

CHIP SCHEUER

Broadway Street Tunnel, 2005
Archival Pigment Print, 30 x 40 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

PETER SHEEHY

Burning the Fish

We'd just placed our order with a chubby, frizz-haired girl—a Lumberjack Slam for me, the Lemon Pepper Grilled Tilapia for Gillian—when the couple at the next table got into it. The woman stood and screamed at the man. Because I don't want *your brother* at our wedding! while the man theatrically picked apart his home fries. He stabbed a potato wedge and he waved the fork in the air like waving a small flag and then he poked the wedge into a pool of ketchup. I made the mistake of locking eyes with the man, and he winked at me, this slight confidence I couldn't name, while the woman's arms flailed like the arms of a car dealership balloons-man. Although her breasts bounced obediently.

You're bothering everyone here, Gillian said to the raving woman, and I agreed. Gillian executed a deliberate sip of ice water, the way acting classes had taught her to sip from a glass onstage, although she wasn't an *actress*, because that wasn't what she wanted. She managed a gift shop in a children's museum. The classes she'd been taking were more like her yoga, a practice in mindfulness because she was coming to this place in life where she was aware of how her arms moved, how she propped her neck and pointed her nose. In many ways I was in the same place—although I'd never acted, or practiced yoga, but I did jog and swim in the ocean—and Gillian and I agreed on such things. It was a cornerstone of our relationship, such agreements.

Bothering? Am I bothering your boyfriend here, String Cheese? The raving woman turned to me. Hello! and she lifted her tank top to expose a worn periwinkle bra struggling to hold together enormous breasts. She cupped a breast in the palm of each hand, and like weighing impossibly round grapefruits at the supermarket, trying to see which one was bigger without the help of a scale, she alternated hefting each breast: first her right, then the left, and the right again, then again the left.

The woman singsonged, Do. You. Like. What. You. See? to the tune of the "Star-Spangled Banner." Somewhere a man catcalled, here in the dining room at Denny's, the Las Vegas Strip.

I made no effort not to stare at the patriotic singsonging woman; if I'd turned away it would have made matters worse. She added, Why don't you take a picture? gesturing to the disposable camera on our table. The yellow Kodak lay like a severed hand, fascinating and grotesque.