

TALKON



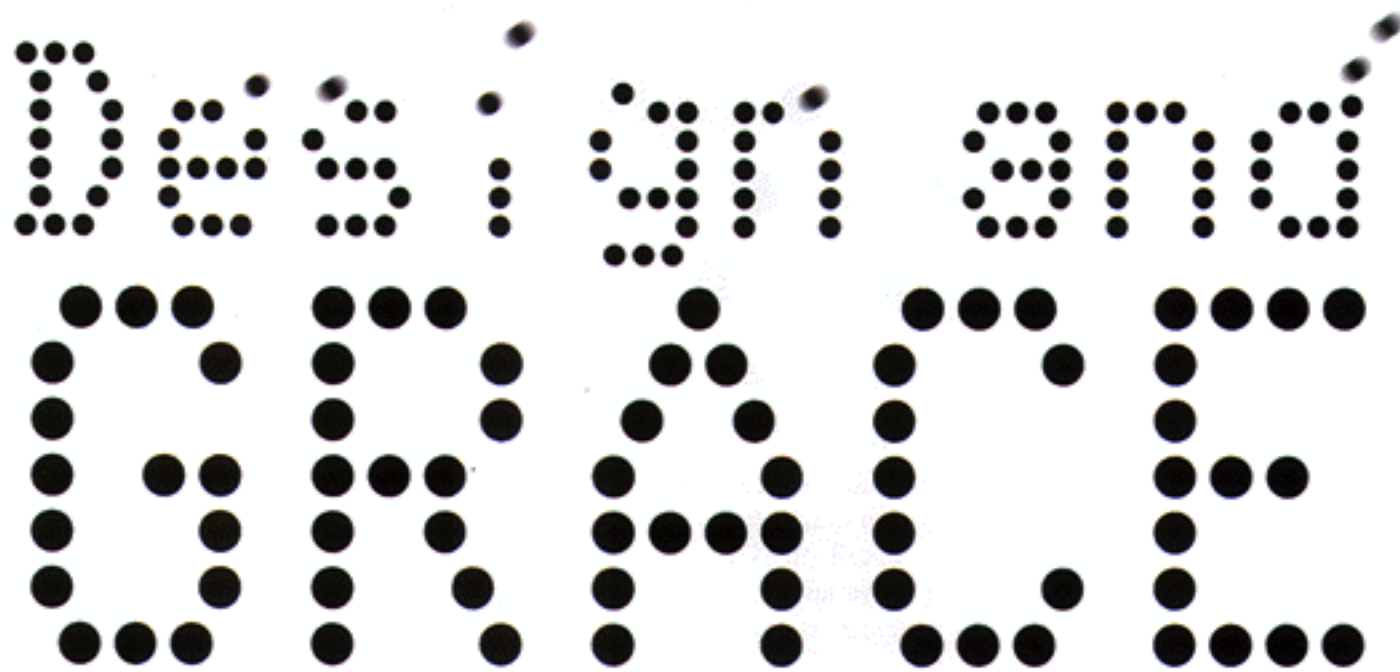
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CREATIVITY NOW

2006

*Conversations with the brightest minds
in art, film, fashion, design and music*





JULIE VERHOEVEN has seen her illustrations traced and then exhibited in a gallery by another artist. JEREMY BLAKE has shown at the Whitney Museum while reaching a mass audience with abstract images that were incorporated into the film *Punch-Drunk Love*. LAURENT FÉTIS is as well known for directing music videos as he is for his graphic designs. And ELISABETH ARKHIPOFF has created a brand identity for a musical act that doesn't even exist. Is the line between art and design in the conception or the execution? Or can it be found in the audience and in the space where the work is exhibited?

LAURENT, I'VE READ A LOT OF INTERVIEWS WITH YOU WHERE YOU HAVE TALKED AGAINST THE NOTION OF A DESIGNER HAVING A RECOGNIZABLE STYLE. WHAT DOESN'T APPEAL TO YOU ABOUT THAT?

LAURENT FÉTIS: It's the peculiar position of a graphic designer or art director that you are

supposed to give an answer to something. If you are an artist, you don't have a commission. But for me (as a designer), I'm supposed to give an answer to a form of a problem, and for this the style is something secondary. I like the schizophrenic aspect of doing stuff with really

different styles. It's the difference for me between an illustrator or an artist and a designer. I would not do the work I am doing if there was nobody who asks me to do it. I have no personal work. I'm always working on specific projects, and even if I'm working on an exhibition or a collaboration with artists, it's always the way of working that interests me. The process.

CAN YOU MAYBE EXPLAIN THE PROCESS?

LF: Every project is different, of course. Each project is like a conversation or a kind of dance. And if you feel a connection with the people you are with, it's (begun) from this conversation, this reaction. It's a general process that interests me. That you could meet people, discuss with them and create a form from this conversation. It's this magic thing that interests me...

THE IDEA OF PURE PROCESS SEEMS LIKE A REALLY GOOD PLACE TO MOVE ON. ELISABETH, I THINK THAT 'STYLE' WOULD BE THE HARDEST CONCEPT TO APPLY



Illustrations by JULIE VERHOEVEN



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"I never really think about design.

TO YOUR WORK, BECAUSE YOUR WORK IS VERY VISUALLY DISPARATE.

ELISABETH ARKHIPOFF: For me, it's (more interesting) to do the research before and to make the project exist than when it's done. When it's done, I feel depressed, almost. It's not formally or visually meaningful. It's more in the ideas that are behind it.

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR PROJECT, 'SPORT HIT PARADISE,' AND MAYBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THAT AND 'UNEXPECTED FEELING'? YOU WOULDN'T KNOW, VISUALLY, THAT THEY WERE BY THE SAME PERSON.

EA: Yeah, it's the experimental part that interests me. 'Sport Hit Paradise' is a fake band I invented, and I manage them. I did a vinyl, I do the fan club... I did the first vinyl by asking a band to give me, anonymously, their song. I wanted to do two really different kinds of music under the same name.

AND MEANWHILE YOU'VE BEEN RUNNING THIS PROJECT, 'UNEXPECTED FEELING.' THERE'S A COLLAGE VISUAL COMPONENT TO THAT.

EA: It's a collection I've been doing, since a long time ago, of accessories or clothes. I want to share the collection with the other people, so I did a collage to present all the collection...

YOU STUDIED LITERATURE. IS THAT WHERE YOU GET YOUR IDEAS?

EA: Yeah. Personally, I'm more inspired by stuff I can't see, and (that) provokes an image in my head. I love painting and stuff like that, but you (already) have everything in front of you. It's different when you read a book - you kind of do what you want.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN ARTIST RATHER THAN A DESIGNER?

EA: I started to do design accidentally, but I really like it. I think it's super interesting to touch people other than the art world people. It's more interesting, I think, to talk with other people, from music or from other scenes, than always stay in the same little world.

DO YOU THINK THERE'S A DIFFERENT STATUS, BETWEEN ART AND DESIGN?

JEREMY BLAKE: Sure. The basic difference is, when you're a designer, you're working for a client. Which I've done. I had to make a living when I got to New York. I worked for a guy named Pascal Dangin, who retouches photos. He said, 'You have no future in computers.' At the time he was right. I think he showed good judgment in saying that, but it didn't turn out to be the case. I worked with Theresa Duncan on kids' games and also at Rockstar Games, and they were great. But in terms of my own work, I never really think about design. Unless, it's some utopian ideal that design happens to touch on.

DO YOU THINK THAT YOU HAVE A RECOGNIZABLE STYLE TO YOUR WORK? FOR INSTANCE, YOU HAVE WORKED FOR CLIENTS LIKE BECK OR PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON. THERE'S PRESUMABLY SOMETHING TO YOUR WORK THAT THEY FELT THAT THEY WERE COMMISSIONING.

JB: I think those guys recognized emotion, although only Paul ever really articulated what he liked about it. He didn't go, 'God, what great design!' He said, 'This feels like this, and this

feels like that. Can you make this feel like that?' That's how we talked about it on (*Punch-Drunk Love*). He really didn't say, 'Make this change or that change.' He just kind of gave me a block of time, and then every once in a while he'd say, 'Maybe we're a little bit off the mark,' or something. But that's kind of how I am with my own stuff.

DURING THE PERIOD THAT YOU'VE BEEN PRACTICING, DO YOU THINK THE PERCEPTION TOWARDS DIGITALLY GENERATED ARTWORK HAS CHANGED?

JB: Yeah, I tried to change it. When I first started working at the computer, I came from a background of the punk music scene. I'm not that technologically inclined, and I really thought of the Mac kind of like, the way a musician might think of picking up an electric instrument. I just thought, 'What can I do with this?' And it took years and years and years for that to get recognized. When I started showing in the New York art scene, there were people that accused me of coming from outside of the art scene, even though I went to CalArts with all these great painters. But because of the medium I was working in, I was accused of coming from outside.

IT'S INTERESTING THAT YOU USE THE WORD 'ACCUSED.' DO YOU THINK IT'S SUCH A TERRIBLE THING NOT TO BE AN ARTIST?

JB: It was an accusation from people that want to treat the art scene like a country club. The computer seemed like it was from way out there...like, from outer space.



Illustrations by ELISABETH ARKHIPOFF

● It's always really difficult to find the right image for something that is, in fact, a composition of different things."

FOR ANYBODY THAT MIGHT NOT KNOW YOUR WORK, CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE WAY IT'S EXHIBITED? BECAUSE THEY'RE KINETIC WORKS, AND THEN THEY'RE SOMETIMES EXHIBITED AS STILLS. WHICH OF THOSE IS YOUR PIECE OF WORK?

JB: Well, when I have a solo show, the front room of the gallery is usually drawings, paintings and all kinds of very traditionally made objects. Sometimes there's stills, but most of the time, in the past at least, those photographs have been the things that I've generated first. Then I would start making those things move. In the back part of the gallery, or in another darkened space, I'll show films. They're all artworks. There's no hierarchy, although I'm most known for the film stuff.

DO YOU THINK THERE'S A CONSISTENT WORKING METHOD THAT DRAWS THOSE TOGETHER, OR WHEN YOU'RE WORKING IN EACH MEDIUM, DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE BEHAVING DIFFERENTLY?

JB: I think I have more of a skeptical battle with painting. So, yeah, I do change the way I approach something, a little bit. But it's not like, 'Oh, I can get this look from this or this look from that.' It's usually a little bit deeper than that. I think with painting, I have so much a sense of all the historical baggage (associated with painting) that I get kind of juvenile. I honestly take a poke at that stuff. With the newer medium, I feel like I'm freer to be a little bit more spiritual or emotional or something, right away.

SINCE WE'RE AT PAINTING... JULIE, WOULD YOU AGREE THAT THERE'S AN OVERARCHING AESTHETIC TO YOUR WORK?

JULIE VERHOEVEN: Yes, sadly there is. I mean, they always look the same. (Laughs.) I try really, really

hard with each thing I undertake, to try and take it somewhere else. That's a constant thing with me. I'm trying to find a new style, work in a new medium, blah, blah, blah... I try and move my work on to somewhere. Then I look at it the next day, and it just looks like the same thing I'm always doing.

WHY WOULD YOU FEEL IT'S A NEGATIVE THING? WHY DO YOU FEEL THE NEED FOR A COMPLETE REINVENTING OF YOUR STYLE?

JV: Well, I think it's a kind of laziness, because I do tend to fall back on icons and elements that I like, and I kind of recycle them. It sort of frustrates me that I do it, but I do it because I kind of feel comfortable with them. So it's kind of lazy.

BUT IT HAS ALLOWED YOU TO WORK ACROSS A LOT OF AREAS, HASN'T IT? ILLUSTRATION AND GRAPHICS AND ART DIRECTION AND INSTALLATION...

JV: Yeah, absolutely. I get bored really quickly, so it's nice to dip in and out of different fields like that. That sounds really crap, but it helps my own work. It keeps it fresh, I feel, if I alternate between different fields.

WHEN YOU'RE WORKING FOR A CLIENT, HOW WOULD IT TRADITIONALLY BEGIN?

JV: It always starts with the same formula for me, actually. It's a bit sad. I just always go to the library and sit there. (Laughs.)

THAT'S SOMETHING YOU STARTED WHILE WORKING AT JOHN GALLIANO, ISN'T IT?

JV: When I worked at John Galliano's, he certainly taught me the importance in research. At the time I didn't realize a lot of designers don't do that.

They give maybe like half a day or something. But he would devote maybe three to four weeks to going to libraries and museums, and that's a whole luxury I didn't appreciate at the time. So I sort of followed that through. Which often is (a way) of avoiding starting the actual job properly.

IS IT HELPFUL TO HAVE SEVERAL JOB TITLES - THIS KIND OF MULTI-TASKER ROLE? I'M IMAGINING, COMMERCIALLY, THAT'S QUITE DIFFICULT...

EA: Yeah, but you don't get bored, because you have to talk about it to different people. It's like a breather, when you change the feel. (You can) forget the other stuff for a while and start to do other things. I think it's very important to do different things.

JV: Yeah, personally, it's great. But for a client, it makes them a bit uncomfortable.

EA: Yeah, to not be recognizable to one thing, that's a big problem, I think. Sometimes (I think), 'Ah, I should do less, and focus on stuff.'

DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE FAIR TO SAY THAT IT'S GENERALLY WOMEN THAT GET CAST AS MULTI-TASKERS AND MEN TEND TO HAVE ONE JOB TITLE?

JV: Ugh. That's horrible.

JB: It's our job just to be a man. That's all you got to do. (Laughs.)

I'M JUST TRYING TO BE PROVOCATIVE! TELL ME WHETHER YOU THINK IT'S TRUE...

JV: Yeah, because we're accommodating to everybody. (Laughs.)

I SPEAK OFTEN AT MULTIMEDIA CONFERENCES, AND THE MAIN PATRON SEEMS TO BE BJÖRK, GENERALLY...



JB: Björk is the patron saint of multimedia?

I KNOW IT'S A BIT OF A TENUOUS LINK, BUT IT DOES BRING US TO A TRADITIONAL PRECONCEPTION ABOUT GRAPHIC DESIGN – SPECIFICALLY, THAT THE ENGINE BEHIND IT IS MUSIC AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY.

JULIE, YOU'VE GOT BOBBY GILLESPIE, FISCHERSPOONER... LAURENT HAS DJ HELL, TAHITI 80, BECK... ELISABETH, WELL, YOU'RE THE SLIGHT ABERRATION BECAUSE YOUR MUSIC CLIENT IS ACTUALLY INVENTED, BUT ALSO YOU'VE WORKED ON DJ HELL AND TAHITI 80... AND JEREMY, YOU DID THE BECK ALBUM, AND YOU'VE NOW DONE THIS EXHIBITION IN COLLABORATION WITH DAVID BERMAN OF SILVER JEWS.

JB: Yeah, David Berman from Silver Jews, who's also a poet... Poetry used to have a crucial role in Beat culture, surrounding American music and surrounding American artists, and it just kind of disappeared and became something purely academic. So I thought it might be interesting to bring some of his poetry, which I think is really cool, into the art context, just to see what would happen. It wasn't really so much about music. It was about his writing. But I definitely discovered poetry through music and the power of graphics through music, for sure.

DO YOU THINK THAT MUSIC IS STILL A MOTIVATION AMONGST YOUR PEER DESIGNERS?

JV: Well, yeah. Rock and roll is cool. Everybody wants to be part of it.

LF: I think it's the dream of everybody to work for music. When you do design, I'm especially happy when I'm working for a music client. It's not even a 'client.' It's something else. When I listen to music, it's a thing that gives me the need of inventing forms. I want to do the image, which will match with this music. It's really simple.

IS IT BECAUSE OF THE FREEDOM IT GIVES YOU? IT'S MOVED AWAY FROM THE TRADITIONAL ALBUM SLEEVE. THERE'S NO LONGER THIS BIG (ALBUM COVER) FOR YOU TO BE WORKING ON.

JV: It doesn't really bother me, I have to say, because at the end of the day you're just working to a square, and if it's good design, it should work whatever the size. Postage stamp? It should work. So I think that's a bit feeble when people say, 'It's so sad that it's gone down (in size).' Because it's just all about good design, isn't it?

LF: I like the format of CDs. The thing that I've noticed is that it creates a kind of different way of making albums. Before, you were supposed to listen to an album in a certain order. Now, especially with an mp3 player, it completely transforms albums. I think it influenced also the design. I'm feeling (that) now that there are less concept albums, with only one idea developed on several songs, it's more of a compilation of songs. It's sometimes a bit difficult to put only one image on the cover. It's always really difficult to find the right image for something that is, in fact, a composition of different things. It's more difficult if you work for somebody who has already an image. For example, you can't imagine a Madonna album without a photo of Madonna. When you watch a Björk video, the principal subject is Björk. It's working for a product that you have to show.

WE'VE SEEN A SUBSTANTIAL SHIFT TO WHERE BIG NAME DESIGNERS HAVE BEEN WISHING TO SHOW THEIR WORK IN GALLERIES. THE ORIGINAL AIM OF THE FIRST DESIGNERS THAT WE KNEW AS 'DESIGNERS' – THE MODERNISTS – WAS TO KIND OF DEMOCRATIZE DESIGN AND MAKE DESIGN FOR PEOPLE'S INTIMATE UNIVERSE AND FOR THEIR HOMES. IT HAD VERY SOCIALIST PRINCIPLES. BUT IT SEEMS TO ME THAT YOU MIGHT ARGUE THAT DEVOTING YOUR WHOLE CAREER TO BEING SHOWN IN AN EXCLUSIVE GALLERY ENVIRONMENT ACTUALLY IS THE ANTI-THESIS OF THAT...

JB: I think it's a lot of people that don't know the gallery world that want to do that. Then you find a lot of artists want to do the kinds of things that I've been doing on movies or with Beck or whatever. So I think the grass is always greener... The best thing to do is mix it up, for sure. You talked earlier about being defined. I think it's dangerous for an artist, especially a young artist, to be defined too quickly. I think that's the time to take a job outside of the art world and learn a little bit, and then come back in with something else. I think the art world used to emphasize long careers. Somebody like Ed Ruscha didn't get huge until he was 40 or 45 or something like that. And one of the reasons he got famous – or famous again – is because he did a Gap ad. You never know what's going to bring people back to the work. I just think it's important to mix it up, and to stay safe

from letting one group of people represent you or misrepresent you.

BUT WHY DO YOU THINK THAT THE TITLE OF 'DESIGNER' ISN'T NOBLE ENOUGH?

LF: I think there was no difference before. The history of French posters started with people like Toulouse Lautrec. They were doing the best posters. The fact that you need to find a sticker to put on what they do means that (people) can't think about the fact you could do several things.

AUDIENCE: I was wondering if you could give examples from your career of moments which enabled you to take your art and move into other aspects of the creative industry – from visual illustration to fashion to music video to advertising, etcetera. What practical career moves enabled you to do that?

JV: Well, for me, getting an agent was absolutely the beginning of my career. And then when I did a bag design for Louis Vuitton, that's what gave me street cred. So then I could set out to do other things. You're given the seal of approval.

JB: What launched my career was being put down in the basement of PS1 during the first 'Greater New York' show. I was kind of upset, thinking, 'Oh, they're going to put me in the basement.' But it was great. What made my career was being badly placed. I think that's the kind of accident that you're waiting for as an artist – letting something snowball.

LF: I think it was the cover I did for a band named Melo. It was at a period that French musicians were exporting music. It was something really, really new. I started to receive commissions from other countries. And then the more you do, the more people ask you to do.

EA: Yeah, for me, after I was a literature student, I went for a year in an art school. And I did the library.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE LIBRARY?

EA: I started it because I wanted to give a book on dogs to the art school library, like a donation. They said, 'Oh, no. We can't accept this kind of book.' So I did another library in the hall of the school with all the books I wanted to put inside. I had an exam at the school and all the teachers said, 'It's not art.' In fact, I had been selected in the Paris Museum of Modern Art to show this piece... It was stupid, but I think art schools are really bad anyway.

JB: I almost wish *more* people were like that now! Now I think everything is so permissive. It's like, 'Oh, sure. That's art, and that's art, and that's art.'

EA: Wait, it wasn't that long a time ago! ❁