

Every picture tells a story, for Steve Stoppert. A regular guy, funny and irreverent, in the East Village, the walls of his home are stacked, floor to ceiling, with paintings and drawings by all the members of the Painting in New York group, and fellow travelers. Overflow lines the corners, fills the spaces under the beds, next to sofas.

He tells me I should write about art for the average fan, and so I will.

A tour begins with a bread-making lesson. Three cups of white flour, a half-cup of wheat, plus some seven-grain mix, although Tyler wants more. Time is told through their—and our—common stories. Working in construction together, then his hardware store. A trip to the Met, which made his heart start beating. Before or after the towers went down? Before or after the break-up? And then, a painting, made by Chris, about Steve's turmoil. He bought it, instead of buying that flea-market nothing. The beginning of a collecting impulse, which now won't stop. He's in too far, they all are. Time is told as we add the salt, yeast, water – cold. He buys their work because it's easy, they are there, and because, by now, he loves them. Knows about the divorce, the heartbreaks, their families, and the great love affairs. Knows the way the faces change, the paintings change. Knows now how to look at painting, what makes it work. Adding vinegar, beer, and stirring. Covering the bowl. Bread rising. Twelve hours. He looks while he sits on the couch and smokes; it's time to sit still. He's trying it; a drawing group – they meet in his house. He doesn't care what anyone thinks, here's \$200, make me a painting, here's a pizza stone, make me a painting, you're working too hard, make it in half an hour... It works. Move the dough to the counter, knead it exactly fifteen times. They're out working on the street because of him, because he loves Shepard Fairey, Jim Joe. Heat the cast-iron pan. Eating bread, drinking tea, looking, and laughing, and drawing.

-- Jennifer Samet