

## ROS CUTHBERT

*Carnival of the Dolls*, 2017  
Collage, acrylic, and watercolor,  
20 x 28 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## ROBERT KERWIN

# Feeding the Tabs

Adventures in writing  
for the tabloids

**P**ractically since I'd started profiling celebrities, the tabloid representatives had been pursuing me, asking which celebrities I had on my agenda and telling me of their interest in seeing transcripts, notes, or anything at all.

It didn't take long to be able to predict the sort of quotes the tabloids wanted, and over time I became rather expert. It was easy: work up some tired lines a star had uttered to me years before, send them in, and from that nucleus the tabloid copywriters (veritable geniuses at this) fleshed out a full-length article.

"We'll never use your real name," one tab rep said in confidence. "We don't want to blow you out of the water."

Regularly I saw my contributions appear in the *National Enquirer* and *Star* under bylines such as "Cecil MacGowan," "Rupert Williams," "Alastair McLaughlin," and a dozen other names, each (to me anyway) more creative and fanciful than the last.

Most of the celebrity media—freelancers and affiliated alike—fed the tabs as much as I did, or more so. It was like espionage trade: when you did it, you sneaked it, and each time you promised yourself that you'd get out of this very soon and never have anything to do with it again. Constantly, over all, hung the realization that if your cover was ever blown, career-wise you were finished.

The tabloids had larger circulations than most legitimate outlets, and paid higher rates. Their primary, obsessive, interest was in TV. The more a celebrity subject was connected to a television show—particularly a show in the top ten or twenty ratings—the greater was your chance of getting a tabloid cover or a first inside page, where tease rates were highest of all.

Regularly, the tabloids sent out updated tease cards that listed categories they liked best:

My Big Break  
My Career Turning Point  
My Romance  
The First Time That I \_\_\_\_\_  
My Cute Meets  
My Success  
My Diet  
My Exercise Program: How I Stay Slim