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LATE CITY FINAL
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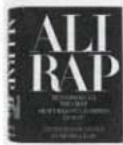
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FEAT OF CLAY

Picturing the life of the Marvelous Mouth

By ISAAC GUZMÁN

ALI RAP
Edited and designed by George Lois
★★★
Taschen, \$24.99



HAD Cassius Clay been born in 1982 instead of 1942, there's no question that as Muhammad Ali he'd have been making music in addition to punching out palookas. "Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee (Your Hands Can't Hit What Your Eyes Don't See)" would have made him our nation's first pugilist, poet and pop star.

The champ, after all, ran his mouth even faster than his fists — a trait that makes "Ali Raps" a joy for a host of audiences, from boxing enthusiasts to poetry lovers. (Joyce Carol Oates and Norman Mailer, we assume, fall into both camps.)

George Lois — who conceived the legendary Esquire cover of Ali as arrow-pierced St. Sebastian (at right) — has taken some of the fighter's most explosive (and amusing) comments, placed them in chronological order, paired them with photographs and graphics, and turned the whole thing into a pictorial autobiography.

He begins with one of young Clay's earliest quips, given to the Louisville

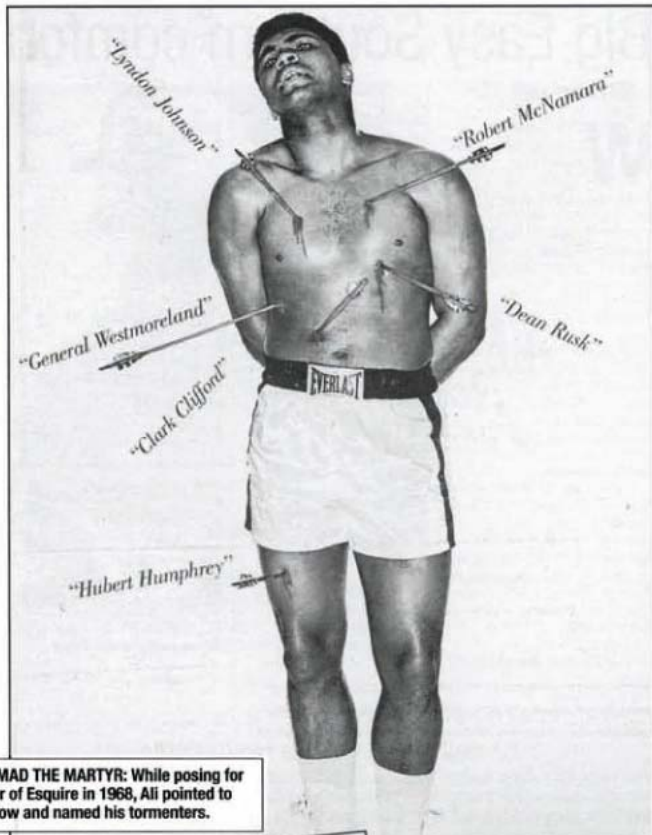
Courier-Journal when he was just 12: "This guy is done. I'll stop him in one." Four years later, he upped the ante with, "I'm young, I'm handsome, I'm fast, I'm pretty and can't possibly be beat. They must fall in the round I call."

It's no wonder sportswriters crowned him with a wreath of nicknames: the Louisville Lip, Mighty Mouth, Gaseous Cassius and Claptrap Clay. Just two, the Marvelous Mouth and Cash the Brash, could even remotely be taken positively.

Later, Ali added social commentary to his patter, saying things that made many hate him, but even more admire him as a pillar of progressive black consciousness.

"What does the white man care if I hate him, anyhow? He's got everything going for him — White Swan soap, Tarzan is white, Jesus is white, White Owl cigars, the White Tornado, Snow White and her seven dwarfs — the White House! Angel food cake is all white. But devil's food cake is black!"

Not every quote delivers a knockout blow, but as a whole it's a powerful collection. There are as many poignant thoughts as humorous ones, each bittersweet in their reminder that Parkinson's has largely silenced one of America's greatest orators.



MUHAMMAD THE MARTYR: While posing for the cover of Esquire in 1968, Ali pointed to each arrow and named his tormentors.



“They’re all afraid of me because I speak the truth that can set men free.”



“I eat fighting and I drink fighting. I fight when I’m in the shower. And I even talk fighting when I’m with women.”



“Don King’s body did four years in prison, but his hair got the chair.”

A PUGILIST’S PASTICHE: Designer George Lois pairs photographs and other images with some of Ali’s best known quotes.

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