

Warehouse Eulogy

ON APRIL first, I was driving down to **Splinter Brothers and Sisters Warehouse** to pay my last respects to the end of an era. In a few days this oldest adobe structure of its size in the Old Pueblo, for 14 years a seminal space for free-thinking artists and craftspersons, would go back to being an abandoned, track-side facade. Dylan gave me some comfort as I sang over and over, "She's an artist, she don't look back," but not enough to keep me from feeling a great emptiness inside when I turned from Main on to Second Street and suddenly faced a blank wall.

Gone the pink lizards and the funky freedom train with its gleeful passengers that had chugged along this 18"-thick adobe wall since 1976—the same year I rode back into Tucson. **Bill Drummond's** mural was one of the "signs of life" that made me want to resettle here. (Bill sketched and the Warehouse community filled it in.) As I parked my car I found myself longing for early Grateful Dead, Casey Jones, Peace train, "The Little Engine That Could."

A very real and piercing Southern Pacific freight roared behind the Warehouse as I entered the inner yard of the complex. Most everybody was moved out. Stands of Johnson grass rattled against the quonset hut, and I recalled my introduction to this place.

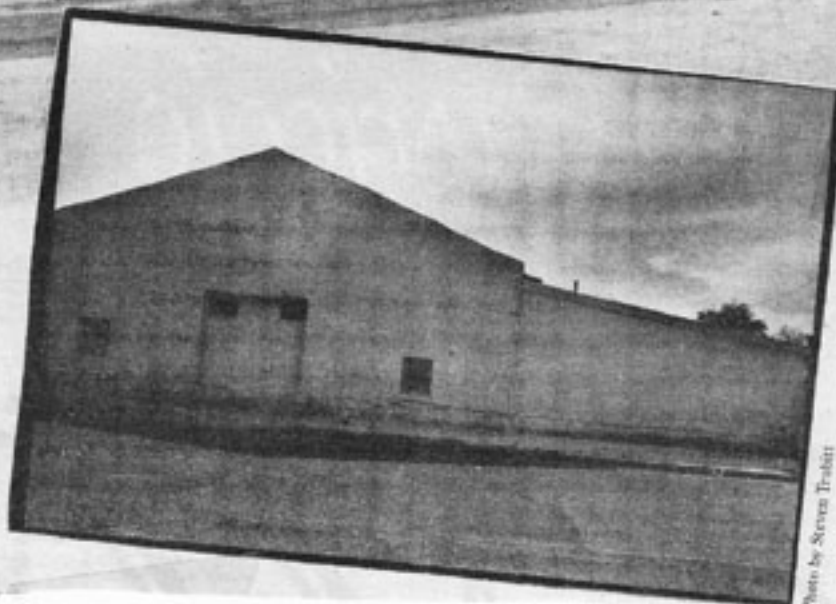
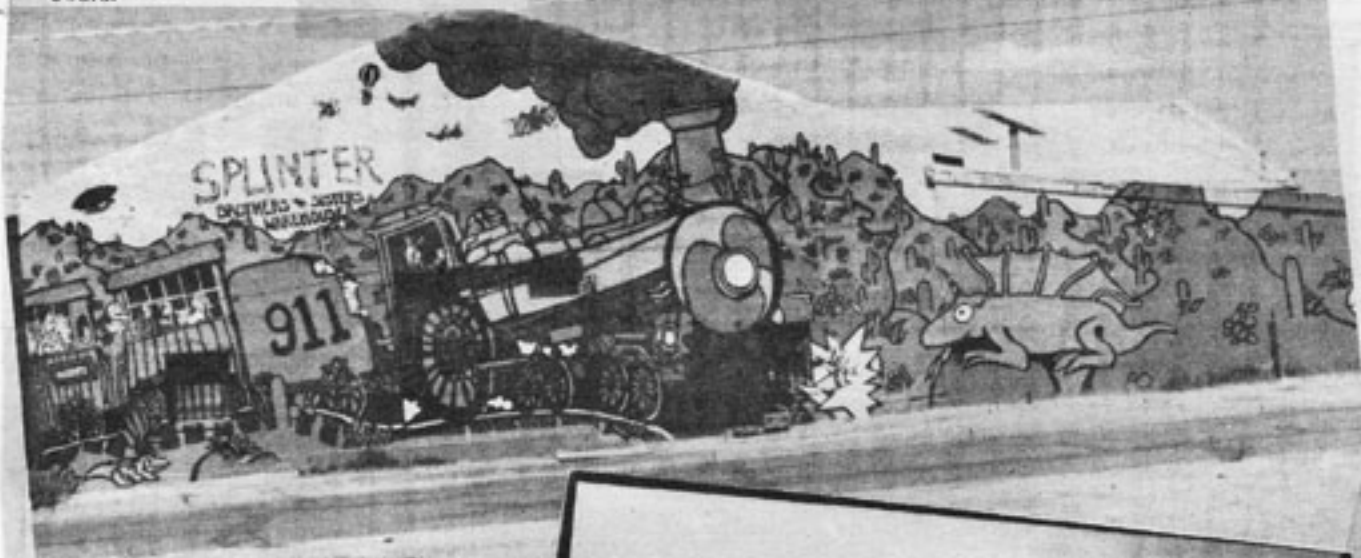
It was a summer afternoon in '76 at an all-day festival, the inner yard filled with visitors, residents, and lots of free-running kids and dogs. Every trailer and tree was popping with life. The big kiln (built in '72) was cooling down—probably Stefan and Lavinia had been firing up the day before. We wandered into the workshop space—the original heart and soul of this loose-knit collective. It was like a gallery in the rough. As no one was working, we snuck in among the creations.

Saul's "Lieberfacts" leaped and frolicked off the walls, making palpable mischief; aromas from hand-hewn, hand-caressed cabinets, boxes, tables and chests sweetened the air as they waited for their creators to return. The Warehouse has always been dense with woodworkers—**Steve Sloan, Steve Savage, Bob Lowe, David Nelson, John Sartin, Gary Price, Ken Cyboron, Ron Salzer.**

These sweet images still coaxing in back in time, I walked across the yard to meet with Ken, who was fixing to move his trailer ("Built it from stuff in the yard") and get his space cleaned up. We settled down under a spidery mesquite with a staircase for a trunk. "A lady dancer lived up there for a while," he shouted (another pile-up of freights coupled and clanged behind us). "Did her meditations up on the top branch. It's an oasis here."

As we talked my eye roved sentimentally. Everywhere there were bits of collages (zany recycling) uniting art and life. I flashed on a Halloween dance (last fall they had their 14th Annual), where a menage a trois, or should I say, mange a trois, came as a knife, fork and spoon. At climactic points in the music they would lay down and make a place setting!

John took a break from cleaning his area to join in the reminiscing. "Yeah, something really special happened here. Nowadays people are scared to step out and be part of something bigger than themselves," John said. "Everybody's so scared of dying they're afraid to live."



BEFORE & AFTER: The vibrant mural by Bill Drummond is no more. Denizens of the Splinter Bros. and Sisters Warehouse whitewashed the mural (inset) as one of their final acts before leaving the warehouse. The larger photo shows the mural soon after it was painted in 1972.

Photo by Steven Truhitt