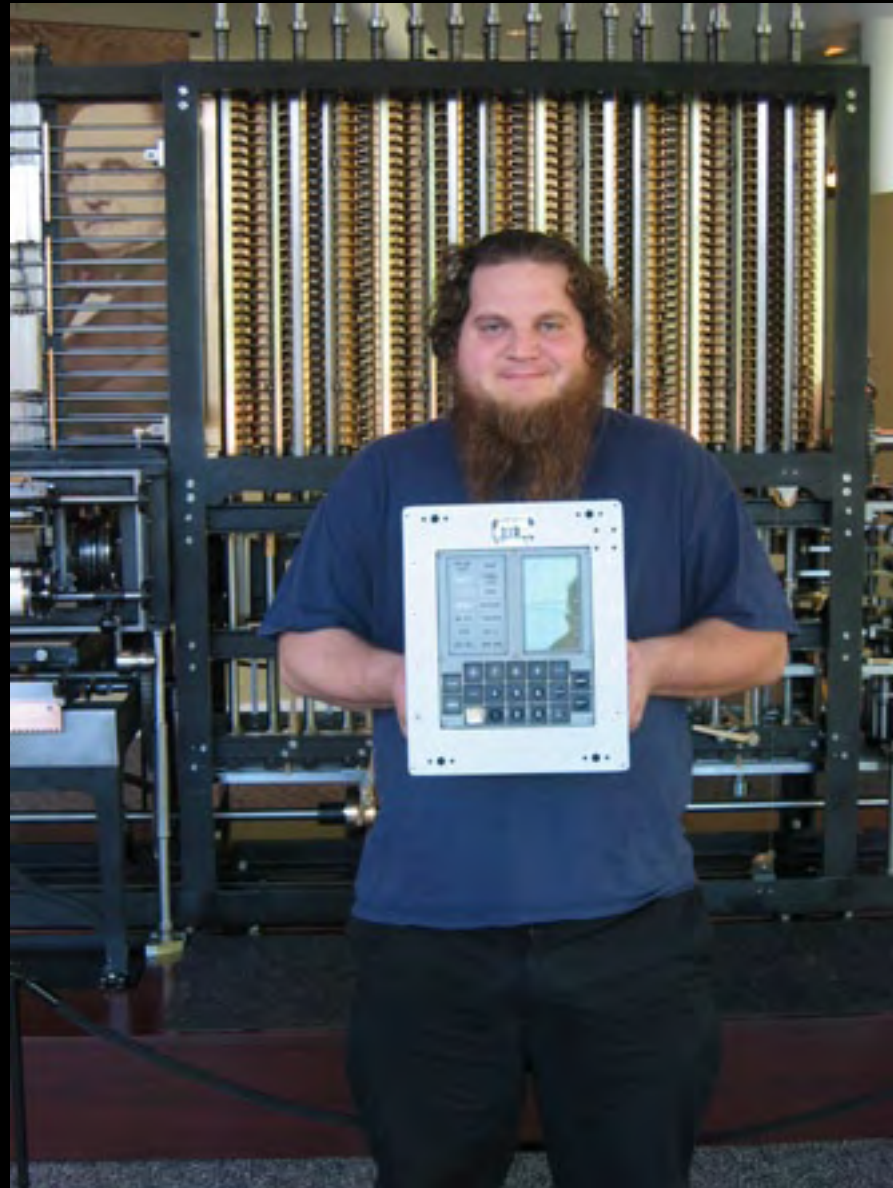


# THE DRINK TANK ISSUE 172



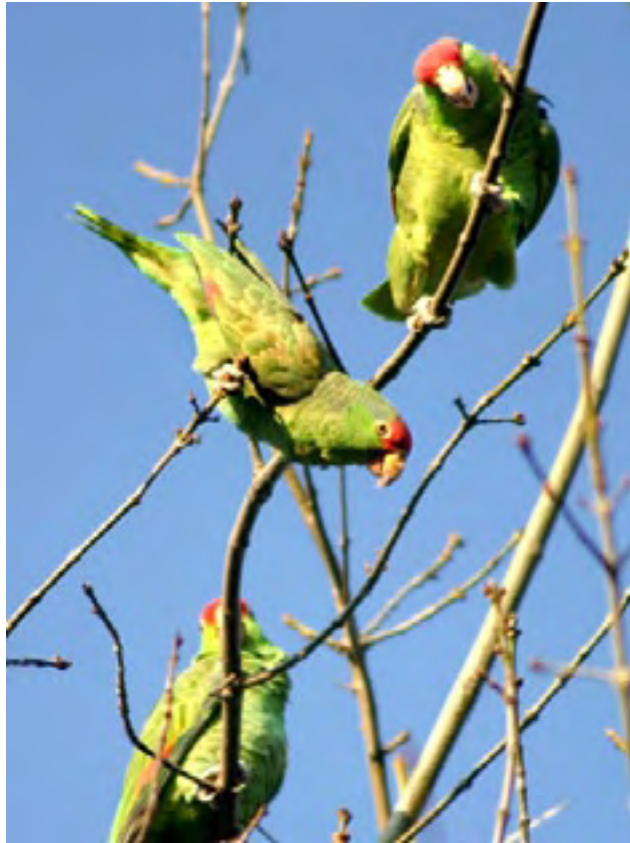
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Cover Photo of Me, The Apollo Guidance Computer (the one that got us to the Moon!) and the Babbage Engine taken by Mike Smithwick!

I was driving back from watching Evelyn and ended up on Matilda, the street that I live off of. There are a bunch of trees of all sorts lining the street and in the median as well. There are a ton of really big eucalyptus trees where the street splits off the other street that leads to Trader Joe's. At that location I'd once seen two Mitred-headed conures flying. Those are wild parrots that've taken root in places like San Francisco and Chicago. There was a documentary about the flock (numbering somewhere in the 70s) that lives in San Francisco. I was driving with the windows open (since it was boiling hot and I've no air-conditioning) and I heard very parrot-like squawking.

And like that, I went across two lanes, pulled into the Orchard Supply Hardware parking lot, turned off the car and left the keys in the ignition while I walked back towards the area where I heard it. I walked out and found a triangulation of trees. Two were high and obviously old eucalyptus trees. The other was an old oak tree across the street. I put myself between the two eucs and looked up.

There they were: Mitred-headed Conures. They were beautiful. There were four or five of them in the big tree



in the median. They were bunched around a crow and were wildly calling. I've seen them briefly once in Sunnyvale, but this was awesome. They kept changing branches and calling, trying to scare off the crow. They managed to, and one of the Conures followed, nipping at the much larger crow. They went to one of the other trees and there was screeching and the Conure flew out of the tree, some of its tail feathers seeming very askew, as if they had taken a slight beating.

In the tree, more came out of the other trees and gathered in the Euc.

There was a big flock, maybe 15 or 20 of them. They were calling, trying to scare another crow from the tree. They were wild, flying from branch to branch, calling and jumping and bobbing heads. They were so animated, like the Tiki Room at Disneyland only magical. In the middle of Suburbia, where you expect nothing but the same as every other day, these birds show up and are dealing with crows, those damned birds that we see everywhere, and the Conures, birds that don't belong but seem to love the world they've found, are making it all work. It's a wonderful thing and I can't wait to get back there with a camera with a good zoom to try and capture a few photos of those strange foreigners.

There's a certain problem too. The wildness of the birds and keeping them that way. There are people who want them eliminated because they are a non-native species. I understand that desire, I really do, but I think once an animal is seriously rooted in a place it should be allowed to live. That's just me. There are those that want to feed them and make them tourist attractions. That's not happening here in Sunnyvale, but it was such a big deal in San Francisco that they passed an ordinance. There's also a group that sees them as simply a part of the background.

Me? I just wanna see them. I wanna know that they're there for all



to enjoy. I'm not going to feed them, I'm not going to try and catch them, I just wanna watch them work with the environment they've ended up in ...and hopefully I can do that for a long time.

Also on Wednesday, I watched a documentary from Netflix called Who The !@#\$\$% is Jackson Pollock?. It was a good little story that hit me hard and made me think. The story is of a Miss Horton who bought a strange painting at a Thrift Shop and it turns out that it might be a Jackson Pollock. Well, on the basis of forensic evidence it IS a Jackson Pollock, but the Art World (here represented by the most arrogant and pompous curator I've ever met, and I've worked with a couple!) refuses to recognise it as such.

And I think they're wrong.

Jackson Pollock is my second favorite American artist of all-time (my first being Paul Cadmus) and is one of the artists who I've spent the most time with. Well, not with the artist, but their works. When I worked at the National Museum of American Art, I got to see a Pollock being readied to be displayed. It was amazing to get to see the back side of the painting. If you've never seen the reverse of a masterpiece, you're missing out. I really wish more museums would do behind-the-scenes tours and show folks that stuff. It really makes you realise that all this stuff is real work. There are marks, fingerprints, smears, tape, scratches, all

of it that doesn't make the surface. You can't really understand the work that goes into a painting until you really understand the way a painting is put together, stretched, tapped.

I've seen paintings in various states, including a few pieces from the Old Masters, but mostly I've seen all the American stuff from the 20th Century at any museum I've spent a lot of time at.

OK, so back to Pollock. I've seen one Pollock from behind and it was mussed up, paint all over the back too. It was marvelous.

The film deals with Miss Horton's trying to get the art establishment to recognise it as a real Pollock. The view of the painting shows a work that certainly carries a lot of marks of Pollock, the drip-and-run technique, the obvious splatters that were the hallmark of



Jackson Pollock.

But it wasn't quite right. It was all the way to the edge, which a lot of Pollock's work tends to be, but he usually slowed towards the edges, at least of the canvases that weren't trimmed down. This one had some strange clumping, it was tighter than most Pollocks, more compact. It wasn't a good Pollock, if you're the type that believes that's possible.

And that's why I came away with the idea that it was the real thing and why it's more important than almost any other Pollock in the world with the exception of Autumn Rhythm, Number 5, and Blue Posts. It's a bad Pollock!

You see, Jackson Pollock often

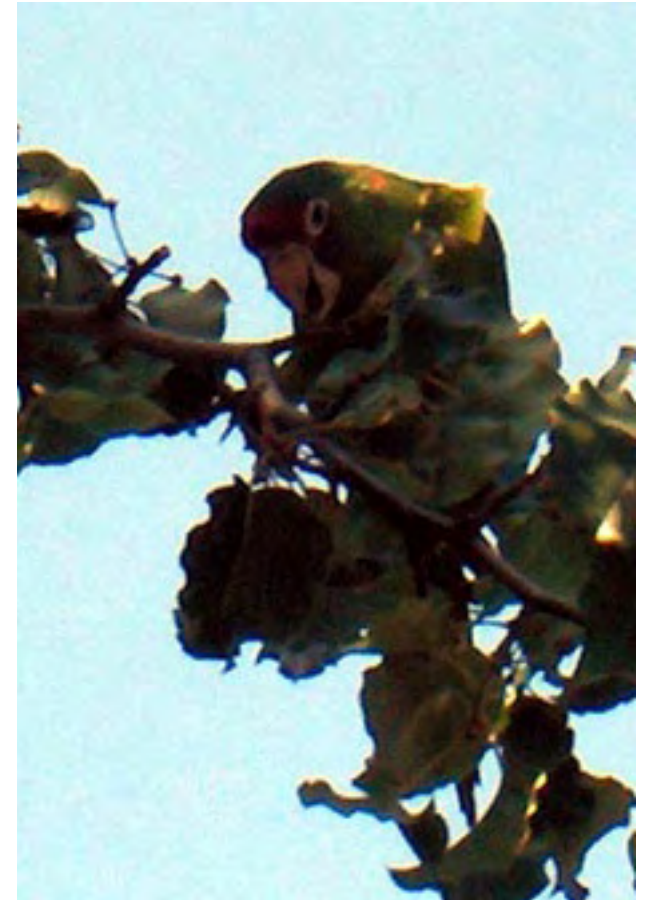
tossed his paintings into the dump if he wasn't happy with them. A couple of these have turned up over the years, only one of which was unknown prior to its discovery. A few folks caught on to the fact that Pollock did that and folks scavenged the ones they could find (and the story goes that the MOMA did a visit or two themselves!) The one that Horton has might be one of those, but it's not too likely. More likely it's a part of a bigger painting that he cut down for some reason and then re-stretched to try and resell that piece. The colours are quite similar to a few different ones, including the untitled one in the collection of the MFA in Boston that I spent a lot of time with while studying art with Joan Brigham at Emerson. It's also very similar to Number 5 in color. Now I believe that the creation of Number 5 is covered on film, so it's not a part of that one, and the one at the MFA is more than 8 feet long already. That would put the date somewhere around 1948 or 49, which is the peak period and the most prized period for Pollock.

So, let's say that Pollock cut up some larger painting and couldn't sell the smaller piece. It's been restretched, so it's a sample of a larger work and could easily have been of a section that seemed less crowded until it was cut-down. He tosses it, someone gets it, sells it a few times, maybe passes away and the beneficiaries have no idea

what it is and give it to a junk dealer who sells it to a Thrift Store.

And if it's a bad Pollock, we have an idea of what Pollock wasn't trying to do. We look at his pieces and get the idea of chaos, spontaneity and dismissal of style, but if this was a bad Pollock, one he let go, then we know what his eyes weren't looking for. It gives us so much more insight into the brain of Pollock. There are a lot of pieces that critics have dismissed, but one that was dismissed by the artist is really solid.

So I hope that they'll pronounce it a Pollock soon. It's got a fingerprint that matches one from Pollock's home and a painting in the Tate. It's also got paint chips and types that match other ones that Pollock was using. That's enough for any reasonable scientist to accept, but those art-lovers are pretty brutal on the matter of proof. I mean, art forgery is...well...it's an art. There are people who are amazing at it (and they had one of the best art forgers in history interviewed in the film) and this just doesn't have the signs for it. A fingerprint is a convenient plant. If you can get a copy of an artist's print and then come up with a way to transfer it to a painting, you've gone a long way to making it accepted. The one trouble is, and this has happened before, is that even if it's uncharacteristic of a time. Period evidence is the worst reason to discredit a painting, and it's the first.



Remember when I said I saw parrots. Well, I've seen them two more times, and once I had a camera. There were only about 5 or 6 (maybe as many as 8) in the trees of a supermarket parking lot. They didn't make nearly as much racket as the first time I saw them, but they seemed to only be interested in chomping away at pods from the tree.

I promise I did not disturb them, they flew a lot, but I only got fleeting photos of it. I'm no wildlife photographer, but here are some shots.





As you can see, I got a total of one good close-up (though the lighting was crap) and two of the parrots in flight (and the blurry one that closes this issue) but mostly, I just enjoyed watching them. They flew about 10 times, only once with more than two birds. There were two obvious pairings, the one up in the left hand corner and once that was tucked in deal to the tree.



