

The Story behind the cover of Hospital Clown Newsletter published after 9/11 (2001)

From Shobi Dobi

A Gift from the Universe

On the first day of the Festival (September 10) there was a charity auction. Toward the end of the auction they brought up a print of a painting by Chuck Oberstein. I raised my hand to bid. This is very strange for me as I don't collect clowns, nor do I buy clown paintings. Someone else bid and I again my hand went up. I couldn't even see that it was a painting of a hobo from my seat in the back of the room. Another hand went up and I bid again and purchased the print. I thought this was very strange for me, but I just shrugged my shoulders. "It's for a good cause." So I just took the print back to my hotel and put it on my desk. I kept looking at it wondering why I had bought a print of a painting of a hobo shedding a tear over the stock market crash of the 1920's . . . besides how would it fit in my suitcase.

On September 11, 2001, I had just finished teaching my second class at The Clown International Festival in Bolton, England. Clown Bluey (Blue Brattle) came in at the end of my class about the attack on New York City. I saw the World Trade Centers come crashing down on TV in the window of an appliance store with the horrified citizens of England on the way back to my hotel.

When I got back to my hotel there was the print sitting on the desk. The headlines being about the Stock market crash, After a few minutes of staring at it dumbfounded – a shiver went up my spine. It was exactly how I felt. I realized right then that this was the cover of my next newsletter. The Universe took no time at all in telling me what to do. A gift from the Universe.

The Show Must Go On

There was a great wound inside of me (I had lived for 18 years in lower Manhattan, and had even worked up on the 101st floor of one of the buildings. I also lost a friend on the plane that went down in Pennsylvania. But the show must go on. Clown Bluey came to me saying the Mayor wanted to cancel the festival. I said "The show must go on. We clowns are needed now more than ever." The Mayor quoted the "American clown" to the press.

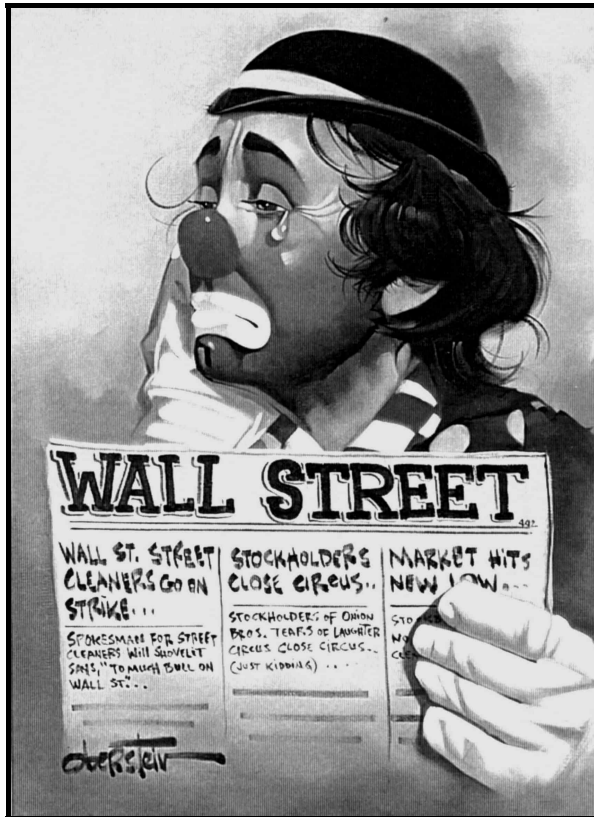
Tragedy and Comedy Working Side by Side

I was scheduled for a public workshop on the evening of September 11. The public didn't show up -- it was just us clowns, so we did theater games with my character masks. It was what we all needed and it was a great relief to laugh. The festival proceeded and we clowned for the whole week. It was an amazing time for me to clown with great tragedy and comedy working side by side.

I added the headlines to reflect the "Attack on Civilization"

I tried very hard to find Chuck Oberstein to get his permission to reproduce his painting, as this is my standard protocol. I did find a whole string of dealers who gave me his last known address, but I never did local him nor did I get his permission to reproduce this painting.

I hope he is well . . . But somehow, from one fellow artist (me) to another, I think he wouldn't mind the painting used in this manner during this tragic time.



Painting by Chuck Oberstein

