

Filmmaker's Statement  
*My Autonomous Neighbor*

Shortly after I began filming Tate, a simple thought popped into my head: can I make a collage film about a collage artist? But first, allow me to rewind . . .

I met Tate through mutual friends in the Catskills, where my wife and I have had a home for more than 20 years. We would intersect at art openings, street fairs and other community events. I knew Tate was an artist and that he had retired from the military, but not much more.

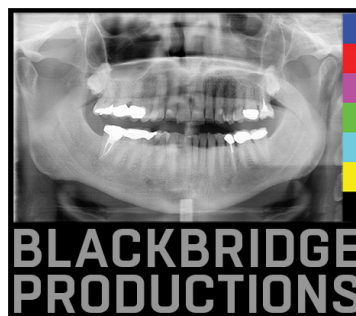
One hot summer afternoon about 3 years ago, I bumped into Tate on the street in town. He was cradling about a dozen weather beaten toys he had just picked up at a yard sale. As he was explaining the peculiar significance of each of his new acquisitions, he became increasingly excited. Suddenly, in my mind's eye, I saw reindeer, and Santa . . . it was Christmas in July! I asked Santa - I mean Tate - if any one had ever made a movie about him. He said no, and I said, "I'll call you tomorrow." It was a chance encounter that sparked my interest and initiated our cinematic adventure. Tate would say it was an alignment of the planets.

Tate lives in a former boarding house he calls the FAB Museum of UnNatural History. He refers to his home as an archaeological dig. It's jam packed with artifacts that he's collected over the years that include books, knick-knacks, toys, artwork, cards, volumes of clip-art, VHS tapes, furniture, tools, and much more. The stuff in his home, or museum, is the source material for his artwork. That is why I consider Tate first and foremost a collage artist. He uses found objects combined with his own automatic drawings and clip art to create playful inventions. The art of collage is about juxtaposing disparate elements that can sometimes clash and generate explosive discoveries. At other times, the elements intersect to create an organic mutation that resonates with mystery. For decades, Tate has been shifting through his homegrown archaeological dig, discovering collages.

But how do you make a collage film about a collage artist? The concept was appealing, even alchemical, but it required a lot of trial, and of course error. Nonetheless, everything about Tate's DNA encouraged me to experiment, and he would often reinforce my creative process by saying things like, "Linearity is our greatest enemy." Or, "They took the wrong way, which turned out to be the right way." In *My Autonomous Neighbor*, I've superimposed layers of images on top of one another and used abrupt transitions to move from one location to the next. I've fractured the narrative and cut up scenes so they appear in different parts of the film. I've even edited one scene backwards, which no one seems to notice!

My film is about Tate and his everyday life but also about the creative spirit. Toward the end of the film Tate says, "If we knew everything had meaning, that would kind of take the fun out of it. You have to create meaning. You have to fight for it." He's right, it takes bravado and maybe that's the secret to being a good collage artist: take nothing for granted and be willing to morph reality into something that is your own; feel free to tell the story backwards if it seems appropriate. But the most important goal is to inspire people to look at the ordinary and use their eyes to see the magic.

- Michel Negroponte



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