

BURNING BOTTICELLI

by

Dennis Schebetta

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TIME: The play shifts from present day to the early Renaissance (1492 - 1500s)

PLACES: Various, but mainly Arizona, New York, and Florence.

SETTING: On the floor is the design of the Medici's family emblem (three inter-locking rings). Surrounding them is a semi-circle of columns in the Florentine Renaissance style-- used for exits and entrances. Behind that is a projection screen where titles are displayed in white letters over black background, as well as the various images used throughout the play.

MAIN CHARACTERS:

ARTEMISIA -- (Native American, f, early 20s) an artist

COYOTE -- the Navajo god, a trickster

SPIDER WOMAN -- the Navajo goddess, a weaver

ALLESANDRO (SANDRO) BOTTICELLI -- (m, 40s) a Renaissance painter

FRA GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA -- (m, 40s) a Dominican monk

LORENZO DE MEDICI -- (m, late 40s) patriarch of a wealthy banking family

MONK (Alan Barnes) -- (m, 30-40s) a famous conceptual artist

EMMA WHITTENBERG -- (f, 50-60s) wealthy entrepreneur turned gallery owner

KAJI (Kaji-baori Izikukashigori) -- (Japanese, m, late 30s), a rising performance artist

OTHER CHARACTERS:

THE VOICE -- (m, 30-50s)

HORIKU -- a parrot

SIMONE BOTTICELLI (m, 40s) -- Sandro's older brother, also a Frateschi

POET (m or f, 30s)

FRANCES KIMMEL (f, 30s), art critic

NORMAN -- zealot, follower of Monk and leader of the Order of the Parrots.

HARMONY -- another zealot, follower of Monk

BOY (m, 10-12)

YOUNG SAVONAROLA (m, 10-12) -- Girolamo at a young age

GIOVANNI SAVONAROLA -- (m, 40s) Girolamo's father

DONATELLO (m, 50s) -- a Renaissance artist

MICHELANGELO (m, 40s) - a Renaissance artist

THE FRATESCHI -- followers of Savonarola, otherwise known as Piagnone

SECURITY GUARD

VENUS (f, 30s) - from the Botticelli painting, "The Birth of Venus"

Production Note:

Originally produced by Amanda DuBois Productions as part of the 2004 New York International Fringe Festival (A production of The Present Company). It was directed by Scott C. Emblar. Lighting design by Traci Kleiner, set design by Julia Hahn and costumes by Jessica Jahn. The cast was as follows:

ARTEMISIA:	Mizuo Peck
COYOTE/LORENZO/GIOVANNI	Timur Kocak
SPIDER WOMAN/EMMA WHITTENBERG	Karin Wolfe
BOTTICELLI/THE VOICE	Todd Butera
SAVONAROLA/POET/SECURITY GUARD	Joe Hickey
MONK	G.R. Johnson
KAJI/DONATELLO	Timothy Huang
HORIKU	Bill Tangredi
SIMONE/HARMONY	Matthew Morgan
NORMAN/MICHELANGELO	Scott Evans
FRANCES KIMMEL /VENUS	Kathryn Savannah
BOY/YOUNG SAVONAROLA	Raum Aron

"There are hardly any exceptions to the rule that a person must pay dearly for the divine gift of creative fire."

-- Carl Jung

"Art is a different value system. Like God, it fails us continually. Like God, we have legitimate doubts about its existence, but like God, art leaves us with footprints of beauty. We sense there is more to life than the material world can provide, and art is a clue, an intimation, at its best, a transformation...Art reminds us of all the possibilities we are persuaded to forget."

--Jeanette Winterson, "The Secret Life of Us"

PROLOGUE

Title: This is the beginning.

A fire burns in the center of the three rings painted on the floor. SOUND of drums and Navajo flute playing (Navajo Ribbon dance) as the title in white letters appears on the screen

Projection: Close-up image of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus". So close that it is indistinguishable, but as the prologue progresses, more of the painting is revealed, starting with her face.

VOICE (O.S.)

This is the beginning.

SOUND of THUNDER as LIGHTNING flashes across the stage briefly illuminating the following:

In the first ring, closest to the audience, stands ARTEMISIA, a young Navajo woman, dressed in jeans, sweater, hiking boots. She plays a hand-held hoop drum as she speaks.

In the second ring stands BOTTICELLI and SAVONAROLA. BOTTICELLI wears a brown robe and SAVONAROLA wears the red robe of a Dominican friar of the 15th century.

In the third ring are MONK and NORMAN sitting on a bench in the Uffizi museum. MONK is a modern day conceptual artist, wears jeans, dirty t-shirt with spots of red paint, looks ragged. HE sketches as NORMAN, an intense and wiry-looking man, sits next to him, trying to peek at the sketchbook.

ARTEMISIA

Here is where it began.

SOUND of thunder as LIGHTNING flashes again. The dialogue overlaps, the characters fighting over each other to be heard.

SAVONAROLA

Painting is a sacred vocation.

MONK

Here is where I saw the vision, heard the Voice.

SAVONAROLA

With every stroke of your brush you carry out God's design by envisioning his beauty.
One error gives the devil power.

NORMAN

I don't believe that. Not anymore.

BOTTICELLI

Would the colors have been so vibrant if not for the canvas? Could I have created Venus so quickly and with such beauty were it not for the canvas?

MONK

That painting came alive. Venus spoke to me.

NORMAN

Tell me the vision. All of it.

MONK

Where do you want to start?

NORMAN

Start at the beginning...

VOICE (O.S.)

This is the beginning.

SAVONAROLA

If you so believe in His truth, throw your vanities into the bonfire !

SAVONAROLA stands by the fire, kneels, then
collapses on the floor,

BOTTICELLI

I will not turn my back on my work.

MONK

This is the beginning.

ARTEMISIA

Here is where it began.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

ACT ONE : PURIFICATION

SCENE ONE

Title: Trial by Fire

Title: Florence

Title: May 22nd, 1498

LIGHTS up on SAVONAROLA (mid-40s) in a prison cell, beaten and battered, clothes in shreds, hair in disarray. HE walks in circles, chanting in Latin. BOTTICELLI (late 40s) approaches, holds a torch and a pail of water. ARTEMISIA continues playing her drum throughout this next scene, almost like a ghost weaving in and around BOTTICELLI and SAVONAROLA.

SAVONAROLA

(Shouts.)

LIVE FREE, FLORENTINES! LIVE FREE FROM YOUR SINS!

(Hears a voice.)

I shall not! It is the Lord which makes me strong.

BOTTICELLI

Girolamo!

SAVONAROLA

I hear the drums of Satan marching in my mind!

BOTTICELLI

Girolamo!

SAVONAROLA

Who's there? Some demon to torment me?

BOTTICELLI

Peace, brother. It is me, Sandro. They have let me come to nurse your wounds.

(Sees large wounds on his back.)

Those savages! I pleaded with the council to be merciful, to keep the soldiers at bay.

BOTTICELLI cleans his wounds with water and a towel.

SAVONAROLA

Satan's minions have pricked me with blades, whipped and stretched me.

(Hears voice.)

But, my Lord, I followed your orders. It was my love for you that stirred me on.

BOTTICELLI

Hold still, Girolamo. The wounds are deep--

SAVONAROLA

I saw Lorenzo de Medici! He came to my cell last night!

BOTTICELLI

Lorenzo died years ago.

SAVONAROLA

He cursed me for refusing to give his last rites.

BOTTICELLI

Be still. Your mind is weak.

SAVONAROLA

God said He is testing me, but soon I will be free. Soon!

(Hears voice.)

The devil doesn't have that power!

BOTTICELLI

Girolamo, listen. Tomorrow they hang you in the piazza and burn your body on a pyre.

SAVONAROLA

(He spits.)

The Pope is a charlatan. All costume and no substance! When the apocalypse comes, he shall see who will wear the white robes of our Lord and who will be cast down into the flames!

BOTTICELLI

Shh. Quiet, you'll disturb the guards.

SAVONAROLA

Sandro, do you still believe in me?

BOTTICELLI

Yes.

SAVONAROLA

And Simone?

BOTTICELLI

My brother has fled to Bologna with the rest of your followers.

SAVONAROLA

Ah! But you have remained with me like a true saint.

BOTTICELLI

Not as a saint, but as your friend. A friend who is weak and asks your forgiveness.

SAVONAROLA

You shall be strong, Sandro. Praise the Lord in your artwork. Strive to be pure.

BOTTICELLI

It is not easy to have your courage.

SAVONAROLA

Faith is never easy.

BOTTICELLI

My fears carry me away to Naples. I cannot watch tomorrow and so I say farewell.

SAVONAROLA

(Hears voice.)

Shh! Quiet!

(Whispers to Botticelli.)

The lord said he will save me at the Day of Judgement. Until then, we must do our part. You will do your part, Sandro, yes?

BOTTICELLI

I can't save you from this fate. Tomorrow you die.

SAVONAROLA

I welcome death. That is not the end. Till then, we must remain strong to our convictions. Swear to me, Sandro, that from this day forward you will paint only God's vision of truth and beauty.

BOTTICELLI

I have always strived to do so.

SAVONAROLA

Turn your back on your former self! Turn away from the false idols, the deities you have praised in the past--Mars , Zephyrus , Venus. Swear!

BOTTICELLI

I swear.

SAVONAROLA

I shall be honored to sit by you at the table of our Lord.

(Hears a voice.)

Yes? God says you will be rewarded tenfold for the deeds you do for him here. God will reward all who are devoted to cleansing Florence!

(Pause.)

Do you believe me? Do you have enough faith to purge your sins in the fire?

BOTTICELLI moves away, begins to exit.

BOTTICELLI

Good bye, my friend. May God have mercy on your soul.

ARTEMISIA stops drumming, takes objects out of her bag--small easel, paints, etc.

SAVONAROLA

The drums have stopped. Look! The sun rises to such a glorious day!

SAVONAROLA points as BOTTICELLI EXITS.

SCENE TWO

Title: Hozho

Title: Spider Rock, Arizona

Projection: Photograph of Spider Rock.

ARTEMISIA finishes taking out objects from her bag, her art supplies at the ready, a hawk feather in her hand. SOUND of wind echoing through canyon walls.

ARTEMISIA

Before me may it be beautiful.
Behind me may it be beautiful.
Around me may it be beautiful.
Below me may it be beautiful.
Above me may it be beautiful.
May it all be beautiful.

(Beat.)

Spider Woman! Hear me. My name is Artemisia.
This is not the name my mother gave me. My real name is buried
In the desert sands,
Buried until you appear to give me a vision
To give me a voice.
Do you hear me, Spider Woman?
Here in the sacred earth of our ancestors
Here below your tower-dwelling
Here before the light of dawn
Here have I prepared a smoke for you.
Here will I stoke the fire.

(Pause.)

I will wait for sunrise. I will wait for the conversation Father Sky makes with Mother Earth.
Mornings like this I understand what the elders told me so long ago, sitting in their hogans with their peace pipes blazing. This feather I hold has strong medicine. It was given to me by my mother when I was young and now carries her spirit. I hold it up to the wind as an offering. I release it to you, to float, dance, fly away.
Is this offering enough for you, Spider Woman?

SOUND of wind. ARTEMISIA releases the feather, and it flies up into the air.

ARTEMISIA

Will you ever answer me? Do you even exist?

Pause. Silence.

ARTEMISIA

Silence is my answer.

Beat. She packs up her things, but then there is the sound of a raspy voice from her left.

COYOTE (O.S.)

Paint me.

SHE jumps back, unsure where the sound came from.

ARTEMISIA

What was that?

SOUND of a coyote howling. ARTEMISIA grabs a stick, runs towards the fire looking around.

COYOTE (O.S.)

Paint me.

ARTEMISIA

Who's there? Who is that? I'm warning you. I'm armed.

The whisper comes from the right.

COYOTE (O.S.)

Paint me.

ARTEMISIA

Where are you?

The whisper comes from behind.

COYOTE (O.S.)

Paint me.

ARTEMISIA

Come out from your hiding place!

Silence. The fire goes out. LIGHTS change. SOUND of coyote howling, then the wind.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE THREE

Title: Scheherazade's Fool

Title: The Uffizi, Florence

Title: Present day.

Projection: Botticelli's Birth of Venus

LIGHTS UP on MONK sitting on a bench, staring at the painting and sketching in a sketchbook.

ARTEMISIA behind them, staying near the fire.

NORMAN

So. Venus, huh? Not as glorious as I'd thought it'd be. Not that I was expecting choirs of angels singing "hallelujah", but still...a trifle deflating, isn't it? Florence is disappointing all around, though, don't you think? Dirty. Smelly. Overloaded with tourists. It's worse than New York City in August.

MONK

Do you mind? I'm trying to concentrate.

NORMAN

Right. Concentrate. That's what you do. Create art. Here in this sacred institution, this pagan mausoleum of classical and humanist ideals. This church of voices, visions, and spirits floating around us. Tell me, Monk, do you desire to join these spectres glued to canvas?

MONK

Do I know you?

NORMAN

Here is where it all began, right? The Birth of Venus. The Birth of Monk. The big vision. The Voice. I bet you were sitting there like that during the great epiphany, weren't you? Your face tormented and quizzical just like it is now.

MONK

Who are you? What do you want?

NORMAN

Don't you remember me? A year ago. Your studio. I stole your robe?

MONK

Oh, yes. You.

MONK stops sketching, moves away from him.

NORMAN

Those days I was a follower, anxious to take any piece of you. Now I am a leader of men, as you will bear witness. I have been waiting for this moment for a long time.

Almost as if in a ceremony, NORMAN takes off his necklace with a large mirror and holds it up to him.

NORMAN

What do you see in that face? Do you see the face of God?

MONK

No. I see a man.

NORMAN

“I see a piece of God.” Isn’t that what you said to us? So then, I ask myself “why?” Why did our God abandon us in our time of need?

MONK

I was never your God.

NORMAN

Tell me what happened here so many years ago. Tell me your vision.

MONK

There’s nothing to tell.

NORMAN

It is time for the world to know if it was all just a concept dreamed up by a vain artist, or if you really do hear the Voice.

MONK

What difference does it make?

NORMAN

What difference does it make? WHAT DIFFERENCE! We turned our lives upside down for you, for your art, for your--

MONK

What are you looking for? Some kind of proof? I can't give you that. There is no Voice anymore. My vision happened so long ago I can't remember if it was real or just a dream. Why do you think I've been sitting here so long? I've been visiting this museum every day for a month, just waiting for something to happen. I don't create art anymore. Once in awhile I get an idea for an installation but it quickly fades away by my own doubt.

NORMAN

Tell me the story of this vision you had. I want to believe you so make it beautiful.

MONK

If I do, will you leave me alone?

NORMAN

For eternity.

MONK

Where do you want to start?

NORMAN

Start at the beginning...

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE FOUR

Title: God Works in Mysterious Ways

Title: Florence, 1490

Title: Savonarola meets Botticelli and Lorenzo De Medici.

Projection of Botticelli's portrait of Lorenzo de Medici from "Gift of the Magi".

ENTER SAVONAROLA (late 30s) alone, walking around as if in a museum, admiring the objects of art. ENTER BOTTICELLI, LORENZO, and SIMONE lagging behind. LORENZO carries a glass of wine. THEY do not see SAVONAROLA.

LORENZO

My dear, Sandro, Venus was not merely a symbol of love. She was love incarnate! Love of life, love of self, love of women! It is an ideal of the body as well as the mind.

BOTTICELLI

You're always thinking about the sensual sides of life.

LORENZO

What else is there?

SAVONAROLA

"It is the Spirit which gives life. The flesh profits nothing."

THEY stop, see SAVONAROLA.

LORENZO

Ah, Fra Savonarola, welcome! My apologies for keeping you waiting. Care to join us for some wine?

SAVONAROLA

No, grazie. It is a simple enough honor, Signor Medici, to be in your presence.

BOTTICELLI

Lorenzo, you keep talking of love but there are other pressing matters, which I still need to discuss with you...

LORENZO

Are you still concerned about that?

(Quietly to Botticelli)

The debt is pardoned. Capisce?

BOTTICELLI

Si. And the commission?

LORENZO

Is guaranteed. I will see to it personally. Let your worries cease. Now, before you depart, may I introduce you to our new prior at San Marco?

SAVONAROLA

New prior? What do you--

LORENZO

Fra Girolamo Savonarola, may I present the artist Allesandro Botticelli, and his brother, Simone.

BOTTICELLI

Lorenzo has spoken much about you.

SIMONE

We have read all your papers on Dante's "Inferno".

SAVONAROLA

Is that so? I am surprised that anyone outside my order has even heard about it.

LORENZO

You will find there is no unworthy subject for conversation with guests.

SIMONE

We read everything from discourses on Dante to translations of Aristotle.

LORENZO

Speaking of worthy subjects--tell me, fra Savonarola, do you like this recent acquisition?

Projection of "Venus and Mars" by Botticelli.

SAVONAROLA

Venus and Mars? No. I do not.

LORENZO

You are so quick to judge. Take a moment, let the light illuminate the gentle colors, the lines, the--

SAVONAROLA

I do not care for its suggestion of lewdness and treatment of love.

LORENZO

Ah, so it's merely the subject matter. Perhaps if it hung in the bedroom of a married couple?

SAVONAROLA

Perhaps if it were burned in a fire.

Beat.

BOTTICELLI

Your honesty is astonishing. No one here talks about paintings so bluntly.

SAVONAROLA

If art is not about honesty, then what should it be about?

LORENZO

Well said, brother. Sandro, it seems the monk does not like your painting.

BOTTICELLI

Taste can sometimes be elusive. Even in men of God.

SAVONAROLA

I am sorry, Signore Botticelli, but I did not know--

LORENZO

Do you think if Michelangelo painted it there would be the same reaction?

SIMONE

Don't jest with him, Lorenzo.

BOTTICELLI

Michelangelo is a boy. If you'll excuse me, I have someone to see.

SAVONAROLA

A pleasure and honor to meet you. Again, my sincere apologies for my words--

BOTTICELLI

Your words are only air and do not change the beauty of this painting. Come, Simone.

SIMONE

(To Savonarola.)

I look forward to your sermons.

EXIT BOTTICELLI and SIMONE.

SAVONAROLA

What is this talk of sermons? Of a new prior?

LORENZO

It is said you can predict the future. Can you not see yourself preaching in Florence?

SAVONAROLA

No.

LORENZO

Don't you like my fine city?

SAVONAROLA

It has many charms, signore, but far too many vanities for my tastes.

LORENZO

Watch your tongue. We give far too much to the Church to be treated with any disrespect.

SAVONAROLA

Why do you introduce me as the new prior at San Marco? Have I been appointed somewhere without my knowledge?

LORENZO

Tell me, are you satisfied with the monastic life at Bologna?

SAVONAROLA

Yes.

LORENZO

What do you do there? Preach?

SAVONAROLA

No. I write, read, and instruct the younger brothers in the ways of our order.

LORENZO

Friends of mine saw you preach in Ferrara with some sort of fire.

SAVONAROLA

If that is true, then it is whatever fire God has put inside me.

LORENZO

I want that fire in Florence.

SAVONAROLA

My place is with my order.

LORENZO

Your place is wherever the Church chooses you to be, no?

SAVONAROLA

I go where I am commanded by God.

LORENZO

I see. And when did God command you to become a priest?

SAVONAROLA

When I was 18.

LORENZO

What happened?

SAVONAROLA

I heard a sermon about the Apocalypse.

LORENZO

And you were filled with fear and trembling? How noble. But perhaps you had other reasons. Perhaps a woman broke your heart. Perhaps a young beauty named Francesca del Iammo broke off her engagement with you, running off with some young sailor from Venice. So you ran off to Bologna to join the monastery, without your father's permission.

SAVONAROLA

They warned me at the monastery about you. They call you " Il Serpente dei giardino".

LORENZO

I prefer Il Magnifico. Are you afraid of me?

SAVONAROLA

No.

LORENZO

You should be.

SAVONAROLA

My faith in God protects me.

LORENZO

I am not a serpent in the garden, real or Biblical, and I do not intend to corrupt your soul. I find all those rumors stupefying.

SAVONAROLA

The Church of Rome has not ordered me to preach here.

LORENZO

They will.

SAVONAROLA

I will refuse.

LORENZO

That is not your right.

SAVONAROLA

I am a man of God, not a hired hand.

LORENZO throws his right hand around
SAVONAROLA'S throat, choking him.

SAVONAROLA

What are you--?!

LORENZO

Understand this, my little "brother". You are nothing. The Medicis have been here for centuries while you are simply a beggar passing through our enormous banquet of delights. And the Medici order you to preach in Florence.

SAVONAROLA

You cannot kill me.

LORENZO

Can't I? It is as easy for me as drinking this wine. Your body will be found on the road outside of Napoli, bloody and bruised--another unfortunate robbery. Capisce?

SAVONAROLA

Please...release me...

LORENZO lets him go.

LORENZO

Now what do you see in your future? Shall you preach for us?

SAVONAROLA

I see the future of Florence. One day you will leave and it will be a city for Christ.

LORENZO

If I leave then my son Piero will rule.

SAVONAROLA

He will leave soon after you.

LORENZO

You have seen this?

SAVONAROLA

Yes.

LORENZO

You do have a fire in your belly. Va bene. It should be shared with all. It should be viewed like great art is viewed. And I am a patron. I am the patron. You will be well cared for here, your order will be protected, and your parish will flourish. Get on your knees.

SAVONAROLA

Scusi?

LORENZO

I said, get on your knees.

SAVONAROLA briefly hesitates, then kneels.

LORENZO goes to him, smiles and touches his head.

LORENZO

Fra Girolamo Savonarola, you are a good man of God.

I shall make you a great man of God.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE FIVE

Title: The Face of God Pt. I

Title: Whittenberg Gallery, New York

Title: Over a year ago.

LIGHTS UP on a black curtain in the central area, ten feet wide by ten feet high that appears to be hiding a large indistinguishable object. EMMA

WHITTENBERG dressed in formal attire, stands near it, talking to FRANCES KIMMEL, an art critic. Other audience members mingle about, including NORMAN.

EMMA

My dear Frances--may I call you that?--Frances, Alan Barnes is no more. Alan Barnes was a kid out of Yale with no sense of his own identity as an artist. That man went to Florence and died. He has been resurrected as Monk and his art speaks for itself.

FRANCES

How much is it a departure or a revisiting from earlier successful works like "Surfing Jerusalem" and "Cloning Jesus"?

EMMA

Monk is still launching from ideas he had in his "Looking at Looking" installation, but in a visionary and completely new way.

MUSIC plays and a VOICE is heard.

VOICE (O.S.)

Ladies and Gentlemen...The Whittenberg Gallery proudly presents the artist known as Monk and his exhibit...the Face of God Pt. I.

ENTER MONK, wearing a white robe, looking far removed from the proceedings. HE waves his hand and the black curtain in the background rises up to reveal a large frame with an absolutely empty space inside it. Silence. Then SOUND of slight murmurs which finally build to an enormous applause. MONK takes an awkward bow, then EXITS.

EMMA

Well? Didn't I tell you? Quite a surprise. You expect something, y'know, anything, and you get...well, you get...nothing.

FRANCES

It's more than a surprise, yes. And it's not nothing in the same way Warhol's "Brillo Boxes" were not just boxes. He shows a remarkable capacity here for illuminating the void, for suggesting the importance even in the banal.

EMMA

Would you like to meet him?

FRANCES

It would be an honor.

EMMA

He's very shy, understand. Quite eccentric.

FRANCES

I'm well aware of his reclusive nature.

EMMA

Hardly ever talks to reporters at all, but he says there's something special about you. That is, if you're willing to write about him in an objective manner.

FRANCES

That has always been my goal. As I've said to your publicist for months, I have always believed Alan Barnes to quite possibly be the--

EMMA

Monk, dear. Monk.

FRANCES

Yes, Monk. I believe him to quite possibly be the first genius of the new millennium. He's like Picasso a hundred years ago. Who can fathom to what heights he will soar to with his amount of talent.

EMMA

We had an offer for an interview from the Village Voice but he insists they feel too insular.

FRANCES

An exclusive interview in The Times could catapult his status to international acclaim. If you could persuade him to--

EMMA

Oh, no, I never persuade him. I simply suggest things to him. I'm not persuasive at all.

FRANCES

I have time whenever he feels ready.

EMMA

However, there is one condition. You want to be as objective as possible, right?

FRANCES

As a faithful journalist and critic, yes.

EMMA

There will be no mention of the voice or the vision.

FRANCES

Are you referring to the rumors that he hears the voice of...

EMMA

I am not referring to anything. If there are any rumors floating out there about him, I am unaware of them. That's the only condition. I don't want you critics to crucify him as some modern day "Joan of Arc".

FRANCES

He will at all times be in complete control of the interview.

EMMA

Then I'll suggest that he sit down with you next month.

FRANCES

Do you think I could meet him now? Not for the interview. Just to say hello.

EMMA

Just a moment.

EXIT EMMA. NORMAN approaches FRANCES.

NORMAN

So, that must've took a long time to do, huh?

FRANCES

I'm sure it took him more time to think of the idea than it did for you to dismiss it.

NORMAN

(Looks at a program.)

“The Face of God”. What’s it supposed to be about?

FRANCES

You may discover that if you stare at the piece awhile, it will open a door for you.

ENTER EMMA.

EMMA

I’m sorry, but Monk is...well, he’s feeling very shy. Perhaps another time.

FRANCES

There’s a multi-media performance piece tomorrow night. Perhaps you both could join me?

EMMA

Wonderful idea! Thank you so much for the invitation. Would you like some champagne?

FRANCES

Thank you. Congratulations again on the opening of your gallery. What other artists do you have lined up?

EMMA

I’m still looking for more geniuses like Monk, but they are so hard to find.

FRANCES

Perhaps I can help point you in the right direction?

EXIT EMMA and FRANCES. NORMAN stares at the installation as LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE SIX

Title: Coyote Steals the Thunder

ARTEMISIA in same position as her last scene.

ARTEMISIA

Come out and show yourself!

COYOTE (O.S.)

Artemisia is not your name. That is a white man name.

ARTEMISIA

Who are you? What do you want?

COYOTE (O.S.)

What kind of crazy person talks to herself in the middle of the desert?

ARTEMISIA

Show yourself!

COYOTE (O.S.)

You may not like what you see.

SOUND of the wind. LIGHTNING flashes and the fire ignites. ENTER COYOTE, dimly-lit and cloaked.

COYOTE

Do you hear that? No thunder. I have stolen it. I will give it back to you if you give me something to eat and drink.

ARTEMISIA

Who are you?

COYOTE pulls out a feather that looks like the one ARTEMISIA had earlier.

COYOTE

I am Spider Woman. Don't you recognize me?

ARTEMISIA

You don't look like her to me.

COYOTE

Have you ever seen her picture?

ARTEMISIA

No.

COYOTE

Then how do you know? I have your feather as proof. See?

HE shows her a feather.

ARTEMISIA

That's not mine. It's a turkey feather.

COYOTE

No, no, this is the feather that flew up into the wind, the feather that--

ARTEMISIA

And does Spider Woman always have a shaggy tail dragging on the sand behind her?

COYOTE sees his tail poking out from his cloak.

COYOTE

Oh, that? That is just part of my clothing.

(Beat.)

Okay, little rabbit, you're very bright. So I admit that I am not Spider Woman, but she did send me with a message.

ARTEMISIA

What message?

COYOTE

I'm very hungry. If you give me something to eat, I shall tell you.

ARTEMISIA

I don't have anything.

COYOTE goes towards her things, snooping.

COYOTE

You have no fry bread? No beef jerky?

ARTEMISIA

Stay out of there.

COYOTE

(Sniffs.)

I smell something in your bag. Chocolate?

HE pulls out a Snickers candy bar. Eat it in one gulp.

ARTEMISIA

Hey! That's mine.

COYOTE

Mmm. Yummy. "Snickers really satisfies". Heh heh. Anything else in that little bag of yours? Tobacco? Whisky?

ARTEMISIA

It's all I have. What's the message?

COYOTE

The message is very important.

ARTEMISIA

What is it?

COYOTE

It is from Spider Woman herself.

ARTEMISIA

Yes? And?

COYOTE

From the tower up there.

ARTEMISIA

What does she tell me?

COYOTE

She says: go home, go back to the rez, stop wasting your time. All you're doing is bugging everyone with your lousy songs. Some of us are tired and trying to sleep.

ARTEMISIA

Tell her I can't go home. I am seeking a vision.

(Coyote laughs.)

What's so funny?

COYOTE

You. "I am seeking a vision." You are so serious, aren't you? On the outside, you are proud Indian, but inside I know who you are.

ARTEMISIA

And I know who you are. I can tell by your nature and by your stench that you are Coyote.

COYOTE

No, no, not me. That is not my name anymore. My name is now Bill Johnson. No, that's not right. Peter Jones. Doesn't get more white than that, does it? What's your name, beautiful little rabbit? Artemisia, is it?

ARTEMISIA

My real name is for Spider Woman only.

COYOTE

She will not come for you.

ARTEMISIA

Why not?

COYOTE

My throat is so parched because of this dry air. Don't you have anything to drink?

ARTEMISIA

Why won't she come? Tell me!

COYOTE

If you have nothing to drink, then perhaps I'll be on my way. Good luck, rabbit!

Walks away to exit.

ARTEMISIA

Wait! Stop. If you tell me I will give you some water. Okay?

SHE gives him a bottle of water.

COYOTE

(Drinks then suddenly points up above.)

Look! There is Spider Woman now. She comes!

ARTEMISIA

Where?

SHE looks and COYOTE EXITS, running.

ARTEMISIA

Hey! We made a deal!

COYOTE (O.S.)

Bye, bye, rabbit!

SOUND of laughing and howling as LIGHTS
CHANGE.

SCENE SEVEN

Title: Sacrifices

Title: Florence, 1491

Projection of Ghiberti's "The Sacrifice of Isaac".

ENTER BOTTICELLI in work clothes with apron, holding a brush, followed by SIMONE, and SAVONAROLA. SOUNDS of workers in background as BOY ENTERS with two small bowls, approaches BOTTICELLI.

BOTTICELLI

I can't be disturbed from my work over these trivial details!

SAVONAROLA

The Church does not see it as trivial.

SIMONE

Sandro, just listen to him. He is a wise man.

BOTTICELLI

Simone, if you weren't my brother I'd have you whipped for following this fanatic.

BOTTICELLI examines the paints in the bowls.

BOTTICELLI

No, this red has too much yellow as a base. Tell them to add more green and then mix up the blue with more white. Capisce?

BOY

Si, Signore Botticelli

EXIT BOY.

SIMONE

Everyone in Florence flocks to see his sermons. His predictions have come true...

BOTTICELLI

Don't talk to me about predictions.

SIMONE

Please, Sandro, just hear him out. For me.

SAVONAROLA

Painting is a sacred vocation. With every stroke of your brush you carry out God's design by envisioning his beauty. One error will give the devil power. Now, by using materials that are less than desirable, by using materials that are profane, you defile all that is beautiful and holy in your work.

BOTTICELLI

I fail to see how using canvas instead of wood is profane.

SIMONE

You only use canvas because its cheaper.

BOTTICELLI

You only want me to use wood to placate the Church officers.

SAVONAROLA

I have responsibilities to the Church, in the same way you do when you receive our commissions.

BOTTICELLI

If that's what it comes down to, then I don't need the Church's money.

SAVONAROLA

The days of the Medici will wither like vines in the summer sun, Sandro. What other wealthy families will support you then?

ENTER BOY with bowls again. BOTTICELLI
examines them.

SIMONE

Brother, please, it's such a little thing.

BOTTICELLI

Simone, did you like my painting "The Birth of Venus"?

SIMONE

Yes, of course, but--

BOTTICELLI

Would the colors have been so vibrant if not for the canvas? Could I have done that painting so quickly were it not for the canvas?

SIMONE

It is beautiful but--

BOTTICELLI

When it comes to beauty, there are no little things, Simone.

SAVONAROLA

Sandro, you are a talented artist and a true man of God. I know you will come to the right decision. I'm sorry to pressure you. If you desire to use canvas, then do so.

BOTTICELLI

Do you mean this?

SAVONAROLA

I'm not a cruel tyrant and neither is God. We shall not force you to do things you do not wish to do. Not when there are other artists so willing to appease God's will. Come, Simone, we have other visits to make. Now, how far does Michelangelo live from here?

HE walks away from BOTTICELLI as SIMONE approaches him.

SIMONE

Please, Sandro, reconsider this. The family is not in a situation to lose another commission.

SAVONAROLA

Come, Simone. Leave your brother to his work.

SIMONE

Sandro. Please.

BOTTICELLI

Fra Savonarola.

(Beat.)

Perhaps...perhaps we can make a compromise here...perhaps I can use wood for this piece.

SAVONAROLA

I would not think of you sacrificing the vibrancy of those colors.

BOTTICELLI

It is the Church's commission and I will do as necessary.

SAVONAROLA

Follow your own heart.

EXIT SAVONAROLA and SIMONE.

BOTTICELLI

Take this away and tell them to start over again.

BOY

But Signore Botticelli, they have been making paints all morning.

BOTTICELLI

Am I alone in my search for perfection? Tell them!

BOY EXITS.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE EIGHT

Title: Sacrifices Pt. II

LIGHTS UP on MONK and EMMA in his studio.

MONK

And she agreed to the interview?

EMMA

It's all about playing hard to get--the more reclusive you were, the more she wanted it. Although, I think you did offend her by not meeting her. It might behoove you to come out with us to this performance and apologize for your lack of social graces.

MONK

No. I'll see her next month.

EMMA

Oh, come on. It'll be fun. We'll go see this performance piece and be all friendly. Eccentric existential stuff, right up your alley--Poets, artists, multimedia, all that. And I'm hearing exciting rumors about a parrot.

MONK

Where is it?

EMMA

Williamsburg.

(Off his reaction.)

Don't make that face. It's just over the bridge and we can take a car. Please?

MONK

No. I don't want to be influenced by the fads and trends of youth.

EMMA

You need to get out of this studio once in awhile. You're so pale.

MONK

I need to work.

EMMA

How is the rest of the series going?

MONK

It'll be ready in time for your new performance space.

EMMA

Any chance of a peek at the--

MONK

No.

EMMA

You haven't done a thing, have you? You're blocked.

MONK

That's not true. I've been meditating.

EMMA

But not working.

MONK

It's how I create, Emma. Don't worry, the work will be there when you need it.

EMMA

I'm not sure yet whether this zealously damages or edifies your image.

MONK

My beliefs don't concern you.

EMMA

Actually, they do. I have one condition with this Times piece. You are not allowed to mention this voice or this vision you had in Florence, understand?

MONK

That's the whole reason for this interview! You can't stop me from--

EMMA

Can't I? Tell me, Monk, do you like this studio? Do you like having your work sell and reach the people?

MONK

I am grateful for you lending me this space, but if you want money, I can pay you back now from my earnings.

EMMA

What I want is for you to think of someone else other than yourself.

MONK

I meditate on the spiritual fate of the entire world.

EMMA

I'm not talking in a metaphysical sense. Think about all that I've done for you. Give me a chance to sell your work without people thinking you're possibly psychotic. Wait for your fame to reach the international level first, then you can do another interview and talk about the voice all you want. Does that sound fair?

MONK

I'm not psychotic.

EMMA

It's that or no interview. Understand?

MONK

Emma, don't you believe in my work?

EMMA

Yes.

MONK

Do you believe I had a vision? Do you believe I hear the Voice?

EMMA

I believe there are some things I don't understand. I call them artists. The interview is next month. Please, be ready. Clean yourself up a little bit. Comb your hair once in awhile and for God's sake, wash that robe.

EXIT EMMA.

MONK

(Hears voice.)

It doesn't matter. I'll find a way to talk about it. The truth will be delivered to the people somehow.

(Beat.)

I know what I'm doing.

(Beat.)

If all you're going to do is make jokes, then leave me alone to work.

(Beat.)

(MORE)

I have to finish the series. I have to capture your image. Reflect it to the world...like
a...Wait! That's it.

MONK(cont'd)
EXIT MONK as LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE NINE

Title: The Face of God Pt. II

Title: In 1492

Title: Columbus sailed the ocean blue

Title: In Florence

Title: Lorenzo de Medici Died

LORENZO is on his death bed, covered in gold sheets.
SAVONAROLA preaches to audience.

SAVONAROLA

An old woman knows more about the Faith than Plato! Lorenzo de Medici has poisoned your minds with his “classics” in the same way that the Pope has poisoned the Church and all men of God. But I say no more! Even now Lorenzo lies on his deathbed.

LORENZO

I am not dying!

SAVONAROLA

Soon he will be gone and what then? Who will lead your minds to salvation then?

LORENZO

I am not dying!

HE coughs. SAVONAROLA turns to him, and stands, arms clasped, no longer preaching but standing in Lorenzo's bedroom.

LORENZO

Even after all your curses cast upon me, I still live. It is not so easy to kill a Medici.

SAVONAROLA

Why did you call upon me to administer your last rites?

LORENZO

You are a great man of God.

SAVONAROLA

Only because that is what you made me.

LORENZO

Why do you loathe me so? I have done much to praise God. Have I not funded your parish? Your order? Have I not commissioned glorious works of art for the Church? Ask anything of me, and I shall do it, Fra Savonarola.

SAVONAROLA

God has already spoken to you.

LORENZO

I am old and my hearing is not so good. What did he say?

SAVONAROLA

You must give up these beautiful objects that you have acquired. You do not belong to the material world. You belong to the spiritual world, to God's world.

LORENZO

And how shall I do this?

SAVONAROLA

Florence must become pure. You must destroy all idols, the same way that Moses destroyed the golden calf.

LORENZO

What? Destroy my beautiful artwork?

SAVONAROLA

We should praise God, not man. Start with Botticelli's "Birth of Venus". Destroy that idol as an example to Florence, then leave the rest to me.

LORENZO

Sandro is a true man of God.

SAVONAROLA

Which is why he will do your bidding. Yours as well as the Lord's. With his example we can begin purifying the rest of the city, destroying other works of idolatry.

LORENZO

But the Venus is so beautiful. Does God not love beauty?

SAVONAROLA

Do not forget that the devil has power to appear beautiful in order to deceive us.

LORENZO

Ma, é pazzo ?! Venus is no devil! I shall not!

SAVONAROLA

(Getting up to leave.)

Then I cannot, with good conscience, give you absolution.

LORENZO

You refuse a dying man his last rites? Vaffancúlo! How dare you? Stronzo! You sniveling charlatan! I shall have your tongue cut off and served to my dogs! You will--

(Coughs.)

I shall see your body burn in the piazza before I destroy any of--

HE has another coughing attack as SAVONAROLA begins to exit. ENTER BOTTICELLI who grabs him.

BOTTICELLI

On his death bed. His death bed! The Medici's have showered the city of Florence with art and cultural riches for generations. And for you to--you, a lowly, despicable Dominican monk!-- to treat his--you show such disrespect, Fra Savonarola!

SAVONAROLA

We are not enemies, Sandro. We both seek truth.

BOTTICELLI

I seek beauty.

SAVONAROLA

They are both the same in the eyes of the Lord.

BOTTICELLI

Your days here in Florence are numbered.

SAVONAROLA

All of our days our numbered. The apocalypse approaches with the new millennium.

EXIT BOTTICELLI as SAVONAROLA turns to the audience, preaching as if on a pulpit.

SAVONAROLA

But I say no more! NO MORE! Lorenzo is dead! Let us embrace the strong arm of France as they march towards Florence, welcome King Charles VIII, for he will bring reform into our city, into our Churches, into our lives!

LIGHTS fade on LORENZO'S bed.

SAVONAROLA

The Pope is a child who has lost his way in the sight of God. Soon, he will be dead like Lorenzo and will face his cowardice. Heed my warning! Millennium approaches and with it comes the time of judgement. Will your soul be prepared?

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE TEN

Title: Satori

Title: Williamsburg, Brooklyn

Title: The new Bohemia.

Projection: Botticelli's various sketches of Dante's Inferno as POET reads.

SOUND of muttering of a cabaret type bar, clinking glasses, etc. LIGHTS UP on POET who finishes a painfully slow performance overloaded with meaning.

POET

I went down
Down
Down
And the flames
Went higher
And it burns
Burns
Burns
The ring of fire
The ring of fire.

Pause, then short applause as POET exits. LIGHTS UP to reveal EMMA and FRANCES sitting at a table.

FRANCES

He always does that bit. He keeps making references to Dante's "Inferno" but none of us critics really swallow that justification.

EMMA

Again, Frances, I apologize for Monk's absence, but you know how these temperamental artists can be so anti-social.

KAJI ENTERS , an older Japanese man wearing an outfit similar to the traditional fire dress of a samurai warrior. On his shoulder is a bright green parrot named HORIKU.

KAJI

(In broken English w/ Japanese accent)

Hello...I thank you...very much. Me like haiku, so give you bird, name Horiku, to give you haiku...enjoy!

HORIKU squawks before speaking.

HORIKU

Polly was a crackwhore!

EMMA laughs and KAJI turns around with the bird speaking muttered Japanese in angry tone. When he spins back around he has a big smile.

KAJI

So sorry. He no feel good. Nervous. He do haiku now.

HORIKU squawks once again before speaking.

HORIKU

Darkness falls on riverbed mud
Clouds drifting summer rain
Anger burns in mind

Pause. KAJI feeds him a cracker.

FRANCES

So simple in presentation and yet creates a complex contemplation on the existence of animal creativity.

EMMA

A poetical parrot. It's perfect.

HORIKU

Leaves travel lightly above
Crazy snow shoveler in drag
I cry for a cracker!

KAJI yells at HORIKU again in Japanese but there is the SOUND of audience clapping.

KAJI

Thank you very much. You make us proud.

EMMA

(To Kaji.)

Hello, darling! Excuse me, Mr. Talking bird man!

KAJI starts to exit but stops.

KAJI

If you from immigration, I show papers to man other day and he tell--

EMMA

Oh, you are so precious! No, no, nothing like that. May I buy you a drink?

HORIKU

She's the devil! Brawk!

EMMA

Oh my!

KAJI

Horiku! You bad bird. No supper for you. He so sorry.

EMMA

It's all right, really. What's your name?

KAJI

Kaji-baori Izikukashigori. Short name is Kaji. And this is Horiku.

EMMA

Emma Whittenberg. And this is Frances Kimmel. Art critic from the New York Times.

FRANCES

Pleasure. I heard great things about your act at St. Ann's Warehouse.

KAJI

Ah, Whittenberg. Like the department store, yes?

EMMA

Exactly like the department store. Tell me, can this green bird of yours create Haikus at will?

KAJI

Oh, yes, he talented bird. He is the...how you say, brain department.

EMMA

(Laughs.)

Then maybe I should be talking to him. See, I've got a small business proposition for you. How would you like your own show at my new performance art space?

LIGHTS CHANGE dimming slightly. ENTER HARMONY and NORMAN both with flashlights. They are inside MONK'S studio searching around.

HARMONY

I still think if we're going to be a cult, we should have a name.

NORMAN

Shh! You'll wake him up.

HARMONY

We shouldn't be here, Norman. This is breaking the law.

NORMAN

I'm not Norman, anymore. My name is Color. Yours is Harmony.

HARMONY

I told you, I'm not changing my name to Harmony. That's a girl's name.

NORMAN

We should take something.

HARMONY

Isn't that stealing?

NORMAN

It's in the name of religion, though, so it's okay.

HARMONY

How do you figure?

NORMAN

Haven't you ever heard of the crusades?

SOUND of rustling nearby.

NORMAN

Shit.

Let's get out of here.

HARMONY

Hide!

NORMAN

What? Are you crazy?

HARMONY

Now! Turn off your light.

NORMAN

THEY turn off the flashlights as MONK enters and sits, meditating.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE ELEVEN

Title: Coyote Steals the Sun

LIGHTS UP on ARTEMISIA as before. SHE has pulled out another bottle of water and started sketching. ENTER COYOTE.

COYOTE

I have drunk all from the bottle and now I see you have another.

ARTEMISIA

This water is not for thieves.

COYOTE

I promise not to steal it. Honest.

ARTEMISIA

You tell me why Spider Woman won't come to me and you can have a sip.

COYOTE

Why not just give me a sip now, then I tell you?

ARTEMISIA

No deal.

COYOTE

Don't you trust me?

ARTEMISIA

(She drinks.)

Mmm. It's really good water. Refreshing.

COYOTE

I warn you, do not be cruel to me. You will be very sorry.

ARTEMISIA

I'm not afraid of you.

COYOTE

Haven't you heard the great stories of Coyote?

ARTEMISIA

In those stories you are always getting tricked or killed.

COYOTE

That is not true. I am a proud warrior. And crafty.

ARTEMISIA

You don't look so proud to me. I can't even see you under that disguise.

COYOTE

If you saw me, you'd be blinded by my glory.

ARTEMISIA

Show me who you really are. Maybe you're not Coyote at all, but some imposter.

COYOTE

No one can impersonate Coyote.

ARTEMISIA

How do I know that? If you reveal yourself to me, then I will know you are real.

COYOTE

That is the problem with youth today. Never believe anything is real unless they see it on the T.V. All right, you want to see me, know who I am, then I will reveal my glory.

COYOTE takes the hood off. He wears an outfit with
gorgeous, brilliant-colored feathers all around.
LIGHTNING flashes.

COYOTE

I am Coyote, the Trickster. I am the face of imagination.

(Beat.)

Now, give me a sip of water.

ARTEMISIA

Tell me why Spider Woman won't come to me. Am I doing something wrong?

COYOTE

Tell me, why do you paint?

ARTEMISIA

I paint because it is all I know. I paint to make life beautiful.

COYOTE

I want you to paint me. I want you to make me beautiful.

ARTEMISIA

Why? What do you want with a portrait of yourself?

COYOTE

Am I not the most beautiful thing you've ever seen?

ARTEMISIA

No.

COYOTE

No? What do you mean, no? What else is more beautiful? What else is more worthy to be painted?

ARTEMISIA

See that sunrise over there? Those brilliant colors? That is beauty unmatched even by your glorious feathers.

COYOTE

I will steal that beautiful sun, then, if you do not paint me.

ARTEMISIA

You don't have the power.

COYOTE

Don't be so foolish, rabbit. Spider Woman is not the only one with powers. I can do many things.

ARTEMISIA

You cannot give me my vision. You cannot give me a voice. Leave me in peace.

COYOTE

I may leave you, but you'd never be in peace. Your kind is always in turmoil. Between two worlds. It reminds me of the bat. That is why they live in caves, because they are not like the winged people flying through the air, and not like the four-leggeds crawling on the ground. You should decide between these worlds. Go back home and fly, or go back to your white man college and crawl. Or else live in a cave.

ARTEMISIA

Why don't you go live in a cave.

COYOTE

I did once. Too drafty.

ARTEMISIA

Go anywhere but here. Try to trick someone else.

COYOTE pulls out a rock from his bag.

COYOTE

See this rock? It is made of moonstones. Strong medicine. If you paint me, it is yours.

ARTEMISIA

No.

COYOTE

How about a child, then? Is that what you seek for a vision? If you want to be a mother I can be very helpful in that department. No need for boyfriends when Coyote is near.

HE approaches her. SHE swipes at him with the stick.

ARTEMISIA

Ew! No. Get away from me.

COYOTE

Don't make Coyote angry. He is only trying to be playful.

ARTEMISIA

I said get away! I'll break your legs if you come one step closer to me!

HE playfully steps one step closer. SHE swings at him, misses.

COYOTE

Missed me!

ARTEMISIA

I won't miss you again if you come near me.

COYOTE

Stop! Don't hurt me, please? I will tell you why Spider Woman won't come to you.

ARTEMISIA

Why not?

SHE raises the stick at him..

COYOTE

Calm down and put the stick away. Please?

(She puts the stick down.)

She won't come because you are not red inside anymore.

ARTEMISIA

That's not true! I wouldn't be here if that were so!

COYOTE

Liar! You lack faith in the old ways. What is your birth name?

ARTEMISIA

That is for Spider Woman only.

COYOTE

She will never show.

ARTEMISIA

I will wait.

COYOTE

Then you will wait forever and the Sun will wait with you!

HE howls with such a piercing cry and ARTEMISIA has to close her hands over her ears. LIGHTS FLICKER and THUNDER SOUNDS.

COYOTE

I have released the thunder and stolen the sun. See the frozen light on the horizon? I will only give it back when you paint me.

ARTEMISIA

It's just another one of your tricks, nothing more.

COYOTE

This is no trick. The fate of the world is in your hands now, eh?

ARTEMISIA

You can't hold the sun there forever.

COYOTE

The Diné forget the old ways. They forget who I am and what I look like. But no more. They will be reminded of my glory. You can show them my beauty with your paints.

ARTEMISIA

What do I get out of it?

COYOTE

I will bring Spider Woman to you.

ARTEMISIA

How?

COYOTE

Paint me and see.

ARTEMISIA

All right. I will. But if Spider Woman does not appear then I keep the painting for myself.

COYOTE

Make me beautiful and I will fetch her for you.

ARTEMISIA

I will do what I can. Be still.

SHE grabs her paints and the empty canvas and begins to go to work. LIGHTS OUT on ARTEMISIA and COYOTE.

SCENE TWELVE

Title: The Artist as Art

Projection of New York Times Sunday Magazine with a picture of Monk on the cover. The caption reads “The Most Important Artist of His Generation?”

MONK sits in the meditative spot as before.
FRANCES holds a pen and notebook.

MONK

My life is a constant string of artistic statements. I am the Artist as Art.

FRANCES

And the voice...?

MONK

The voice?

FRANCES

The voice...of the new generation, that is to say, what do you think of the voice of Horiku, the haiku parrot?

MONK

Poetic poultry is the epitome of spectacle in its most common, commercialized form, not creation in the mystical sense. If that parrot begins splashing a canvas in the same style as Jackson Pollock, then I'll get nervous about my place in the art world.

FRANCES

And are you the voice of a more mystical artist?

MONK

I'd suggest that you stick to the approved list of questions.

FRANCES

Are we to expect more religious themes from you in the future?

MONK

They should not be categorized as merely religious themes. They are tales of humanity, or humanity's perception towards the divine. My life is a framework in which to hang the tapestries of existence. It is not just my work that one looks at, but my image as well.

(MORE)

When you look into the installations of The Face of God, you are looking into me. You are looking into yourself. You are looking into all the others around you.

MONK(cont'd)
FRANCES

Are you voicing through your work that there is a piece of God in us all?

MONK

I am voicing nothing. The viewer discovers all. Perhaps the great joke is that there isn't even a God at all, that you may come to the end of a tunnel of light only to be surrounded in darkness.

FRANCES

And where do you get your ideas?

MONK

Where does the wind come from?

FRANCES

What I mean is, do you believe in divine inspiration, that there is a voice in the universe, perhaps? An alternate world that possibly communicates with us?

MONK

Enough. This interview is over.

FRANCES

I'm sorry if I--Yes, well...I only want to know--people want to know--
(Off his blank look.)

And I know you want to tell me.

(No response. She stands.)

Thank you for your time, Monk.

FRANCES gathers notebook together. Beat.

MONK

Why should I tell you?

FRANCES

I told Mrs. Whittenberg I would be objective. Have you read my work?

MONK

Yes. It's good without being skeptical or cynical. It seems accepting of beauty.

FRANCES

Is that why you wanted the interview with me? You think I'll be accepting?

MONK

If I told you, would you print it?

FRANCES

This interview is yours, Monk. Not Emma's. What does the voice tell you?

MONK

That it's too soon.

FRANCES

Then perhaps it is.

SHE moves to EXIT.

MONK

Wait. Stop.

FRANCES

Yes?

MONK

I had a vision and a Voice spoke to me. I won't tell you where or when this happened because some things are meant to be kept sacred and secret. I also won't say what the Voice tells me. It guides me, that is all. It's acceptable that some people may not believe this. People are allowed to make their choices. I am not the first, and I certainly won't be the last.

FRANCES

You're the first artist to publicly proclaim this in your work .

MONK

The world has lost so much of their sense of mysticism. Of spirituality. They try to buy it in a church or in a museum. I am trying to bring it to them with my work. That is my mission.

FRANCES

Is this voice a spiritual deity?

MONK

I have faith in that possibility.

FRANCES

Are you hearing the voice right now?

MONK

Usually it speaks to me here in the studio when I'm alone and involved in my work.

FRANCES

Tell me, Monk, and please, be honest...Do you have a history of drug use?

MONK

This wasn't a drug-induced hallucination.

FRANCES

There are documented cases of these kinds of psychosis--how are we to know that this voice is not a figment of your imagination?

MONK

There are also documented cases of miracles. There are many mysteries in the universe. That's why the world needs faith.

FRANCES

Ah, I see, so the world should have faith in you instead of modern psychiatry?

MONK

Is there not room for both?

FRANCES

You must be aware that some people will categorize this behavior as schizophrenic.

MONK

Every artist has a touch of insanity.

FRANCES

Yes, and some do drastic acts because of it, like chop off an ear. What will you do?

MONK

Van Gogh had more than just a touch.

FRANCES

And how are we to measure your level of artistic insanity?

MONK

The world should have faith in the work I create.

FRANCES

How can the world have faith in a man who disavows his own name, hides behind an image, hides underneath a holy robe?

MONK

I thought you might be understanding, but I see you're a skeptic like the rest of the media.

FRANCES

I am being objective, as I promised. I simply want to know your process, find out about the man under that robe.

MONK

You want to know me, know how I work, the Voice I hear--you think you could ever fathom what it means to be an artist? What could you possibly know about beauty and truth? All you critics know is how to leech off humanity, judging art as if you're an objective observer. But the truth is you're hollow inside without any faith at all. Want to see the man under these robes?

HE takes off his robe, drops it to the ground, is wearing jeans and t-shirt underneath.

MONK

Scratch off the paint to see the canvas. That's all critics know how to do.

FRANCES

I'm not the first to question your visions and I certainly won't be the last. As for us critics being leeches, think about how you are stealing your ideas from all the old masters who came before you. It might be a humbling experience for you to meditate on that.

EXIT FRANCES.

MONK

(To the Voice.)

I know what I'm doing!

(Beat.)

They are ready! It's time! I'm not arguing with you but I'm growing impatient with their constant skepticism. I won't wait for the last installation for the revelation.

(Beat.)

No! The time is now.

(Beat.)

I'm not listening to you. Leave me alone!

EXIT MONK. Beat. NORMAN and HARMONY emerge from their hiding place. NORMAN holding a hand-sized mirror in his hand.

HARMONY

God, my fucking legs are killing me. I would've rather spent the night in jail than in that cramped closet with you.

NORMAN

Did you hear what he said?

HARMONY

All night long he sat there, not doing anything.

NORMAN

He was meditating.

HARMONY

Let's get out of here before we get caught.

NORMAN

I want one of these mirrors.

HARMONY

Norman, come on.

NORMAN

I think he's telling us to look at ourselves, y'know, like really see ourselves as we are.

MONK ENTERS.

MONK

What are you two doing here?

HARMONY

Shit. Norman?

NORMAN

It is my honor to meet you, master.

(He bows.)

Harmony, bow in front of the master.

HARMONY

Get off the floor, Norman!

NORMAN

My name is Color now.

MONK

Whoever you two are, get out before I call the cops!

HARMONY

He's really sorry, but he's not well. Norman, come on!

HARMONY EXITS running.

MONK

What are you? Another critic here to hound me?

NORMAN

Please forgive this intrusion. I am simply a devoted follower seeking answers.

MONK

Don't follow me. Follow your friend, instead. Out the door.

(To Voice.)

He is not!

NORMAN

Who are you talking to?

MONK

(To Voice.)

I didn't ask for this! Make him go away!

NORMAN

Are you talking to the Voice?

MONK

I didn't ask you to be my follower. Do you hear me?

NORMAN

I just want to be like you.

MONK

Be yourself.

NORMAN

How do we hear the Voice? Please, tell me! How do we get the divine ear?

MONK

Stop looking at me like that!

NORMAN

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Forgive me...looking at you like what?

MONK

Like that...that face, like I'm more than just a man!

NORMAN

Is it because I'm not worthy to look at your face, is that why?

MONK

Stop it! Get out of here! NOW!

NORMAN

I shall make myself worthy, master!

HE runs off, trips on MONK'S robe, and falls. HE grabs it, then EXITS.

MONK

Hey! That's my robe!

(To the Voice.)

What's going on? Tell me what's going to happen.

(Silence.)

Silence is my answer!

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Title: Gattamelata

Title: Florence, 1494

SOUND of THUNDER and rain. LIGHTS UP on SAVONAROLA by the fire trying to dry his robe. ENTER BOTTICELLI who gives him some red wine.

SAVONAROLA

I assure you, I do not abhor all art. I seek beauty and truth, just as any great artist does.

BOTTICELLI

Is your robe dry, yet?

SAVONAROLA

Yes, almost. Thank you again for the hospitality. The storm came up so suddenly and I had nowhere else to go.

BOTTICELLI

(Begins to exit.)

Simone should be along soon. He usually sits for dinner and can entertain you--

SAVONAROLA

Sandro, please. I am glad that Providence brought such a torrential rainfall upon me in front of your doorstep. It allows me a chance to find some grace in your heart.

BOTTICELLI

The same grace you show Lorenzo's son in your sermons?

SAVONAROLA

Piero fights against the city council, Sandro. Not just me. He does not have the same air of authority as Lorenzo once had. Have you ever seen Donatello's statue of Gattamelata?

BOTTICELLI

In Padua? Yes, of course. Many times. The technique is superb.

SAVONAROLA

When I look at art, I see more than just the technique.

BOTTICELLI

Beauty begins with technique.

SAVONAROLA

Beauty begins with the purity of the artist. Let me explain. I was there when they commemorated that statue.

Projection: Photo of Donatello's "Gattemeleta"

ENTER YOUNG SAVONAROLA, looks up as if looking at the statue. SOUND of crowds, cheers, horse and carriages.

SAVONAROLA

I was only a boy at the time. There was this massive, noisy crowd surrounding it, but the magnificent statue rose above all of those heads like some tower pushing through a sea of clouds. My father hurried me along but I was transfixed and couldn't stop staring.

GIOVANNI SAVONAROLA grabs YOUNG SAVONAROLA and pulls him away.

SAVONAROLA

The entire journey home I kept thinking of the feelings this statue stirred up within me--I was elated, inspired, and awed. I had attained these feelings simply from looking at a material object. And I wondered how this artist took this solid piece of bronze and created that feeling within me. I wanted that power, and that want became a desire, this fire raging in my belly. Could I ever move people this way? I did not know.

BOTTICELLI

I can see how you might compare an artist with a preacher. Like art, you have that power now, to move people through your sermons.

SAVONAROLA

But should art always have that power?

BOTTICELLI

It wouldn't be great art without it.

SAVONAROLA

The statue is a masterpiece, yes, and it stirred up feelings, true. But I felt some dark, unnameable feeling lurking underneath this sublime pleasure. A feeling that something wasn't right. Many times I went to Padua and finally came to a realization. This artist was praising man in all his glory. This artist was lifting man up on a pedestal as if he were a God, and this idolatry was being masqueraded as technique. Why did no one else in Padua see how this moral line was being crossed?

BOTTICELLI

Perhaps they only recognized humanity as a thing of beauty created by God.

SAVONAROLA

But there is a difference between recognizing beauty and exaggeration, Sandro. If I were to paint you as a purple man with large ears and tangled green hair, you would say it was a misrepresentation of your true self, wouldn't you? To sculpt a man as if he were immortal, worthy of praise, is idolatry.

BOTTICELLI

Girolamo, you act as if those in Padua were kneeling and praying to this statue every Sunday instead of attending mass.

SAVONAROLA

I seem stern, but whoever passes by the statue is paying homage. All it takes is one cursory glance.

BOTTICELLI

And what is the damage?

SAVONAROLA

Don't you see how Lucifer wants to steal your soul one moment at a time? He is patient, my friend, and he will win if you let him. Striving for purity of spirit is like swimming-- you can never stop or you'll sink.

BOTTICELLI

And what of the beauty of man? As God's creation, don't you think we honor God in showing ourselves as beautiful and proud?

SAVONAROLA

Pride comes before a fall.

BOTTICELLI picks up some papers and shows them to SAVONAROLA. On the projection screen we see some of Botticelli's preliminary drawings for Dante's Inferno.

BOTTICELLI

Art is about more than literal representation. See this drawing here?

SAVONAROLA

What is that hideous beast?

BOTTICELLI

It's from Dante's Inferno. Do you think this creature really exists? Do you think Hell is really as Dante describes? It is a metaphor, which art should always strive to be.

ENTER SIMONE running.

SIMONE

Fra Savonarola! There is an urgent message from Rome.

SAVONAROLA

Ah, Pope Alexander calls yet again. What? Is he offering me another Cardinalship to silence me?

SIMONE

It might be concerning your last letter.

BOTTICELLI

The Holy Church does not take kindly to being reprimanded.

SIMONE

There is talk of excommunication.

SAVONAROLA

There is also talk of martyrdom. Perhaps he is taking my statement about wearing red a bit too far? Let me see this letter.

(Reads.)

Sandro, I must be off.

SIMONE

You can use my cape for the rain, brother.

SAVONAROLA

Andiamo. Buona notte, Sandro. I hope to continue our conversation.

BOTTICELLI

In the next storm, Girolamo.

THEY EXIT as BOTTICELLI goes to his drawings.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Title: Face of God Pt. III

Title: or

Title: Return of the Haiku Parrot

LIGHTS UP on the black velour curtain now back in place in the center, hiding another object. EMMA, FRANCES, and KAJI are standing in front of the curtain.

KAJI

First he learn small words, like “cracker” and I use that to teach him other words.

EMMA

So when did you discover Horiku’s capacity for spouting haikus?

FRANCES

Yes, and was it something you had to teach him?

KAJI

I no teach. You no instruct any creature. You have talent or you no have talent. He playful parrot, lots of fun.

FRANCES

But is he conscious of his creative powers?

KAJI

I know not. Ask him.

FRANCES

Uh...okay.

(To Horiku.)

Horiku?

HORIKU

Polly want a cracker.

KAJI

He love that bit. Say it over and over. I like to kill myself for teaching it to him.

FRANCES

Horiku, how do you make such beautiful poems?

HORIKU

Bitch whore fuck you!

EMMA

Oh, now, really! Isn't there any way you can stop him from doing that, Kaji?

KAJI

Sorry, no, he have problem with dirty words. Horiku, answer. How you create poem?

HORIKU

Feeling. Thoughts. Merge with images. Beauty.

FRANCES

Amazing. Spoken like a true artist.

HORIKU

Art is from the soul.

KAJI

And soon, he shall paint large canvases in style of Jackson Pollock, just like I tell you.

EMMA

It'll be just like that chimpanzee that paints! Only even more astounding! People will be able to witness the parrot making the artwork. It's going to put Soho Millennium Artworks on the map.

HORIKU

Art is from the soul.

ENTER MONK.

MONK

(To Emma.)

How can you do this to me?

EMMA

Monk, what are you doing out here? You never come out before your big unveiling.

MONK

I need to talk to you.

EMMA

Have you met Kaji and Horiku?

FRANCES

The “Parrot Poet”, I’m calling him. He’s going to start painting soon.

MONK

Yeah, great. Pleasure to meet you.

KAJI

Many thanks. Me big fan!

MONK grabs EMMA away from FRANCES and
KAJI.

MONK

Why did you bump me for the grand opening at Soho Millennium Artworks?

EMMA

You need more time with your work. Kaji is ready today.

MONK

I told you. I can be ready.

EMMA

And I told you not to tell the New York Times that you had a vision and heard a voice.

MONK

I didn’t tell them the details. And it hasn’t hurt my image at all.

HORIKU

Art is from the soul.

EMMA

No, it’s only made you a media target and cult figure with hordes of absent-minded followers.

MONK

I can handle those zealots. They’re nothing.

HORIKU

Art is from the soul.

EMMA

Nothing? They congregate outside the gallery for every show. When those robed goons found out you were the opener at my Soho Artworks, my staff couldn't even find the door to the building because of the huge mob.

MONK

So hire security.

HORIKU

Art is from the soul.

EMMA

I did! Perhaps you should consider changing your image. Go for something, I don't know, maybe a little less...religious.

MONK

It's not religion...it's...it's mystical, spiritual, but it's not--.

HORIKU

Art is from the soul.

MONK

(To Kaji.)

Will you shut that fucking bird up!

EMMA

Make it different. People need to see something new. Be provocative all you want, but do it in a fresh way. Like the parrot.

MONK

I need your support.

EMMA

You think so? This past year alone your work has been seen at MassMoca, the Guggenheim in Bilbao, and the Venice Biennale. Next month you'll be the youngest artist to ever have a retrospective at MoMA. The whole world is at its knees. What more are you looking for?

MONK

When I finish the series, it's going to be--

VOICE

And now, ladies and gentlemen, The Whittenberg Gallery proudly presents Monk's newest installation, "The Face of God Pt. III".

EMMA

You better get up there in the spotlight, don't you think?

MONK moves to his spot near the curtain, as it lifts and reveals a mirror standing upright. Silence. SOUNDS of crowd muttering. Light applause. EMMA, KAJI and a FRANCES, step forward to admire the work.

FRANCES

It's so predictable, this work, and repetitive. He did so much with mirrors earlier on in his career. And are all those robed followers part of the concept, now? It's all becoming muddled in abstraction.

EMMA

I like the abstraction.

FRANCES

It's funny how talent just dries up, like oils fading on canvas. Now, Kaji, take your parrot painting like Pollock--that will change the fabric of the art world forever.

KAJI

It like divine gift.

FRANCES

Who would think that neo-abstract expressionism would come from poultry?

ENTER HARMONY and NORMAN, both wearing trench coats to hide their robes and mirror necklaces underneath.

NORMAN

Come, Harmony, quickly, so they don't see us. We'll only have one chance at this.

HARMONY

Are you sure we should do this in here, Norman?

NORMAN

Color! My name is Color now! Look at the installation! Didn't I tell you about the mirrors? He's trying to tell us something about our own faces!

HARMONY

Yeah, Color, you're a genius.

NORMAN

(Points to Monk.)

There he is!

HARMONY

Now?

NORMAN

Wait. I want to get closer to him. I'll give you the signal.

KAJI approaches MONK, and talks as if he is quite younger than he seemed before, and his English is perfect. NORMAN slinks around behind them, eavesdropping on the conversation.

KAJI

(Whispering)

Hey, don't be so hard on yourself.

HORIKU

Squawk! Bullshit. All art is bullshit.

KAJI

Shut up, parrot! I'm talking to a genius here.

MONK

Have you seen Emma?

HORIKU

Bob is an asshole! Bob is an asshole!

KAJI

Keep talking, little birdy, and tomorrow night it's parrot stew for dinner.

(To Monk. Whispers.)

Look, I just wanted to tell you I'm sorry I stole most of your funding Whittenberg.

MONK

You didn't steal anything from me. And why are you whispering?

KAJI

If these people find out I spoke English so well I'd be toast. Anyway, I don't want any hard feelings because I, like, really admire you, y'know? I did my thesis on your "Looking at Looking" installation.

HORIKU

Polly was a crackwhore! Brawk!

MONK

I thought you were from Japan?

KAJI

No, San Francisco. Real name's Bob Smith. I'm an invention, "the artist as art". Great concept, right?

MONK

Art is not just about concepts. It is about truth and beauty.

KAJI

Yeah, as long as the ideas sell, right, man? Artists who hear a Voice. Animals that create. It doesn't even matter what's real.

MONK

The parrot doesn't write the Haikus? Or paint?

HORIKU

Scam! Bullshit artist!

KAJI

So what if I trained a parrot to recite poems? These people want to believe it. Just like they want to believe you hear voices.

MONK

I do hear a Voice.

KAJI

Hey, don't worry, you're secret is safe with me.

MONK grabs him by the shirt.

MONK

In the Uffizi of Florence! I had a vision in front of Botticelli's Venus!

KAJI

Don't cause a scene, all right?

ENTER EMMA. KAJI instantly changes his mannerisms into his "character".

EMMA

Ah, the two most talented artists of the new millennium chatting in a corner. Whatever could they be talking about?

KAJI

(Broken English)

Ah, hewwo, Mrs. Whittenberg.

EMMA

(To Monk)

I do hope my little genius is not sulking about this mediocre reaction to your latest work.

MONK

I don't care about the reactions as long they know it's true, not some artistic sham that some charlatans try masquerade as art by training--

KAJI

(Interrupting.)

Emma, you are, how I say, quite beautiful. Shall you like to dance?

EMMA

Oh, why thank you. I'd love to.

KAJI puts Horiku down and takes her hand. HE and EMMA dance in the background. NORMAN moves back to HARMONY

HARMONY

What'd you hear?

NORMAN

Something about the Uffizi.

HORIKU

Ass crack backwards! Squawk!

MONK

Say a haiku for me, birdy. Oh, that's right, you don't write them, do you?

HORIKU

Blow me sideways! Polly was a crackwhore! Squawk!

MONK

Eat this, you little--

MONK grabs the bird by the throat. IT bites him.

MONK

Ow!

HORIKU

Bwawk! Try it again! Try it again!

MONK grabs the bird, this time successfully strangling it with both hands.

HARMONY

Now?

NORMAN

Yes! For the glory of God!

NORMAN runs up to the installation and takes off the trench coat, revealing Monk's old robe underneath. HE has a big mirror necklace which he proceeds to hold up to everyone. HARMONY copies his actions, keeping the crowd at bay by holding a mirror up to their face.

NORMAN

(Shouting)

LOOK AT YOUR CHERUBIC FACES! GOD SPEAKS TO YOU EVERY DAY AND YOU ARE DEAF TO HIS EARS! THE ORDER OF MONKS HAS COME!

MONK

Oh, crap.

Still holding the bird, MONK EXITS. KAJI and EMMA stop dancing.

EMMA

Security!

NORMAN

MONK IS A PROPHET AND WE ARE HIS SOLDIERS! BOW DOWN TO HIS ART AND HEAR THE VOICE SPEAK TO--hey , get away from me! I was only--

A SECURITY GUARD runs to NORMAN and chases him, eventually both EXIT. KAJI looks towards where the bird used to be.

KAJI

Horiku?

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE FIFTEEN

Title: "Art is useless."

Title: "Go home."

LIGHTS UP on ARTEMISIA painting COYOTE. HE moves to the canvas. The fire burns in the center of the ring.

COYOTE

No, no. Too much red there.

ARTEMISIA

Do you have an MFA in fine arts?

COYOTE

No.

ARTEMISIA

Well, I do. You must trust the painter or all will be ruined.

COYOTE

I know beauty when I see it.

ARTEMISIA

Go sit down on that rock and let me do my work.

COYOTE

What is that circle there in the middle?

ARTEMISIA

It is a hole in honor of Spider Woman, so that my spirit does not get caught up in the canvas.

COYOTE

That shouldn't be there. You are not a weaver.

ARTEMISIA

It is my painting.

COYOTE

It is my portrait.

SHE gives him her brush.

ARTEMISIA

Then you do it.

COYOTE

I am not a painter.

ARTEMISIA

But this is your portrait.

COYOTE

It is your painting. I only wanted to help.

ARTEMISIA

You can help by sitting down and waiting.

COYOTE

Coyote hates waiting.

ARTEMISIA

Then Coyote can paint this picture himself.

COYOTE

It's not so hard. I can do it. Watch me.

As HE takes the brush in his hand, MONK enters, his clothes and hands covered in blood, shouting to the Voice. ARTEMISIA drinks from a bottle of water and watches COYOTE struggle.

MONK

Art is about making sacrifices! You've blessed a fool with a talking parrot while I will be cursed with obscurity. I'm finished. This is the last one. Do you hear me?!

COYOTE paints, but like a five year, clumsy and hard and eventually gets frustrated, throwing the canvas to the ground.

COYOTE

The brushes are against me!

MONK

They're all against me!

COYOTE

They go wherever they want, not where I want them to go!

MONK

They all think I'm crazy!

ARTEMISIA

You are not a painter.

MONK

How do I know what you are? How do I know Your face?

COYOTE

No.

ARTEMISIA

I'm glad we got that straight. Now sit down and get out of the way.

MONK

I'm tired of believing in false truths! It's all a big scam, like the parrot!

ARTEMISIA

Now sit down and get out of the way.

MONK

No more! You hear me?! NO MORE! Leave me forever!

(Beat.)

I don't care. LEAVE ME!

Projection of Masaccio's "Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden".

MONK

Hello?

ENTER KAJI looking for his bird.

KAJI

Horiku?

SHE gets a new canvas and goes back to painting him.

MONK

Are you gone?

KAJI

Monk? Where you go with Horiku?

MONK

(Looks at his bloody hands.)

What have I done?

MONK crumples down on his knees. LIGHTS
CHANGE.

SCENE SIXTEEN

Title: The Face of God Pt. XXXVII

The scenes cut back and forth from the Museum of Modern Art to the Medici palace to Spider Rock.

LIGHTS UP on ARTEMISIA and COYOTE.

COYOTE

Are you going to make me look taller?

ARTEMISIA

Be quiet. I'm almost done.

COYOTE

Can you make me thinner? Not my legs, though. Make me look strong like buffalo.

LIGHTS show a black curtain hanging on the wall, covering something up, and on EMMA, and FRANCES in formal clothes. HARMONY and NORMAN are in the back. KAJI continues to wander around the stage, looking around, as if still trapped in the previous scene.

FRANCES

I can't reiterate it enough, Monk is far too young for a retrospective at MoMA. Honestly, have you ever seen it so deserted?

EMMA

Frances, this unveiling tonight of the new installation is bound to reveal uncharted territory.

FRANCES

Is that so?

EMMA

Monk told me that himself.

FRANCES

Is this before or after he mysteriously disappeared?

KAJI

Horiku?

LIGHTS UP on SAVONAROLA and
MICHELANGELO in Medici's palace.
SAVONAROLA is showing him some architectural
plans.

Title: No King but Christ

Title: Florence, 1495

Title: Savonarola assumes power

SAVONAROLA

...and the room would measure twenty three by fifty-three meters, here being the pulpit
and here being the altar. There will be twelve windows which would be ample light for the
frescoes...here and here.

MICHELANGELO

And what will be on these frescoes?

SAVONAROLA

I suggested to the Great Council the sacrifice of Isaac.

MICHELANGELO

Who is being considered for the other wall?

SAVONAROLA

I have my choice between Botticelli and Leonardo.

MICHELANGELO

Is that even a choice? No one has mastered frescoes like Botticelli and everyone knows he
is a great follower of yours.

SAVONAROLA

Yes, I love him dearly and he is more than qualified for such a great commission. However,
his brush may be too soaked in humanist ideals.

LIGHTS OUT on SAVONAROLA and
MICHELANGELO.

EMMA

He's just being shy, that's all.

FRANCES

He's been "shy" for several months.

EMMA

I must admit that not showing up for his own retrospective at MoMA is a bit extreme, even for his modicum of eccentricity.

FRANCES

Do you think he was kidnapped by those zealots?

EMMA

Even they wouldn't dare cross the line from prank to kidnapping.

KAJI

Horiku?

FRANCES

Perhaps it's a desperate attempt to regain some notoriety. This disappearance could merely be an extension of his art form, using the absence of his presence to reinforce the idea of the absence of man in the face of spiritualism. As before, he hides away in a cocoon, to emerge yet again with a new artistic identity.

EMMA

Oh, you're almost as banal as that parrot.

FRANCES

Excuse me?

EMMA

I said, "I wonder why no one has found that parrot."

ENTER SIMONE with two members of the FRATESCHI, wearing white robes.

SIMONE

Fra Savonarola, the Council wants to know your decisions about where to dispose of some of the Medici paintings.

SAVONAROLA

Put it out with the rest of the refuse, Simone.

SIMONE

But don't you think that the--

SAVONAROLA

What?

SIMONE

The Massaccio should be spared.

SAVONAROLA

No. Everything in this house has been tainted.

SIMONE

And my brother's work?

SAVONAROLA

I haven't time to pick and choose. This palace should be purged of all idolatries.

(To Michelangelo.)

Excuse me, Michelangelo, but ever since King Charles's departure every moment is spent-

MICHELANGELO

I understand. We will talk more later.

SAVONAROLA

I look forward to it. Florence welcomes you back from your travels.

ENTER BOTTICELLI.

BOTTICELLI

(Shouting.)

Is there a reason why your sniveling band of brothers is hauling all of my paintings into the streets?

SIMONE

Sandro, you can't just barge into--

SAVONAROLA

It's all right, Simone. Show Michelangelo out and let us be alone. It is good to see you, Sandro.

SIMONE nods and MICHELANGELO follows him as they both EXIT.

BOTTICELLI

I thought you might be salvaging Lorenzo's collection, not destroying it.

SAVONAROLA

I'm sorry it angers you, but it is not your concern.

BOTTICELLI

Some of those works are the most beautiful things ever created.

SAVONAROLA

They are secular and profane. Is this the only reason you've come to see me? Over a few vanities?

BOTTICELLI

No. I came here to plead for the lives of the five men you hold in custody.

SAVONAROLA

Why? What do you want with those traitors?

BOTTICELLI

Their only crime is their support for the Medici.

SAVONAROLA

And that is crime enough. Piero may have fled the city but he still poses a threat to the government. The Council wants to be free from the Medici's tyranny.

BOTTICELLI

Is it by your decree or the Council's that they be executed?

SAVONAROLA

Do not think that men rule this city anymore. Christ reigns here now.

BOTTICELLI

These five men have families.

SAVONAROLA

All supporters of Lorenzo's poison should be so justly killed.

BOTTICELLI

Including me?

SAVONAROLA

No, Sandro! I would never harm you. How can you think that?

BOTTICELLI

But you would harm my work. Your white-robed yearlings smashed up my workshop in their patrol of the city for vanities.

SAVONAROLA

The Frateschi order has been established to restore Florence's purity. I am sorry your workshop was destroyed. It will be rebuilt better than before.

BOTTICELLI

The city is in a state of disarray and your Frateschi go around collecting mirrors and earrings.

SAVONAROLA

Mirrors are windows into vanity.

BOTTICELLI

We need rulers that can rebuild this city, rulers like the Medici family--

SAVONAROLA

We need order!

(Beat.)

Let me ask you something...if you had the power to make the world beautiful, to change the appearance of the sky to match the colors of your paints, to change people's faces so they all possessed your cherubic smile, would you not do it?

BOTTICELLI

You go too far.

LIGHTS up on HARMONY and NORMAN.

HARMONY

Norman, don't you think this time we're going a bit too far?

SAVONAROLA

God will decide that.

NORMAN

All right, that's it! If you don't get my name right, you're out of the cult.

LIGHTS OUT on BOTTICELLI and SAVONAROLA.

HARMONY

There's not much of the cult left, is there? Everyone is getting tired of being arrested for stupid pranks in museums. Monk is gone, disappeared, and what are we supposed to do? Who do we follow now? You?

NORMAN

He will give us a sign, Harmony. Have faith in that.

LIGHTS OUT on HARMONY and NORMAN and
back up on BOTTICELLI and SAVONAROLA

SAVONAROLA

The winds of change blow swiftly in this modern world and an artist should change with it. The city of Florence will no longer approve of some of your Venus paintings. They desire depictions of God.

BOTTICELLI

And Michelangelo will give that to you?

SAVONAROLA

He understands the necessity, yes.

BOTTICELLI

And if I do not understand?

SAVONAROLA

Do you love me, Sandro?

BOTTICELLI

As any fellow man.

SAVONAROLA

Do you love God?

BOTTICELLI

Of course.

SAVONAROLA

If you love me, then think of me as a friend. Not an enemy. If you love God, then you should idolize Him. I am asking you to create with your brush for God.

BOTTICELLI

I will not turn my back on my work.

SAVONAROLA

Turn your back on your former self. Turn your back on sin. Will you do that?

LIGHTS UP on COYOTE and ARTEMISIA as she finishes painting.

ARTEMISIA

I'm finished. Take your painting and go fetch Spider Woman.

COYOTE

Let me see. I will decide if you are done.

ARTEMISIA unveils the canvas to COYOTE at the same time as LIGHTS UP on EMMA, FRANCES, KAJI, NORMAN and HARMONY.

ARTEMISIA

It is called "Face of the Trickster."

VOICE

And now, ladies and gentlemen, MoMA is proud to present, courtesy of a generous grant from the Whittenberg Foundation, Monk's installation exhibit "The Face of God Pt. XXXVII".

The black curtain rises, revealing the dead body of Horiku, crucified upside down on a small wooden cross which has been mounted on a large, white canvas, now stained and dripping with blood. It's as if the crucified parrot has been inserted into a macabre version of a Jackson Pollock painting. At the same time as the unveiling, SOUND of drums beating.

EMMA

Oh my!

FRANCES

Dear God!

NORMAN

It is the sign!

HARMONY

Holy shit.

LIGHTS OUT on all but KAJI who continues looking around, not seeing the monstrosity.

KAJI

Horiku?

LIGHTS OUT. END ACT ONE

ACT TWO: HEALING

SCENE ONE

Title: The Face of God Pt. XXXVII

SOUND of Navajo drums and flute as LIGHTS UP.
The set arrangement is almost the same as the previous scene, except Horiku is not pinned up on the canvas and EMMA, FRANCES, KAJI, NORMAN, and HARMONY are faced towards us with more focus on their reactions. ARTEMISIA and COYOTE are, as before.

ARTEMISIA

I'm finished. Take your painting and go fetch Spider Woman.

COYOTE

Let me see. I will decide if you are done.

BOTTICELLI

I will not turn my back on my work.

SAVONAROLA

Turn your back on your former self. Turn your back on sin. Will you do that?

ARTEMISIA unveils the canvas.

ARTEMISIA

It is called "Face of the Trickster."

VOICE

And now, ladies and gentlemen, MoMA is proud to present, courtesy of a generous grant from the Whittenberg Foundation, Monk's installation exhibit "The Face of God Pt. XXXVII".

EMMA

Oh my!

FRANCES

Dear God!

NORMAN

It is the sign!

HARMONY

Holy shit.

KAJI

Horiku?

(Sees Horiku and runs to the body.)

HORIKU! Why?! Why did you kill Horiku?!

COYOTE

This is not beautiful!

ARTEMISIA

It's abstract.

COYOTE

This is not me!

ARTEMISIA

I told you, it's abstract.

COYOTE

This is not sacred! This is not me!

ARTEMISIA

I have done what you asked. Fetch Spider Woman.

COYOTE

No! Paint me again.

LIGHTS UP on SAVONAROLA preaching.

SAVONAROLA

God speaks to me, people of Florence. Was I not right about my predictions? Did I not predict King Charles and his march through the city? Did I not predict that Pope Innocent VIII would die? Trust in me, Florentines. Trust in me the way you trusted in the Medicis of times past.

(Shouts.)

LIVE FREE, FLORENTINES! LIVE FREE FROM YOUR SINS!

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE TWO

Title: "Where do you get your ideas?"

Title: or

Title: That's where you died.

LIGHTS up on MONK and BOY. EMMA, FRANCES, NORMAN, HARMONY and KAJI freeze. The drums and flute continue in the background. MONK sits on a bench, holding a red balloon, while the BOY sucks a lollipop. MONK now wears jeans and a t-shirt, looking ragged, his hands still bloody.

Projection of "The Storm" by Giorgione.

MONK

Nobody knows where they come from. These ideas. Like a flash of lightning in the night, some mystical brightness illuminates the darkness, sizzles the ground, lighting the world. But where do they originate from? The intricate workings of the subconscious mind? The lower depths of our psyche? From some God as we imagine him with a white beard? If I told you that I had conversations with an almighty power, would you believe me or think I was crazy? Could you prove to me I didn't? Could I prove that I did? Maybe I am crazy. Every artist has a touch of insanity.

(Beat.)

Inspiration. Divine Gift. Divine Curse. The great fear is that this gift of fire will be quenched, stolen from us in the darkness. We clutch our gifts closely to our chest, afraid that if we send them out into the world, they will never be replenished. It is creative greed. We're afraid because we never know when the next idea will appear. Could be days. Could be years. And everyone is waiting. Waiting. Including you. Especially you. And the great fear is that you may never receive another idea again. What do you do then? So we clutch them tighter and tighter until...

(HE squeezes the balloon until it pops.)

See, this is the Great Mystery. I'm not allowed to talk about the Great Mystery. When people ask me where I get my ideas I'm just supposed to shrug and look brilliant. There's this belief that if you talk about the Great Mystery, it kills all your ideas for eternity. That's silly, huh?

BOY

I'm not supposed to go on the swings after lunchtime.

MONK

What happens if you do?

BOY

I get punished.

MONK

It's very similar.

BOY

Can I have my balloon back?

MONK

But it's popped. What are you going to do with it?

BOY puts the ruined balloon below his nose.

BOY

I can make it into my mustache.

(Changes voice.)

"Hello, I'm Mr. Mustache. What's your name?"

MONK

My name is Monk. No. No, it's Alan.

BOY

"What are you doing here, Alan?"

MONK

I am here because I am afraid I will run out of ideas.

BOY

"You should grow a mustache. It will help you get ideas."

MONK

You are very wise.

BOY

"You seem so sad. Why are you so sad?"

MONK

I killed an innocent parrot.

BOY

(Drops voice.)

What makes you think the parrot was so innocent?

MONK

What did you say?

BOY

Did you think you could cast me away so easily? Or that I would never speak to you again?

MONK

Who are you?

BOY

Some know me as Spider Woman. Some know me as Venus. Which do you prefer?

MONK

It was Venus who spoke to me.

BOY

I don't look much like her, do I?

MONK

What's going on?

BOY

Don't worry. You'll see. All will be revealed.

MONK

I told you not to talk to me again. Why won't you leave me alone?

BOY

It is time to go back to Florence. To the Uffizi.

MONK

I'm never going back there.

BOY

You never left. Want to know a secret? That's where you died.

MONK

What are you talking about? I'm not dead.

BOY

You have much to learn and not much time.

EXIT BOY laughing and running.

MONK

Wait! Where are you going?

HARMONY

Hey, where are you going?

NORMAN and HARMONY move.

BOY

To Florence! To Florence! I'll see you in Florence!

MONK EXITS following BOY.

NORMAN

I want to get a closer look.

HARMONY

They're going to catch us.

THEY walk up behind KAJI, EMMA and FRANCES.

KAJI

(Without accent.)

Get him down! Get him down now! You hear me?!

EMMA

Kaji, stay away from that. Security!

KAJI

If you think he can take my parrot then--

FRANCES

What happened to your accent?

EMMA

It's artwork now. You can't touch it!

KAJI

If you don't get my parrot down off that wall right now, I'll sue!

EMMA

What is that? A threat?

KAJI

If you commissioned Monk to kill my parrot, I'll sue you for all you're worth!

EMMA

What happened to your voice? You don't even sound Japanese anymore.

FRANCES

His accent is completely gone.

KAJI

God, you people are so dense! Who cares about my accent?! Horiku has been murdered! Someone is going to pay for this!

EXIT KAJI. EMMA and FRANCES walk closer to Horiku, staring intently.

EMMA

Just look at that--Have you ever seen anything like this?

FRANCES

Damien Hirst came close but at least he established certain boundaries. This crosses the line from art to animal brutality.

NORMAN

Isn't that the most beautiful thing you've ever seen?

HARMONY

I don't know. What is it?

FRANCES

Beyond the obvious cruelty, it is also a revolting use of a mixed medium.

NORMAN

What is it? It's the sign. Monk is telling us what we should be.

HARMONY

We should become dead parrots?

EMMA

Ew, disgusting! It's already starting to smell. Hasn't Monk ever heard of formaldehyde?

NORMAN

Yes. We should destroy ourselves, our own image, and turn the world upside-down.

HARMONY

You're talking metaphorically, right?

NORMAN

God, it's beautiful.

FRANCES

Atrocious!

EMMA

Hideous!

Pause. They all stare.

FRANCES

My eyes are completely transfixed.

EMMA

I can't seem to stop looking at it.

THEY continue to stare as LIGHTS change.

SCENE THREE

Title: Crossing the Threshold

Title: May , 1497

Title: Pope Alexander VI excommunicates Savonarola.

SAVONAROLA kneeling in prayer and nearby is DONATELLO, sketching. ENTER SIMONE and BOTTICELLI and YOUNG SAVONAROLA, holding rolls of paper, with his father, GIOVANNI.

SIMONE

He hasn't eaten in three days. You must go to him, Sandro.

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

Go to him, papa.

GIOVANNI

Are you certain you want this?

BOTTICELLI

What good can I do?

SIMONE

He respects you.

BOTTICELLI

He condemns my work.

GIOVANNI

He may not like your work.

SIMONE

Some of your work, true. But he admires and respects you as an artist and a man of God. Look at him, in fervent prayer. The man is a saint.

BOTTICELLI

I thought he was a prophet.

SIMONE

Go to him.

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

Please, papa. Go to him.

BOTTICELLI

Why don't you?

SIMONE

I have been to him three times already. He calls for you.

SIMONE motions for him to go, and BOTTICELLI approaches SAVONAROLA. YOUNG SAVONAROLA and GIOVANNI approach DONATELLO.

BOTTICELLI

Fra Savonarola? Please, eat something. My brother grows concerned for your well-being.

GIOVANNI

Signor Donatello, mi dispiace. May I say that the entire town of Ferrara is honored by--

DONATELLO

I'd gladly sacrifice all your town's honor for one cup of decent wine.

SAVONAROLA

The only sustenance I need is my faith.

BOTTICELLI

Eat something for him, then, for he lacks faith.

GIOVANNI

Boy! Run and get Signor Donatello some wine.

GIOVANNI bends down to whisper in YOUNG SAVONAROLA's ear as he gives him money and takes the rolled up paper. Exit YOUNG SAVONAROLA.

GIOVANNI

Signore Donatello--my boy--he sketches, draws people, plants, the hillside. Always a big dreamer, loafing, and so I was thinking if you could look at his sketches, see if he has any talent, to either encourage him in this endeavor, or to...

DONATELLO

To quench his desire to be an artist? Show me the drawings, signore.

HE gives the rolled up papers to DONATELLO who quickly looks them over

DONATELLO

Hmm, yes. There is some nice line work.

(He looks at another. Discards it.)

Good attention to designo.

(Looks and discards another.)

Seems moderately comfortable with the materials.

(Discards another)

Huh. He has no concept of perspective. No fluid movement in his characters. No sense of passion.

SAVONAROLA

Your brother means well but he does not have your passion.

DONATELLO

(Looks again. Then discards them violently on the floor.)

Yes. Dreadful work.

BOTTICELLI

I have craft and skill, not passion.

GIOVANNI

Dreadful?

SAVONAROLA

You dishonor your gifts.

BOTTICELLI

You have the gift of passion, not I.

SAVONAROLA

I am only a man, just as the Pope is only a man.

DONATELLO

With time he may do well, but genius does not live within his breast.

BOTTICELLI

What will you do?

SAVONAROLA

I will continue to give mass as usual. The Pope is not an authority and therefore this excommunication means nothing to me.

BOTTICELLI

It means something to the Great Council. They might turn on you without the Church.

SAVONAROLA

They will trust my judgement as always.

BOTTICELLI

Then why do you fast?

SAVONAROLA

I fast in order to hear the voice of God.

BOTTICELLI

Has he spoken to you?

SAVONAROLA

He will. He has before. Does he not guide your brush?

BOTTICELLI

He guides my heart. At least, I hope that he does.

YOUNG SAVONAROLA ENTERS with a glass of red wine.

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

Vino, Signor Donatello.

DONATELLO

Grazie. What is your name, my boy?

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

Girolamo Savonarola.

DONATELLO

Your father tells me you desire to be an artist?

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

Si.

DONATELLO

Why do you spend so much time sketching?

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

It takes me away from my own thoughts.

DONATELLO

Ah, it's an escape. From what?

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

My chores.

GIOVANNI

Girolamo!

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

Mi dispiace, papa.

DONATELLO

It's all right. The boy is honest. A wonderful virtue in an artist. Let me see your hands.

DONATELLO takes the boy's hands, studies them.

SAVONAROLA

Why are you an artist, Sandro Botticelli?

BOTTICELLI

I wanted to make things beautiful.

DONATELLO

You shall go far, my young friend, but I'm sorry to tell you that these are not the hands of an artist.

BOTTICELLI

And what about you?

DONATELLO

Perhaps a more scholarly education, like a doctor, or a monk.

SAVONAROLA watches DONATELLO and YOUNG SAVONAROLA as if revisiting the past.

BOTTICELLI

Why did you become a monk?

YOUNG SAVONAROLA

You didn't like my drawings at all?

DONATELLO

It's not about whether or not they are liked, my boy. The truth is you have no talent.

SAVONAROLA

I don't remember.

(Pause.)

Perhaps I wanted to make people beautiful.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE FOUR

Title: Coyote's Dance

LIGHTS UP on COYOTE and ARTEMISIA as before.

COYOTE

You think you can out-trick the Trickster, do you?

ARTEMISIA

No, that isn't what I--

COYOTE

We agreed you would make me beautiful!

ARTEMISIA

It is beautiful!

COYOTE

You call this monstrosity beauty? I spit on this modern beauty! This is how a white man paints!

ARTEMISIA

I painted how I see your beauty. That's what artists do.

COYOTE

And this is what Coyote does to paintings he does not like. He burns them!

COYOTE throws her canvas into the fire.

ARTEMISIA

NO!

SHE grabs a canteen of water and throws it on the fire.

IT goes out, but the painting has already been too badly burned.

COYOTE

Paint me again.

ARTEMISIA

I painted you once, like we agreed. Now, do what you promised!

COYOTE

Yes, I will do what I promised. I will fetch Spider Woman and tell her that you have frozen the sun. She will wrap you up in a web and eat you for breakfast. No more visions for you, little rabbit. That is what you get for trying to trick the trickster!

ARTEMISIA

She will know you are a liar!

COYOTE

She will see the frozen sun and see you here and it won't matter. She won't have time for questions when I get through telling her about you.

(Beat.)

But, if you paint me again, I promise not to tell Spider Woman about the sun.

ARTEMISIA picks up her stick.

ARTEMISIA

Tell me something, how fast can you run, Coyote?

COYOTE

What do you mean?

ARTEMISIA

If you value your life, you will run as fast as you can.

SHE chases him.

COYOTE

Stay away from Coyote!

ARTEMISIA

They say your heart is in your tail. What if I smash it and throw that into the fire?

COYOTE

You cannot catch me. I will run up to Spider Woman. Her face will be the last thing you ever see.

ARTEMISIA

Go!

COYOTE EXITS, running. LIGHTS UP on HARMONY and EMMA .

HARMONY

Excuse me, Mrs. Whittenberg? Do you know where Monk went?

EMMA

Like I told the rest of the press, I haven't seen him in seven months.

HARMONY

I'm not a reporter. My name is Harmony--no I mean it's not--well, let's just say it's Harmony. I need to find Monk and warn him about Norman. He's the leader of the Order of Parrots.

EMMA

What are you talking about?

HARMONY

(Hands her a notebook.)

Look, give Norman's diary to the cops for me. In here they'll know about the meetings and pranks, but there's also all this stuff about Monk, about death and destruction, shedding blood to bring about apocalypse. I think this time he'll do more than kill some parrots.

EMMA

What do you mean apocalypse?

HARMONY

I don't know. That's why I'm trying to find Monk.

EMMA

Why don't you come with me and you can tell the cops yourself.

HARMONY

No! They'll just arrest me again. Look, I've done what I can. I'm done with the cult. If you talk to Monk, warn him, okay?

HE EXITS.

EMMA

Hey! Come back! Warn him about what?

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE FIVE

Title: The Artist's Studio is his Chapel

Projection of "Birth of Venus"

LIGHTS UP on KAJI, not wearing his samurai fire dress outfit or makeup, but dressed in paint-splattered jeans and t-shirt. HE is working on a large wall-sized collage filled with magazine pictures of different women models, which have been compiled in such a way to be a replica of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus". It is only half complete. HE stops, looks at it, then refers back to a book. There are piles and piles of magazines and clippings all around. ENTER MONK, holding an envelope.

KAJI

What's that?

MONK

Compensation. I wanted to make amends.

KAJI

Why? You doing some weird version of the 12 steps for conceptual artists?

MONK

(Referring to the collage.)

Interesting piece.

KAJI

Yeah, her face still needs fleshing out. I wanted to keep a purist heart about the idea, but I think I'm going to add a neon sign here that says "whore". Oh, and listen to what I wired up when you stand close to it. Go ahead, move towards the face.

MONK moves to the face. A recorded computer voice repeats the phrase:

VOICE

Please leave your message at the beep.

Please leave your message at the beep.

Please leave your message at--

KAJI

Motion sensors. They're triggered by a digital emulator which modulates based on the person's height and weight so that every person hears a different voice. Cool, huh?

MONK

Is life all just one big joke for you?

KAJI

What's a matter, having flashbacks?

MONK

What's it called?

KAJI

"The Total Inadequacy of Experience in an Effort to Conclude Spiritualism."

MONK

It's a bit too intellectual, isn't it?

KAJI

Frances Kimmel loves it.

MONK

This work is derivative crap. Just some asinine, small-minded prank.

KAJI

It's not crap. Derivative, yes, but not crap. Do you have any idea what this piece is about? It's about a feeling you've probably never actually experienced. Inadequacy. See, when I look at Botticelli's Venus, I appreciate the magnificence before me. I think, "I could never do that". Now I know a genius like you probably finger-painted imitation Picassos in pre-school, but for others scrambling about in mediocrity, creating art is not easy. Good art, that is. Venus is the reason I invented the character of Kaji. Because I couldn't paint. Not like Botticelli. When I discovered that an artist--a true artist--didn't have to paint, that he could use any medium he desired, I was overjoyed. Liberated. I could mold ideas in other ways. So I embraced the world of concepts, form and identity. Masks. Do you know what I'm talking about?

MONK

Monk wasn't a mask. He was real, not some joke.

KAJI

You called me a charlatan, but all artists are charlatans. And look at the world--it is all one big joke! I'm only tapping into that.

MONK

I'm sorry I killed your parrot. I'll find you another bird.

KAJI

Another haiku parrot won't be enough for those idea mongers. See, that little incident forced me to move on to another phase.

MONK

What phase is that? From charade to mockery?

KAJI

I used to look up to you. "The Artist as Art". I wanted to be you. Now I'd rather be like Warhol or Rauschenberg, who constantly evolved as artists. Because you...you can't seem to adjust.

MONK

No, I just can't be bought.

KAJI

Cut the holier-than-thou shit, Alan. I know who you really are.

MONK

You know nothing, Bob. You are nothing. You can paint imitation Botticelli's all your life, and you still won't have the experience I had in the Uffizi.

KAJI

Any way you try to sell it to me, it's always going to come out sounding exactly like what it is--a scam.

MONK

Have you no faith at all?

KAJI

You're insane. You really believe you heard voices.

MONK

It was only one. And I don't know what it was. Something mystical.

KAJI

Shh! Do you hear that? That's the voice speaking...what?

(Beat.)

I'll tell him! He says you should give up art completely, move back to Wisconsin and become a garbage man.

MONK

Don't mock me.

KAJI

You think you can escape by running off to some hiding place?

MONK

I'm not trying to escape. I'm looking for inspiration.

KAJI

It's all the same! You think I look for inspiration to invent my artwork? No. I do it by the sweat of the brow, by working it out in my mind. You think Botticelli waited for inspiration? You know what a real artist does? He gets up in the morning, makes coffee, sits in his studio, picks up his tools, and he works. He works.

MONK

Are you sure that's what a real artist does?

KAJI

If you don't mind, I have some work to finish. I can't sit around waiting for lightning to strike.

(MONK goes to grab the envelope.)

If money doesn't matter to you, then you can leave that envelope right there.

EXIT MONK. LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE SIX

Title: Crossing the Threshold Pt. II

SAVONAROLA kneeling as before, chanting in Latin,
ENTER BOTTICELLI and SIMONE. ARTEMISIA is
kneeling by the fire. SHE also chants in Navajo.

SIMONE

He hasn't eaten in three days. You must go to him, Sandro.

BOTTICELLI

What good can I do?

SIMONE

He respects you.

BOTTICELLI

He condemns my work.

SIMONE motions for him to go to SAVONAROLA,
then HE kneels and chants in latin.

SPIDER WOMAN (O.S.)

Who has frozen the sun?
Coveted it like a jewel
To be held and possessed?

ENTER SPIDER WOMAN.

SPIDER WOMAN

Speak, child. Use your tongue if you have one. What is your name?

ARTEMISIA

Are you Spider Woman?

SPIDER WOMAN

All this time you pray to me and you do not recognize me?
Why have you been sitting here, scaring all the snakes and birds?
Why have you frozen the sun and kept it for your self?

ARTEMISIA

I am only an artist seeking your help.

SPIDER WOMAN

That is not what Coyote has told me.

ARTEMISIA

Coyote is a trickster, a teller of tales.

SPIDER WOMAN

He tells me there is a woman who waits for me with magical brushes and medicine to stop the sun. I see you with brushes and a frozen sun and think he tells the truth for once.

ARTEMISIA

Coyote did it. He said he wouldn't release the sun unless I painted his portrait .

SPIDER WOMAN

Your tongue spins more ridiculous tales than his. Why would anyone want a picture of him?

ARTEMISIA

There is beauty even in Coyote.

(Grabs her brushes.)

Look at these brushes--not magical, just worn out and soiled by my paints. I have brought them for your blessing.

SPIDER WOMAN

Where is this painting of him? I would like to see it.

ARTEMISIA

Coyote was unhappy and threw it into the fire.

SPIDER WOMAN

He never likes anything. Very unhappy, that Coyote. Did you like it? Was it good?

ARTEMISIA

It was beautiful. It was exactly how I saw him.

SPIDER WOMAN

Ah, foolish child. Coyote does not like to look at truth.

SIMONE motions for him to approach
SAVONAROLA and BOTTICELLI does so.

SAVONAROLA

We must prepare a fire, Sandro. An altar for the Lord. And into that fire we must throw all of our vanities. The things we love more than God Himself. The extravagant clothes,
(MORE)

the jewelry, the humanist books, the paintings of pagan gods.

(Pause. HE hears something.)

What? Yes, my Lord, he does know. He is a man of God and will do your bidding.

BOTTICELLI

Whom do you speak to, Fra Savonarola?

SAVONAROLA

Do you not hear? God talks with me. He whispers of the apocalypse. We must prepare ourselves.

BOTTICELLI

You are not well. You must eat.

SAVONAROLA

Jesus fasted in the desert for thirty days.

BOTTICELLI

Please, get some sleep.

SAVONAROLA

The devil approached him.

BOTTICELLI

Andiamo, per favore--

SAVONAROLA

(Shouts.)

I AM FINE!

(Speaks to above.)

No, mi dispiace, my Lord. He does not fully understand. Some day they will know.

(To Botticelli)

Come, Sandro, bring your brother to the Piazza della Signoria and bring plenty of wood.

HE EXITS. SIMONE approaches BOTTICELLI.

SPIDER WOMAN

Coyote has lied and for that he will be punished. In you I see no magic. In you there is not even belief in the old ways.

ARTEMISIA

I wouldn't be here if that were true.

SPIDER WOMAN

Wouldn't you? People believe in anything when they are desperate.

ARTEMISIA

I admit I have doubts, but I am here now for my vision.

SPIDER WOMAN

Go home. There are no visions for you here today. You are lucky I don't eat you up right now. Understand?

ARTEMISIA

That's not fair! I waited! I prayed!

SPIDER WOMAN

Go whine to Coyote. He will appreciate the tune of that song.

SPIDER WOMAN walks away.

ARTEMISIA

PLEASE! Spider Woman! Don't go.

SPIDER WOMAN

You are proud and stubborn, but that will only get you so far. If you do not go home, then climb my web to my dwelling up high above. If you possess the courage.

EXIT SPIDER WOMAN. SIMONE goes to
BOTTICELLI.

ARTEMISIA

Spider Woman! Please, come back!

SIMONE

Do you believe in his passion now? Can you deny his calling as a prophet of God?

BOTTICELLI

I do not know what it is I see.

SIMONE

We must walk by faith, not by sight. Come, Sandro, follow me to get some wood.

BOTTICELLI

It is difficult to have faith in what I do not understand.

ARTEMISIA

What about the sun? It's still frozen!

SIMONE

Faith is never easy. Come. Let's build his fire.

ARTEMISIA

Spider Woman!

BOTTICELLI

Va bene. I will follow you.

EXIT SIMONE and BOTTICELLI.

ARTEMISIA

All right. I will follow you.

EXIT ARTEMISIA as LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE SEVEN

Title: Bonfire of the Vanities

Title: or

Title: Botticelli's Dreams

Title: February 7, 1497

Projection: Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus"

LIGHTS UP on MONK and NORMAN as before in the prologue and ACT ONE SCENE THREE.

NORMAN

Tell me the vision. All of it.

MONK

Where do you want to start?

NORMAN

Start at the beginning...

MONK

This is the beginning.

SAVONAROLA preaches as BOTTICELLI and SIMONE enter with wood in hand and exit repeatedly, piling wood in the center area where the fire begins to glow transforming into the bonfire of the vanities.

SAVONAROLA

We must have faith and a purity of heart, children of Florence!

As SAVONAROLA preaches, ENTER the FRATESCHI, all wearing white robes, who dance around him in a frenzy, grabbing objects like jewelry, books, scarves, hats, etc. and throwing them in. The fire should burn bright, projecting their silhouettes and creating a feeling of a dream-world.

MONK

First came the vision. A fire, burning high into the night sky.

SAVONAROLA

If you so believe in His truth, throw your vanities into the bonfire and loose the bondage of your sins!

(Shouts.)

LIVE FREE, PEOPLE OF FLORENCE! LIVE FREE FROM YOUR SINS!

ENTER BOTTICELLI and SIMONE with a rolled-up canvas.

SAVONAROLA

See now, our esteemed artist Sandro Botticelli believes in His God so devoutly that he will throw his painting into the fire. And what is the painting of, my son?

BOTTICELLI

It is “The Birth of Venus.”

SOUNDS of cheers from the FRATESCHI.

SAVONAROLA

Throw that Goddess into the fire, as we should melt all our pagan symbols!

Projection of “The Birth of Venus” as flames engulf it.

MONK

Then I realized that it was Venus who was burning. Her face darkened by smoke, the edges curling up around her hair.

SAVONAROLA

Watch it burn!

MONK

Then I heard the Voice.

VOICE

SAVONAROLA!

ALL freeze, except SAVONAROLA.

SAVONAROLA

What?! Who calls to me?

MONK

The voice was not a woman's voice, yet not really a man's voice. It just sounded pure. And then her lithe body moved like a fantastical ocean slipping onto the shores of reality.

ENTER VENUS, the exact woman from Botticelli's painting. She moves with grace, her expression always the same peaceful gaze. The VOICE speaks through her, but she never moves her lips. SHE approaches SAVONAROLA teasingly, and HE stands still as a statue, obviously uncomfortable with her beauty and nakedness. MONK moves closer, watches.

VOICE

Savonarola! What are you doing, my child!?

MONK

I was an observer to the scene, like a ghost drifting through someone else's dreams.

SAVONAROLA

It...It is your bidding, my Lord. I am cleansing Florence.

VOICE

Does God not love truth?

SAVONAROLA

My Lord, I am--

VOICE

Does God not love beauty?

SAVONAROLA

Yes, my Lord, but--

VOICE

Then why do you cast me into the fire. No more! Do you hear me?

SAVONAROLA

When I am finished purging the sins of man into--

VOICE

Do you not love me?

SAVONAROLA

Of course I love you, my Lord.

VOICE

Beware that fire, Savonarola. It shall grow and grow until it consumes you.

SAVONAROLA

Never. I shall rise to heaven and be in your bosom.

HE reaches out for her, but she withdraws.

VOICE

But you are wrong. See the soldiers, waiting for you.

LIGHTS CHANGE as VENUS steps back, turning into the painting as she poses. LIGHTS CHANGE as when Savonarola was in his prison cell in Act One, Scene One. ENTER TWO SOLDIERS. One of them is LORENZO and he approaches SAVONAROLA.

SAVONAROLA

Back, foul demons! I have the Lord to protect me.

LORENZO

Come! There's a fire burns brightly for your soul.

SAVONAROLA

(Frightened.)

No! You are Lorenzo de Medici, returned from the grave to torment me.

LORENZO pulls him toward the fire and ties him to a stake.

SAVONAROLA

My lord, why has thou forsaken me? Where am I?

VOICE

Have you lost all sense of time and place? It has been a year since you burned your vanities in my name and now the people of Florence have turned on you.

SAVONAROLA

You lie! You are not God, but the devil in disguise!

VOICE

I warned you, preacher, but you did not heed my voice.

SAVONAROLA

I followed your orders. It was my love for you that stirred me on.

LORENZO

How does it feel, brother? To be waiting for death with no sense of absolution?

SAVONAROLA

You are a wraith come back to haunt me, nothing more.

LORENZO

Oh, but I lived a glorious life and was loved by the people of Florence. They didn't turn on me the way they did on you.

SAVONAROLA

You ruled them as a tyrant.

LORENZO

Perhaps, but my offspring will become Popes while your ashes blow away in the wind.

SAVONAROLA

I have faith in my God.

LORENZO

Now's an excellent time for faith.

(Yells.)

STOKE THE FIRE!

BOTTICELLI unfreezes, runs forward, but is grabbed by SIMONE.

BOTTICELLI

No! He is a man of God!

SAVONAROLA

Swear to me, Sandro, that from this day forward you will paint only God's vision of truth and beauty.

BOTTICELLI

I swear. Of course, I swear!

SAVONAROLA

I shall be honored to sit by you at the table of our lord.

SAVONAROLA is burned alive in the fire as he preaches.

SAVONAROLA

God speaks to me, children of Florence! He speaks of the apocalypse!

(Shouts.)

If you so believe in His truth, throw your vanities into the bonfire and loose the bondage of your sins! LIVE FREE, FLORENTINES! LIVE FREE FROM YOUR SINS!

HE disappears behind fire and smoke.

MONK

I realized this nightmare was coming from someone else, from somewhere long ago as a warning. I knew it was a great gift but I didn't know what it meant. And then Venus turned to me.

VOICE

I have chosen you to be a messenger of my word.

MONK

What is your word?

VOICE

My word is beauty and truth.

MONK

How can I do this?

VOICE

In time I will show you. Be still. The trail is beautiful.

VENUS moves back to the painting.

MONK

Wait! Where are you going? I don't even know who you are.

VOICE

Who am I? Is that so important? Do you know who you are?

MONK

Yes. I'm Alan. I'm an artist.

VOICE

No more. Now I shall call you Monk and you shall become a work of art.

MONK

Please! You can't go!

LIGHTS CHANGE as VENUS poses and is gone.

MONK

Then she was gone.

NORMAN

That's it? The vision is some guy burning up in a fire and some naked chick talking to you?
I turned my world upside down for that?

MONK

It's what happened. I was chosen.

NORMAN

I don't believe that. Not anymore.

MONK

What would you believe?

NORMAN

YOU USED US!

MONK

I never asked you to follow me. I told you to be yourself.

NORMAN

I am myself. More now than ever. This action is mine alone.

MONK

This vision was true.

NORMAN

I will show you what is true. You will be remembered. And so will I.

NORMAN breaks the mirror against the bench as BOY enters, staring at Monk.

MONK

What are you doing?

BOY

It is time, Monk.

MONK

What's going on?

NORMAN

(Moving towards him.)

Shh. Be still.

BOY

Be still. This is the beginning.

MONK

(To Boy.)

But I haven't finished the work yet.

BOY

You are the work.

NORMAN

Now you will be beautiful. The artist as art.

BOY

This is where you died.

LIGHTS OUT on NORMAN and MONK just as NORMAN pushes MONK against the painting of Venus, plunging the smashed mirror shard into his chest. SOUND of great winds as LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE EIGHT

Title: The Spider's Lair

SOUNDS of high winds. SPIDER WOMAN sits by the fire chanting as ARTEMISIA ENTERS. MICHELANGELO and BOTTICELLI ENTER. BOTTICELLI is an old man now (in his 60s), hunched and walks with a cane, helped along by MICHELANGELO.

MICHELANGELO

And the nightmares?

BOTTICELLI

They persist as always. Every night in my dreams I see him tied to the stake by Lorenzo who watches him burn and burn. He preaches to the last breath.

SPIDER WOMAN

Ah, I see you have chased your vision up my web.

ARTEMISIA

(Out of breath.)

Yes. It's...a...long...long...way up.

MICHELANGELO

You should let that vision go, my friend.

BOTTICELLI

Never. He gave his life for his beliefs. I cannot forget that.

SPIDER WOMAN gives her some water.

SPIDER WOMAN

Here. Sit. Rest.

MICHELANGELO

Please, Sandro, you must come and assist me with this commission in Rome.

BOTTICELLI

Michelangelo, you always say you are a sculptor, not a painter. No one will revere you for painting frescoes at the Sistine Chapel.

MICHELANGELO

You did not resist the offer when they called upon you.

BOTTICELLI

That was twenty years ago.

ARTEMISIA

So it's as the elders have told me: The ground here is white.

SPIDER WOMAN

Washed with the bones of children who disobey. Have you come still seeking your vision?

ARTEMISIA

I came to you because the elders said you would--.

SPIDER WOMAN

Go whine to the elders, then, not me.

ARTEMISIA

They told me to wait for Spider Woman and so I have. Why do you deny me?

SPIDER WOMAN

There is much honor in this waiting. But that is not enough. You think we spirits can grant visions to everyone who just sits and waits?

ARTEMISIA

I have done more than just wait.

MICHELANGELO

Simone has told me of your debts. Please--

BOTTICELLI

If you want to align your talents with those despicable Romans, the very demons who burned Savonarola in the Piazza, well, that is your business. Do not lead my soul into that tempting fire of hell by asking to assist you with your mediocre, humanist work. Get one of the village idiots to help you carry your paints and build your scaffolding.

MICHELANGELO

What happened to you, Sandro? You used to be a great artist.

BOTTICELLI

You used to be man of faith.

MICHELANGELO

My faith is in my art.

BOTTICELLI

As is mine.

SPIDER WOMAN

You feel like you've suffered, yes, but suffering alone does not bring vision. Nor does desire. A vision is born of humility and wisdom.

ARTEMISIA

Please. I beg you.

MICHELANGELO

Sandro, I beg you. Be reasonable.

SPIDER WOMAN

A vision is a gift to be given, not a scrap to be begged for.

MICHELANGELO

This passion will destroy you as it is destroying your artwork.

BOTTICELLI

I paint the religious themes that are the foundations of our faith. The scenes that Savonarola preached of when--

MICHELANGELO

Your work is sloppy! Behind your back Leonardo and Raphael are laughing at you! Can't you hear that?

BOTTICELLI

I only hear God's voice.

ARTEMISIA

I will not go until I receive something from you.

SPIDER WOMAN

You want something? Here is a rock. Take that and go home.

ARTEMISIA

I want my vision.

MICHELANGELO

I loved Savonarola's fire, too, but you sacrifice all your technique for zeal like a selfish martyr. I will not do that. I will not burn my own paintings.

BOTTICELLI

Then you will not be remembered in the kingdom of heaven.

SPIDER WOMAN

Go home.

BOTTICELLI

Go home, Michelangelo.

EXIT MICHELANGELO.

ARTEMISIA

I want what I have been seeking. What I deserve.

SPIDER WOMAN

Oh, I see. It is like that. Well, then, I have something to show you.

SPIDER WOMAN pulls out the feather from her bag.

BOTTICELLI

When will your oath stop haunting me, Girolamo?

EXIT BOTTICELLI.

SPIDER WOMAN

This feather has great medicine. Your mother received it from me long ago. She was a weaver, but you deny that honor.

ARTEMISIA

I weave with paint.

SPIDER WOMAN

She came years ago, pleading for a child. The elders told her to sit out by my home and pray to me for four days and four nights. Her body was willing but she had no husband. I told her to take this feather, hold it in her hands the next time she lay with a man and she would conceive. So now this woman's daughter comes to demand a vision. A daughter who would not be here at all if not for me and my feather.

ARTEMISIA

For your gift to my mother, great Spirit, I am thankful. But now I must choose a road for myself and so I seek your guidance.

SPIDER WOMAN

Your mother was not enough inspiration for you? You alone are not enough?

ARTEMISIA

If I knew the answer to that question, I wouldn't be here.

SPIDER WOMAN

You should not be up here if you do not know. Go now, or I shall bleach my floor with your bones.

ARTEMISIA

Please! You have taken my feather and not given me anything in return. If you will not give me my vision, return my mother's feather so her spirit can be near me.

SPIDER WOMAN

It is yours if you answer one question. If it is a choice between the freedom of the Sun in the sky or your artistic voice, which would you choose?

ARTEMISIA

The world cannot live without the sun.

SPIDER WOMAN

Which would you choose?

ENTER BOTTICELLI with a young MODEL for "The Birth of Venus". HE is younger, with more energy, leads the robed woman to a spot, positions her as Venus and paints her.

BOTTICELLI

Stand here. Per piacere. Be still.

ARTEMISIA

I would choose the sun.

SPIDER WOMAN

So be it. I shall string the Sun back to life with my webs.

ENTER ALAN BARNES (aka MONK). HE also looks younger, with more energy. HE sits in the Uffizzi with his sketchbook, but looks at the same MODEL as BOTTICELLI and begins sketching, mirroring his movements.

ARTEMISIA

And for me?

SPIDER WOMAN

If I told you to stop painting, forever to lay down your brush, what would you do?

ARTEMISIA

I might as well stay on this mountain and die.

SPIDER WOMAN

Why?

ARTEMISIA

For me, to paint is to live.

SPIDER WOMAN

Give me your name.

ARTEMISIA

Kate Yellowhorse.

SPIDER WOMAN

Kate Yellowhorse

You shall have whatever voice you desire for yourself.

The voice you possessed when you climbed up here.

The voice you possessed when you painted Coyote.

The voice your mother gave to you.

The trail is beautiful.

Be still.

SPIDER WOMAN chants, placing the feather in ARTEMISIA's hands. SOUND of flute plays. LIGHTS focus on MONK who suddenly bolts upright as if jolted by electricity as he sees the vision and hears the Voice, then LIGHTS OUT on him, as BOTTICELLI finishes the painting.

BOTTICELLI

It is beautiful!

LIGHTS OUT on BOTTICELLI at same time as title.

Title: This is the beginning.

Projection of feather blowing in the wind.