

A CONVERSATION WITH FA-Q

by John Ittner for Prison Life Magazine, November 1996

[A continuation of The Art of FA-Q, Prison Life Magazine]

<http://fa-qart.com/1996/11/06/a-conversation-with-fa-q/>

FA-Q and I are still in the sculpture garden when Ray Kelly arrives with Tom, an artist and filmmaker.

Kelly: What's that you're drinking?

Grape juice. :FA-Q

Kelly: You're sitting in my seat. Get up.

Hey, I spilled your beer. :FA-Q

Kelly: AAh, go ahead. You don't drink anyway. Aaah. Aaagh!

I feel like I've talked a lot, get to the point. :FA-Q

Kelly: Tired? You read the magazine. Give me a break. You know what the deal is. You're going to be on the fucking cover of the magazine, published. Are you proud of it?

John: How old are you, Kevin?

I'll be 41 the 16th of July. :FA-Q

John: Cancer.

What is that? :FA-Q

John: Crab.

Kelly: What does it mean?

John: I don't know.

I like home. :FA-Q

Tom: Hard on the outside, soft on the inside.

You go sideways. :FA-Q

Kelly: You read all those astrology books? Do you believe in that?

I don't believe in nothing. :FA-Q

Kelly: Kevin, here's an ex-junkie, Tom.

How you're doing, Tom? :FA-Q

Kelly: Both beautiful guys, so we're all beautiful guys.

Homos. :FA-Q

Kelly: Boys, let's just all hug each other.

Put that dress on first, Ray. :FA-Q

Kelly: Put that dress on over there.

Wear those pants. :FA-Q

Kelly: Let's all dress up.

John: Where are all those red pants?

Kelly: Let's be real. Let's be cool.

Motherfuckers never wipe their ass on the street. They come to jail and talk about hygiene. :FA-Q

Tom: Talk about what?

Hygiene. :FA-Q

John: Is race a big thing in prison?

Yeah. I think I got more racist from being locked up. When you're white you're an underprivileged minority in there. It used to be the COs were mostly white, but now they're mostly Black or Hispanic. Lot more white people, more and more. We had 15 out of 58 one time. Fifty-eight guys, fifteen were white. That's the most I ever encountered. Eight years ago I was the only one. :FA-Q

John: What are most of the guys in for?

Drug related charges, which is the biggest problem in the system. For victimless crimes like that I can't think anybody should be locked up. :FA-Q

Kelly: Har-har-har-har.

John: Do you think anybody could rehabilitate you?

Yeah. Possible. Send me somewhere nice. Har-har. :FA-Q

Tom: Fuck it, man.

Kelly: Ahh, like ahh Bahamas.

Make drugs legal. Amsterdam. :FA-Q

John: When you're in prison, what gives you the most trouble?

Five Percenters, Muslims. I get along with those Spanish guys better than I do Black guys. Spanish and white get along pretty good. A Rasta can get a white girl. Black guys from Africa are different. For Black Americans racism is the first excuse they use for everything. Some motherfucker wouldn't give you nothing for eight months and all of a sudden when you're going home he expects you to give him something. You're giving it to the guys who looked for you. He says, "What about the Black man?" What about him? You're going home and everybody crowds around your locker. :FA-Q

John: Everybody gives their stuff away when they leave?

Yeah :FA-Q

Kelly: They may be Afro-Americans but I still don't want them to fuck my daughter. I'm sorry. I can't be that liberal.

What about the prosecutor in the OJ case? Darden, what's his name, Dryden. :FA-Q

John: Was that thing going on when you were in there?

Everybody was cheering when he was found not guilty. I thought he was guilty, still do. :FA-Q

Kelly: Thought? Everybody knows.

I guess Blacks were happy a Black got off one time. He's got enough money. :FA-Q

Tom: That's like a weird thing.

In America, if you're not rich, or a cop, you're pretty well fucked. :FA-Q

Kelly: Kevin, I don't think we're interested in your prison thing. Are they guilty? You're guilty. Of course you're guilty. You did it.

You cop a plea. They say admit you did this murder and we'll give you ten days and it's on your record. That's extreme but that's the way it works. If you don't cop a plea you have to get up at four in the morning and sit in an eight-by-eight room with fifty guys all day until midnight the next night. It's ridiculous. So fuck that. You cop out :FA-Q

so that you can go get a bed. Or they put you in a paddy wagon and leave you there for hours. You pass out. That's the worst part.

Kelly: You're guilty.

You're drunk. :FA-Q

Kelly: System wants you out. Like OJ, like you and everybody else. System's got so many catch...

Catch-22. :FA-Q

Kelly: You beat the system.

You beat the system. :FA-Q

Kelly: I don't have any crimes. I haven't done any crimes.

That's bullshit, you've done crimes. :FA-Q

Kelly: He's an ex-junkie. It doesn't mean junkie, you're a criminal. It doesn't necessarily go together.

You do a crime every day. You get behind the wheel of your truck when you're drunk, you're doing a crime. You take a piece of steel off of a construction site. :FA-Q

Kelly: I don't have a truck.

I'm sure everybody does a crime every day. :FA-Q

Kelly: I totally agree, but your fucking friend comes in here and steals his bike.

He didn't steal it. He wouldn't do that. :FA-Q

Kelly: He did it.

I know he wouldn't do that, but there's a lot of people that would. Ha, ha. :FA-Q

Kelly: Maybe you did it.

They see an unlocked bike inside a fence. They'll jump over and get it. :FA-Q

John: Where do you stay most of the time nowadays?

Kelly: Here.

No set place. I move around. :FA-Q

Kelly: His last known address is Rikers Island.

Third park bench on the left. I will give the address 172 Forsyth. :FA-Q

Kelly: What if someone wanted to write you?

172 East Cardboard Box. :FA-Q

John: How many names have you got?

About 10. McCabe, Kelly. :FA-Q

John: You call yourself Ray Kelly?

Kevin Kelly. :FA-Q

Kelly: [He pulls up his shirt sleeve to show his tattoo.] Kevin, Kevin, look at this.

This guy's got a tattoo of a six o'clock on his right arm. Mine's on the left. :FA-Q

[Pulls up his sleeve and puts it next to Kelly's.] :FA-Q

John: I'd forgotten you had that thing.

Tovy probably stole the bike. :FA-Q

Kelly: You know who stole the bike, Kevin?

John: Sit over next to Kelly and let me get a picture of your six o'clock tattoos.

Is that your brand or your vaccination? :FA-Q

John: Let's see those teeth.

Kelly: Naaah.

John: Do they work on your teeth when you're in there?

They wanted to put me to sleep and work on them. I don't care. :FA-Q

Kelly: Put you to sleep. [Laughs.]

Yeah. My mouth is fucked up. :FA-Q

Tom: I've got trouble with my teeth.

I can see your teeth ain't like mine. I look at myself in the mirror. There's hardly any
mirrors on Rikers Island. :FA-Q

Kelly: I hate mirrors.

In jail the mirrors are fucked up, right. There's a piece of Mylar on the wall. You see a real mirror and you go, "Oh man." :FA-Q

Kelly: I never go in front of mirrors. It'll make a grown man cry.

John: What are those heads all about that you draw?

I just doodle around and see what comes out. A lot of times they say that the work looks like the artist. :FA-Q

Kelly: I see heads all around.

Why do you wear goggles all the time? :FA-Q

Kelly: Safety, safety first.

Where'd you get your haircut? I did mine with a lighter. Burned it off. It don't hurt :FA-Q

John: Did you go to art school?

Yeah, Cooper School of Art, Cleveland. :FA-Q

John: What were you doing then? Same thing?

Naah, I had a grant and a loan. :FA-Q

John: I don't mean that. [Everyone laughs.] I mean the same kind of heads.

I went through all kinds of shit there. Realistic, kind of a Van Gogh style maybe. Abstract Expressionism. :FA-Q

John: What artists did you like?

Back then? Van Gogh. :FA-Q

Kelly: Kevin cut his ear.

I liked Dali for a while. I liked de Kooning, Motherwell. I liked 'em all. Rothko. :FA-Q

Kelly: All the people who killed themselves.

It's too late. I'm too old now. :FA-Q

Kelly: Kurt Cobain or somebody like that.

You gotta be famous to kill yourself. :FA-Q

Tom: They got a cool show at the Whitney, Kienholz.

Yeah, he's good. :FA-Q

Kelly: You gotta be like Jim Morrison.

He did that taxi cab and bar. :FA-Q

Tom: Yeah, he did all that shit.

Kelly: [Points to Tom.] He's got a show at the Whitney. You never had a show at the Whitney. He's gonna be in a show at the Whitney.

So what? I don't want to be at the Whitney. I'm not in the Museum of Modern Art or
The Metropolitan. :FA-Q

Kelly: You're gonna be on the cover of Prison Life. Pretty good rag, right?

I don't know. :FA-Q

Kelly: Shut up! Like Billy the Kid.

Tom: You write at all?

On my drawings, I write. :FA-Q

Tom: This movie I'm trying to work on, like a hell movie, like a bunch of different people who are doing shit like if you want to work on that.

You know what they say. Drug addicts don't have to go to hell. They're already there. :FA-Q