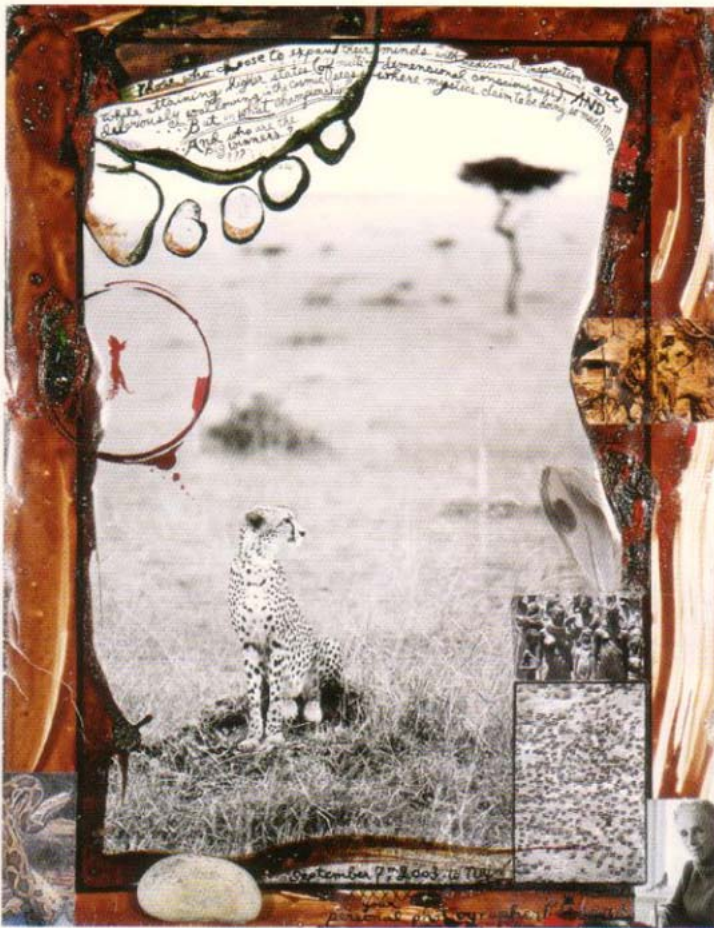




MIX MASTER

TRACE celebrates the work of a true renegade and master. Reproduced for the first time as a group, Peter Beard's collages reflect a unique passion for life. Honoring red-handed decadence in shades of sepia, TRACE takes a look at the soon-to-be-released Taschen book. Dive head-first into Peter's world.



EXCERPTED FROM

OMNIVORE

by OWEN EDWARDS

Looking at [Peter Beard's] work, you can't help but feel that he is a man trying to beat the clock, someone determined to see more, collect more, hunt down more coincidences, create more connections. And as time ticks away with its prim regularity, change devours everything. Beard still goes back to his place in Africa, where local artists he calls the Hog Ranch Art Department paint frames for his pictures with "trillions of dots." But it is a paradise paved over and mostly lost half a century after he sat listening to Karen Blixen tell her stories.

There's a lot of death in Beard's work. Not by chance did he name one of his books *Longing for Darkness*. But as the shadows grow longer, life intensifies, and with it the search for illumination. Beard has had plenty of omens and close calls. His house in Montauk, the Mill, burned down in 1977, the fire consuming 20 years of work. In 1996, an unintended confrontation with an angry elephant came close to killing him. With a cavalier's disdain for lamentation, he has shrugged off such setbacks. A friend who was with him in Manhattan when he picked up the phone and heard that his house was burning recounts that he took in the awful news for a moment, then went back to work. She asked if he wasn't going to go out to Long Island, and he responded, "What's the point?"

For an omnivore, nothing is nothing, least of all catastrophe. There's always a point. Like reminders of the bleak but exquisite fragility of existence, partially burned pages of diaries appear in collages—ashes as art,

destruction as creation. It's hard to discourage an ironist. When the International Center of Photography mounted a major exhibition of Beard's work at the old Audubon House on upper Fifth Avenue in New York, painter and art director Marvin Israel, the show's designer and a fellow dark visionary, arranged to have a print of elephants several stories high wrapped around the building. The day before the opening, a powerful squall blew in off the Hudson River and shredded the dramatic—and expensive—display. I called Beard when I heard about the disaster and he just laughed. "You should have been there. It was so amazing!"

Toward the end of this book there is a photograph of Beard on the shores of Lake Rudolf, clamped in the jaws of a gigantic crocodile. (The creature is dead, of course, though a spasm of rigor mortis almost turned illusion into reality.) Half devoured, Beard scribbles in a notebook, one last postcard from the edge. The photograph is a joking portrait of the artist as a young prankster laughing at fate and asking us to have a laugh at it too. But seen as a metaphor, foreboding trumps fun. Think of the ticking croc that stalked Captain Hook; this is time doing its deadly work, eating us alive. So Beard charges ahead, running for his life, painting, scribbling, turning over his compost, rubbing images and ideas together, watching for smoke, waiting for fire, composing his requiem for all the worlds careening to an end.

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