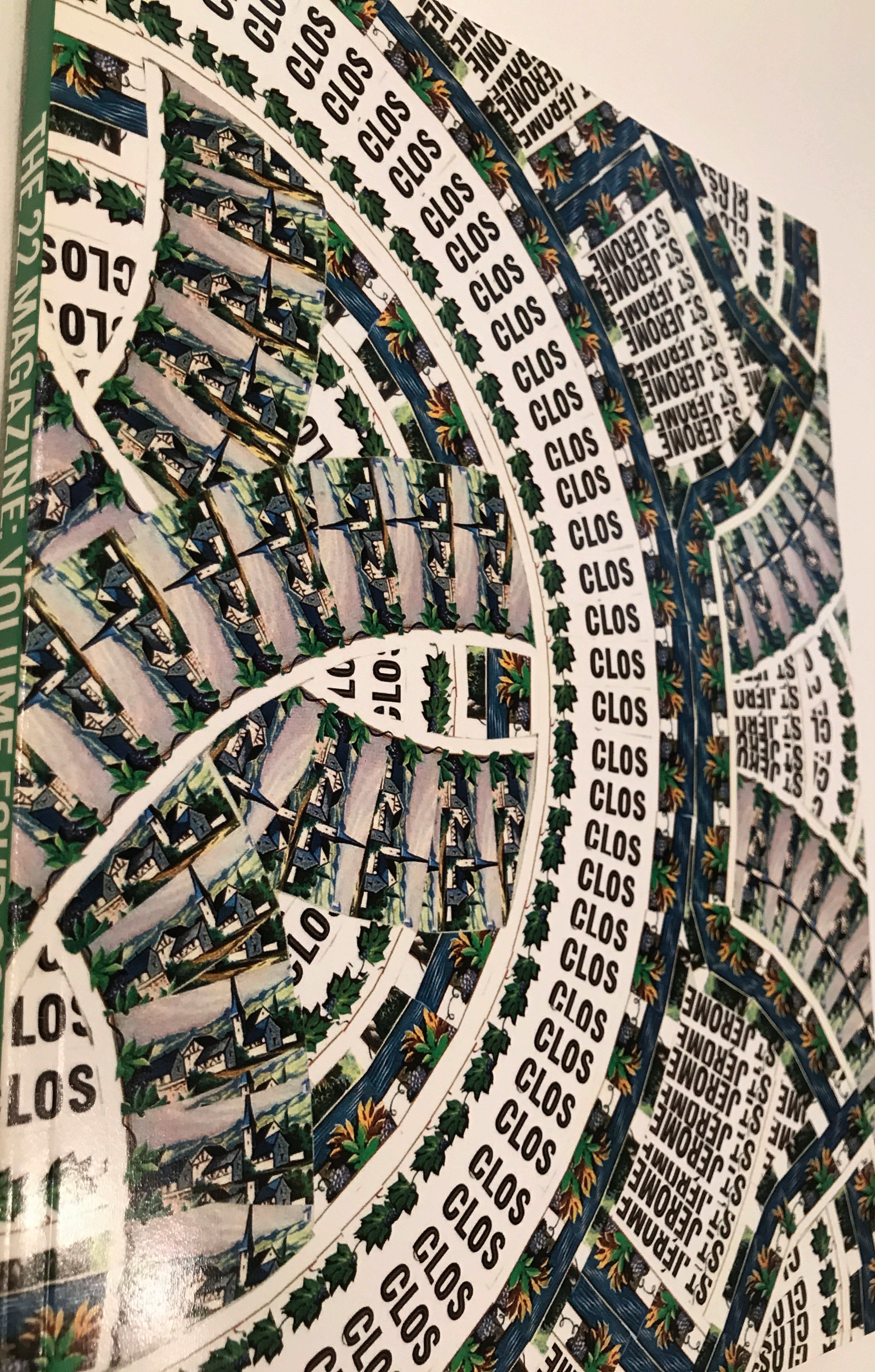


THE 22 MAGAZINE - VOLUME FOUR 2014



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TROY DUGAS

The 22 Magazine: Tell me a little about your journey from Louisiana to New York. How did it happen and what changed for you in any significant way? Why did you finally choose Louisiana and what makes it a special place to make art these days?

Troy Dugas: I moved to New York in 1995 to attend graduate school at Pratt. The way of life here is completely different from living in New York, so pretty much everything changed. Not only day to day living but the extraordinary opportunities to learn, see, and experience new things. The idea of anonymity was new to me, and there was something quite freeing and humbling about it. Louisiana is home and I feel that my work really didn't "take root" until I moved back. These days, I'm really happy with the relationships I've built with the galleries that are located about equal distance on either side of Lafayette in Houston and New Orleans.

22: You've worked for years as designer in fashion and TV. Can you tell us about some of the places you've worked and how those experiences may or may not have contributed to you art?

TD: Those years were filled with tremendous learning and growth. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunities considering I really had no idea what I was doing and never thought of myself as a designer. I worked as a freelance designer for a company that made clothing for Macy's in store brand. The designer I worked for designed boy's clothing, so it was pretty fun to design graphic t-shirts or prints for pajamas and bathing suits. I had to learn how to draw with rulers and pens to make the architectural kind of drawings they used for presentations. This was right before the company started using computers so it was all done by hand. I started incorporating that kind of drawing into my studio practice, and even made little cut out collages from saltine product boxes in the shape of shirts. So yes, it was contributing to my work for better or worse. I really started to hate it after about 3 years. One of my friends from Pratt was working up the street at Nickelodeon, and she invited me to have lunch at the cafeteria for Viacom employees. She mentioned there was a job opening so I interviewed and tested for a position as a digital designer for a children's

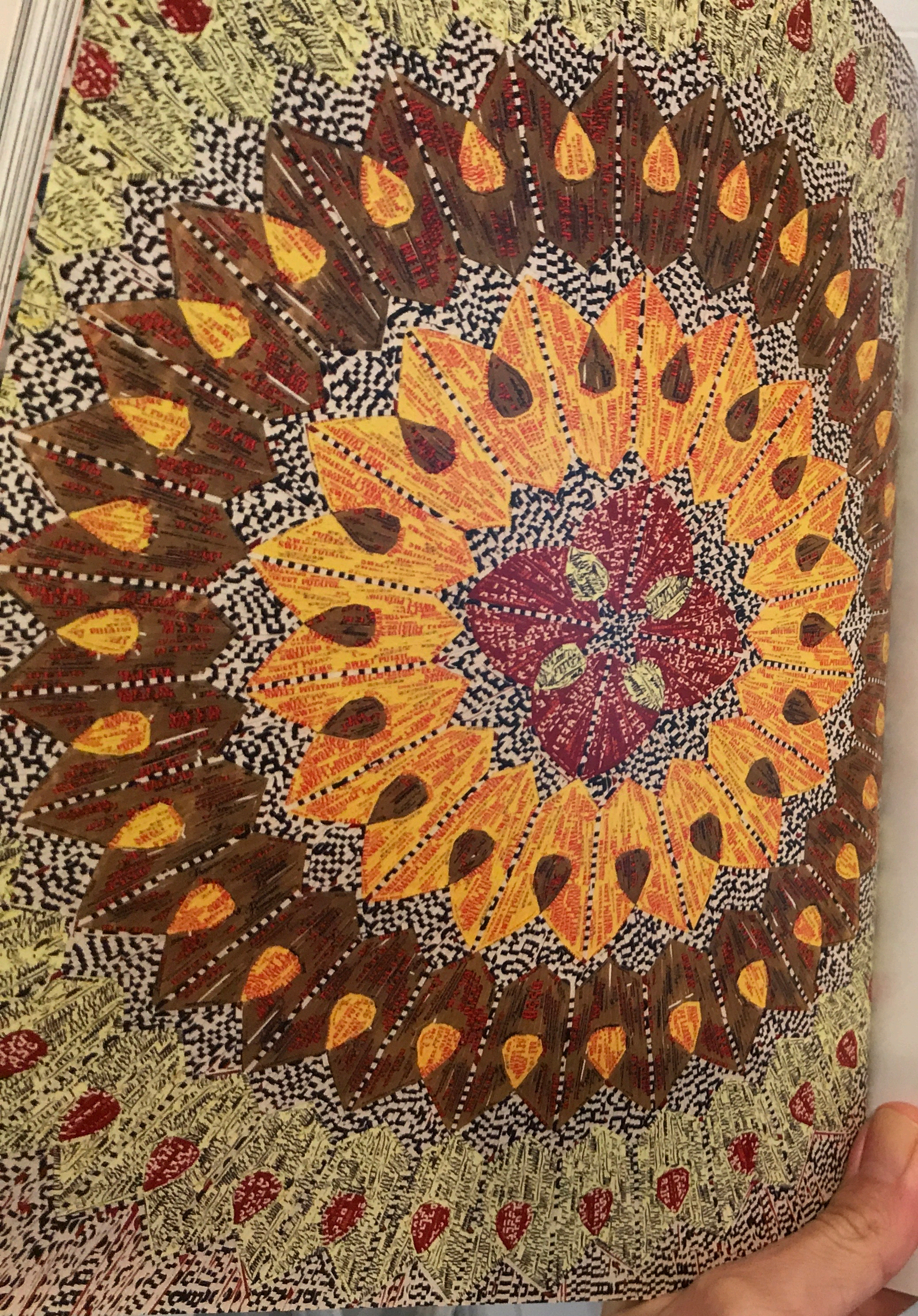
show called *Blues Clues*. I had no experience in television and my computer skills were not up to speed, so I didn't think I had a chance. There was a similarity in the way I was manipulating materials like clay, felt, and paper in my studio that may have translated into the way things were made on the show. Whatever it was, I was given the position, and I worked my ass off to achieve the skill level needed for the job. I learned so much from the people there, became a Photoshop ninja, and eventually a Lead Designer for the show. During that time I continued making collages using product packaging, drawing, cutting up things, and making experimental animations with the knowledge I gained from working at Nickelodeon Digital Studios.

22: You talk about being inspired by your grandmother's crafts. So many pieces look directly inspired by quilt patterns. Did these play a role in your work? Is there any pattern you specifically connect with?

TD: I do love quilts but inspiration comes from many places, and for the most part my pieces are a synthesis resulting in new shapes and forms. My grandmother had an uncanny way of manipulating materials like gum wrappers into chalices, milk cartons into hats, and Coke cans into chairs. It's this transformative act, the activity of busy hands, and the power to communicate through making that I think about.

22: Tell me a little about your mugshot series, what that was inspired by and whether you feel it was successful?

TD: I did a 2' x 2' portrait about 4 years ago with the labels while working on the large abstract pieces and had been wanting to develop the idea ever since. It was both exciting and embarrassing. I struggled with what it was, who it was, it's over stylization, it's form, it's meaning, it's awkwardness, is it from the imagination, from observation, from history and on and on until finally attempting to make a significant series. I love the ancient Fayum burial portraits found in Egypt which have a strong Roman influence and are hauntingly beautiful. I referenced it with images from arrest reports and amateur porn sites and made lots of drawings trying to partially observe, combine, and draw from my imagination. I ended up with 6 final pieces that I truly enjoyed making. I don't think I pushed it enough or



completely gave myself over to it. I made this wacky drawing of Anderson Cooper and was going to make a portrait out of silver foil Miller High Life labels, but I chickened out.

22: What are some of your favorite products or labels you've come across? Any good stories about how you acquired any labels?

TD: I have a collection of old French liquor labels with beautiful colors, metallic inks, delicate illustrations that are kind of a shame to cut up. On the opposite end there are some fun pop, retro green bean labels I love. There is a local bread company just blocks from where I live called Evangeline Maid that is a part of everyone's history and psyche in this area. One day I found a huge 50lb roll of old bread wrappers uncut in perfect condition on my front porch. A man who saw one of my pieces made from Miller High Life labels in an exhibit found it in a dumpster and thought I should have it!

22: It's been mentioned that you don't use contemporary product labels, is this true? Are all your labels vintage?

TD: Most of my collection is made up of vintage labels, but I actually have made quite a few pieces with current labels like Alexander Keiths, Taaka Vodka, Herbsaint, Starkist Tuna and other contemporary but maybe lesser known products.

22: In your bio you say "The immediacy of the graphic label is replaced by contemplation."

This statement really turns the idea of branding and advertising on it's head. What compels you about the idea of incorporating an aesthetic, meditative view into an opposite realm? How do you intend to affect your audience as consumers and as viewers?

TD: The label has to appeal to a customer within seconds, and the colors, images, and type have to work together to convince the consumer to buy. I'm just slowing down and taking those things apart and organizing them in a new way. Those essential elements become my pallet. I guess there is a mischievous pleasure in what I do, but I don't have any secret mission to undo the history of branding, design, or advertising. I like when viewers become aware of what the material is and it gives them this moment of realization.

22: In regards to the idea that you deconstruct consumer products only to create consumer products you say, "That

either makes me a snake or a genius. I don't think I am either. There is something very satisfying about going full circle." What to you is appealing about a "full circle?"

TD: I like the idea that something can take a new form instead of becoming forgotten or wasted. It takes on a kind of spirituality, and that idea is counter consumerism.

22: Do you avoid the symbolism of a Mandala in your work? Is the main goal design, purely a visual experience?

TD: I can't really avoid it, but I don't have any strong attachment to it in terms of the origin or religious significance. I've always referred to the pieces as radial forms as they are a vehicle to create the work. A place to put the pieces. I avoid the word mandala because it seems overused, and makes me think of high school art projects. In it's over use I do think, as the article states, that it is becoming insignificant. I don't think the main goal is to design but to transform. Despite my denial about being a designer, it always comes back to haunt me. Sometimes I try to get away from it and sometimes I embrace it.

22: A review of your work states, "In Dugas' collages, so much good taste, so fastidiously presented within the form of a largely evacuated signifier, somewhat calls into question what this work conveys aside from good design. There's a temptation to compare Dugas to Fred Tomaselli, another current artist deeply invested in the use of hypnotic patterning. But the psychedelic and drug connotations of Tomaselli's work squarely place it into a distinct realm of signification. Dugas seems to be making work-gorgeous work-that avoids it." Do you agree with this statement? Does your work avoid or transcend?

TD: I think the history of the work conveys an interesting story, and I'm not out to make any radical statements or convince anyone of anything. I would like to think the work transcends through the process, execution, presentation, and finally to the viewer who will get it or not.

22: What have been some of the most difficult things you've overcome with your art? Are there any pieces of series that you have struggled with? On the opposite spectrum, what do you feel has been your greatest achievement or most successful piece?

TD: I keep trying to outdo myself and sometimes that leads to stagnation. It's something I'm constantly having to overcome. The pieces I've struggled with the most are also my greatest achievements. *Radial Forms Four #1* (2010), *Radi-*