of this ride.

I will think of you sleeping when I sleep tonight, making a soft arc in the pattern.





We ride right through Kansas. I want to stop at the Eisler Brothers for a chocolate Yoo-Hoo, do you remember that you asked me if I would?

It was blazing hot and my hands can hardly hold this pen from Deane Furnas's House of Pies. He is that wrestler I told you about who can deadlift 821 pounds.

Willie Stradlin's coming to the Casino in the fall, Lotte said. He does "Theme from the Dukes of Hazzard," she told me as the phone rang again and I knew it was you, but I just let it vibrate against me as she raked my back with her long nails.

Then I deadlifted her sweet ass and thought about murder and the sound of the wind in the birch and the buckeye trees.

Dead bodies, or sleeping bodies, jackknifed together—fugitives.

Gary, the night manager, left me a pamphlet about Jesus and chaos theory, called "One of These Days He's Going To Get Himself Organazized [sic]."

The pamphlet explains the calm at the centre of the chaos and vice versa.

The riot of necks and split lips and cherry lipstick; the sheer slide of her laddered stockings, the loose moonstone buttons of her crisp white shirtdress.

What if I told you that —



Plecotus rafinesquii, or Trick.

The big-eared bat that was startled from its hollow straight into the crook of my arm, where it shrilled, then squeaked and fell asleep.

I put Trick in the saddle-bag on a piece of fleece and accelerate with outlaws on my tail, waving pistols and driving their horses' flanks with silver spurs.

As the insects make sad abstractions on my visor, I shift gears and swerve right into Texola.

There is still a church and a bar in this ghost town by the 100th meridian. I went to both.

I rode to motels that would shimmer then disappear: the Clock Inn and the Big 8; to a UFO Parking Area. I swam in liver-shaped pools filled with mermaids.

I fed Trick with an eye-dropper, and wandered through spaces so wide, I never could see where they started or stopped.

Arcadia—You will live on nectar and ambrosia, my friend, is what I told Trick as I picked him up to lay him in the V of a netted olive tree.

He watched a documentary about Chet Baker with me on the motel TV the night before, and ate a whole wing off a songbird that a cat roused and killed that morning.

Look, it's like paradise, I said and Trick looked at me and seemed to say, I mean that I heard him say, Don't be sad.

It's just my life, he said, and died.

The peach trees were extravagant in their sorrowing, bending and extending their branches to me and all though Oklahoma I am collecting twigs and moss for a grave that rests, for now, on the round center of the teardrop seat.







Do you remember what it was like, how big everything was?

The paintings and photographs, the machinery, the equipment—

It feels like that, as I tear past vast fields and low skies. I feel wound up and let go; I feel like a bird just nicked by a spray of buckshot as I enter Cowboy Country and the rain makes a lasso and pulls me into the Last Chance Saloon.

The ghost in the booth by the rear exit is talking about painted ladies and Apaches and loading his single-action revolver as I write you this.

I'm just doin' this to put mah keeds through the state college, she says, rolling her eyes as an old-timey saloon keeper with shirt-garters starts ringing a bell and yelling Howdy!

Handsome, she adds, adjusting her powdered breasts and leaning down to holla' Peewee to

I left her twenty bucks.

Lockit, she just about run out the door when she seen that, the ghost said. He is the size of a snare maker, did I tell you and has to yell so I can hear him.



Rattlesnakes Exit Now—Three days in, or is it four. When I see something you might like, I close my eyes and hear the image ping then fill your eyes.

A. One hundred variations of the sky, viewed as a wave or selection of scarves. God's Eyes, hung from hooks; the hem of a blue velvet gown, a black leather muzzle, a steel blue trap.

B. Birds, some distraught; others singing work songs and gliding as smoothly as a brush-stroke, black Vs on porous blue paper.

C. The flat land, not the Badlands, yet there is something just beyond the horizon where the sky and earth meet in a soft crash like falling backwards onto a bed; like a knife smoothly slicing open one wrists, two wrists and the blood is blue just before it is blandished by oxygen.

On a long run, I see you drift past me; I see the tender white aperture at the base of your throat, a blue vein beating there and this is where I will cut you if you need to breathe; and this is where my mouth has been.

I think of where my mouth has been and my eyes close long enough that I collide with a dead armadillo and stop, long enough to unholster my 38.0 and blast the 66 sign until I have emptied the chamber.

I know how this sounds. The farther away I get, the more uncomfortable I am with the thought of your beauty.



66R50/2 KANSAS (FROM EIGHT DAYS), 2011
Mixed media on canvas (oil, alkyd, ink transfer, & conte), 48" x 36", 110223-06



BLUE RIDER, INTERSTATE, NEW MEXICO (NAVIGATING MAN FROM EIGHT DAYS), 2010
Mixed media on canvas (oil, alkyd, ink transfer, & conte), 84" x 66", 101215-03