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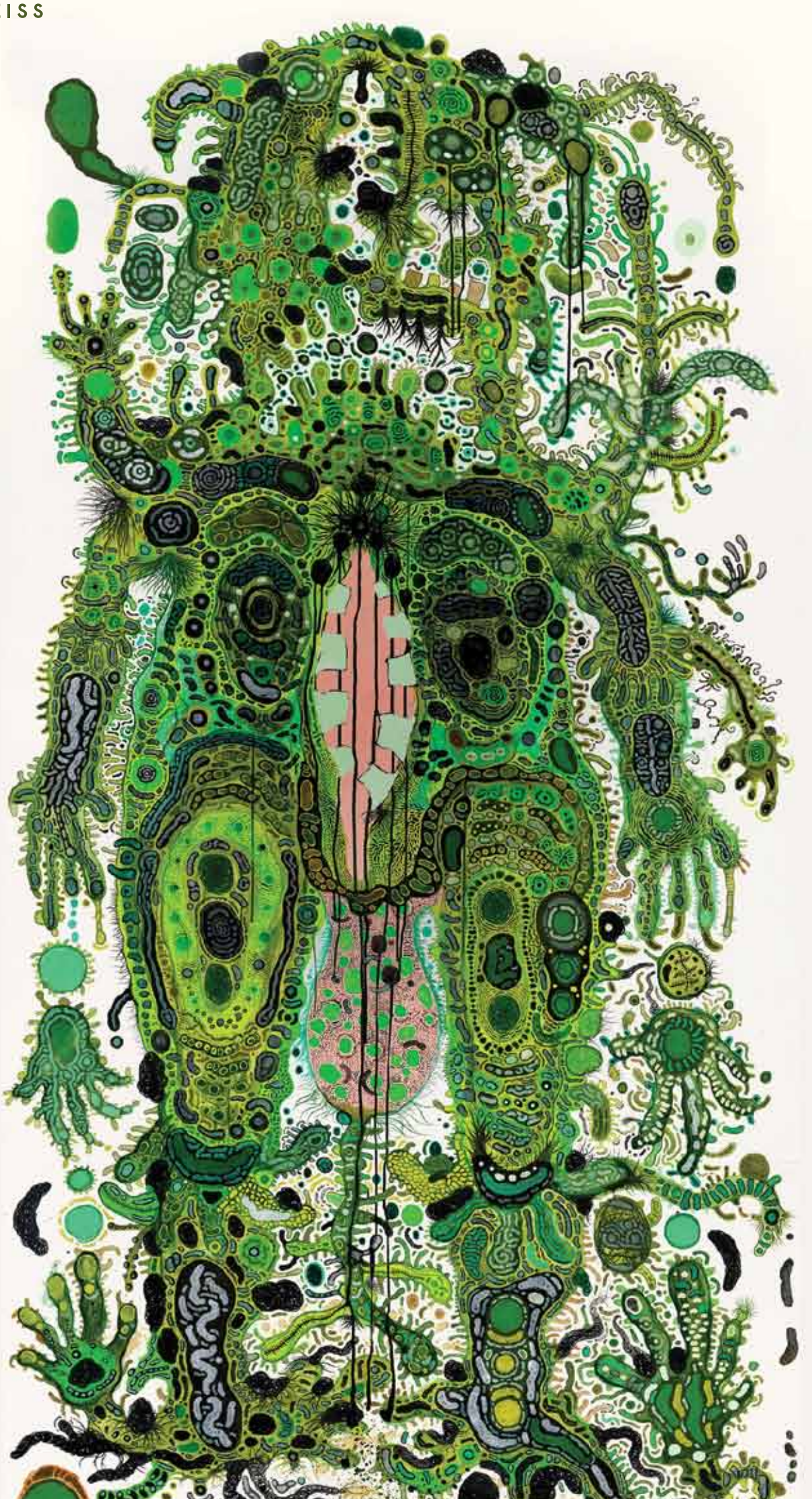

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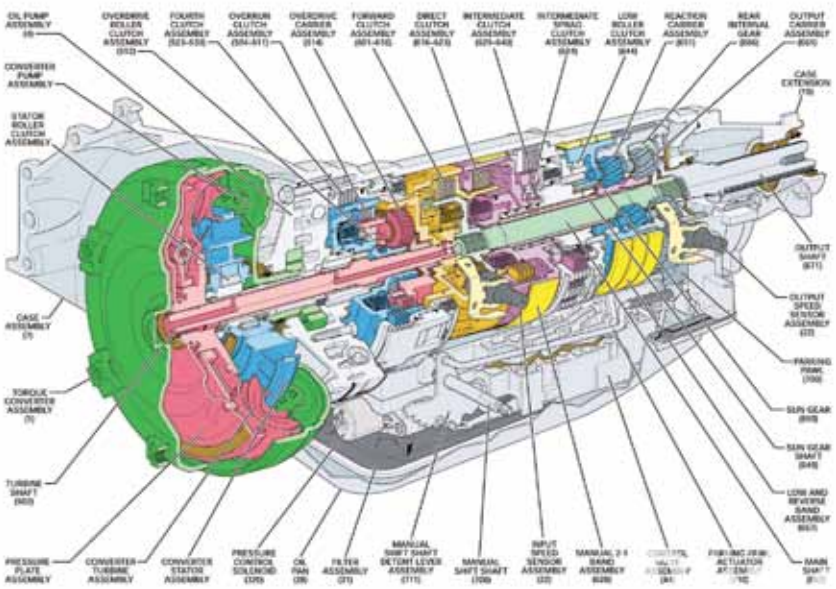

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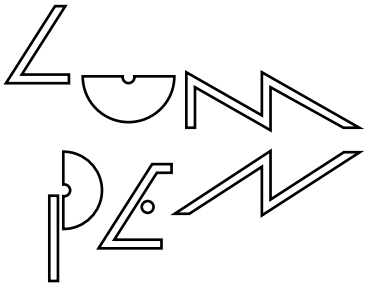

EDITORS
Sara McCall
Emma Saperstein
Dan Sloan

EDITOR/PUBLISHER
Ed Marszewski
EdmarLumpen@gmail.com

COPY EDITOR
Reuben Kincaid

WORLD CORRESPONDENT
Brian Meir

ART DIRECTION
Reuben Kincaid

COVER ART
Hank Pearl

PHOTO EDITOR
Aron Gent

COMICS EDITOR
Joe Tallarico

TECHNOLOGY
Brunerd.com

1984
Mike Evans

THE BOSS
Ruby Dean

THE BUSINESS
Marian Frost

ANGEL INVESTED
Jerry Boyle
Mairead Case
Ken Zawacki

ADVERTISING
Leah Menzer
Leahzmenzer@gmail.com

INQUIRIES

EdmarLumpen@gmail.com

LUMPEN HEADQUARTERS
960 W 31st St
Chicago, IL 60608
U$A

lumpen.com

Con-

Introduction

Every city has its makers. Makers are those who build our local landscape. They are your Wicker Park Optician, your Bridgeport metalworker, your radical mycologist and environmental activist (read on to figure out what that even means!). They are your musicians turned designer, and the dedicated team behind your city's first wholesale distributor of quality foods. Rooted in their communities, they provide a hopeful alternative to the uninspiring and bleak narrative of endless growth, of efficiency and scale. By returning economy to a level we can understand, by bridging the gap between our lives and our livelihoods, the makers make our city. If not for these dedicated, creative people, a collection of whom are featured in the pages beyond, this city and its neighborhoods wouldn't be the Chicago we love.

The Lumpen: Makers Issue brings forward a handful of our fantastic local makers. Within these pages, get to know the people who craft the Chicago scene you move through every day. They paint your signs, bake your bread, fix your bikes, and they do it well. They are the faces of craft and skill, and of all manner of innovative thought. In this issue are places you'll want to shop and people you'll want to know. Because if we are going to connect with our city, if we want the kind of quality that comes from passion and consideration, we don't need to go very far or very big. The makers are here-- they always have been and always will be. MEET YOUR MAKERS.

- Sara McCall, Emma Saperstein, Dan Sloan & Edmar

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Refinishing Example
Not for Sale

Angela Venarchik & Johnny Wa-
tor & Julie Ghatan & Doug Ka-
plan & Max Allison & Kelsey Dal-
ton & Andrew McClellan & Dusan
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ny Stadler & Marie Akerman &
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Grant Reynolds & Jason T Miles &
Krystal Difronzo & Leslie Wiebeler
& Nate Beaty & Sarah Leitten

Angela Venarchik

Angela Venarchik is a ceramic artist living and working in Chicago, IL. Her functional work is minimal and neat, placing an emphasis on form and function rather than image and decoration. The surface of her pieces explore texture and fields of color, often incorporating the raw and natural clay body into the design. Her aesthetic is inspired by the landscape of the Prairie State and the simple designs of modern Japanese pottery.

Interviewed by Emma Saperstein

ANGELAVENARCHIK.COM

How and why did you get into making ceramics?

ANGELA Venarchik: The reason I got into ceramics is pretty simple for me. I loved the craft, the process and the material. But the reason I've stuck with ceramics, and have chosen this material above all others, is more complex and philosophical.

I started working in clay my freshman year of high school. I signed up for a class and completely fell in love. Back then I was intrigued by the process and how much force and control it took to create something so delicate. I loved the raw materials and the way it felt in my hands during each phase–slippery, heavy, wet, and cold, leather hard, brittle, dry, weightless and then finally balanced and complete. The physicality and tactile quality of the clay itself was so satisfying and the material screamed for purpose and form. I loved the excitement that I felt surveying the potential of each chunk of clay and thinking, "I can make that useful and beautiful". Now my love for ceramics is much deeper, but I still hold that same sense of awe and respect and excitement for the craft and the material itself. As an artist, I never want to lose that connection to my material. I believe that connection is incredibly important for creating art because I believe art is still about the object.

"Everywhere one seeks to produce meaning, to make the world signify, to render it visible. We are not, however, in danger of lacking meaning; quite the contrary, we are gorged with meaning and it is killing us." Jean Baudrillard.

In college, I studied art, and the entire time my focus was trying to resolve the dilemma of creating meaning without mediation. My task was to work out how in the world I could keep my representation of ideas from preceding the reality and presence of the objects I created to mediate those ideas. In other words, the idea (immaterial and symbolic) should not be a stronger force than the reality (objectified) of the material – the color, the shape, the form, the function, the weight, the mass, the texture and the balance of something. I believe this thought is incredibly relevant to all artists, who by trade are image- and object-makers. We have a great responsibility to maintain the integrity of representation and image.

During my time at Wheaton College, I experimented with a number of media from video to sculpture to photography to intentionally using no material at all. This was important for my development as an artist, but using these materials to mediate my ideas never felt quite complete or resolved.

I had a sort of purist revelation where I decided I did not want to add to the madness- by trying first to represent the world, express beauty or an outlook on life (even if that outlook was that things were hyperreal or overly symbolic to the point of simulacrum). I decided I did not want to represent anything at all. I wanted to just create something that was material and form that demonstrated (itself) the purpose and design it was intended for.

This conviction led me back to ceramics because of its incredible potential for "Truth of Material" and the idea that materials should be employed only to their capacity. You cannot bring forth what is not there already within the material- a glass can only spill what it contains! Does a glob of paint have the capacity (without image) to demonstrate anything more than its contribution to a composition? Does a cup have the capacity to communicate more than its designed purpose and function? To create an image, already representative (symbolic) of something (because it is not real- think Magritte) is expressing something modified, mechanized and mediated. What the viewer (and creator) is then consuming is not an artwork, or an object itself, but the relation-signified by an image on an object. As a viewer you must consider this about the object. Why did the artist choose this medium? What did the artist do to it? What has it now become?

Photos by Emma Saperstein

All functional objects inherit intention and purpose and from their design. The form of an object mediates the function. Function follows form. Anything beyond that is extracurricular and a representation or commentary on something else- something aesthetic or cultural. Ceramics is my opposition, my resistance, and my disobedience to our [mediated]-image flooded society.

"What characterizes the so-called advanced societies is that they today consume images and no longer, like those of the past, beliefs; they are more liberal, less fanatical, but also more "false" (less "authentic")- something we translate, in ordinary consciousness, by the avowel of an impression of nauseated boredom, as if the universalized image were producing a world that is without difference (indifferent), from which can rise, here and there, only the cry of anarchisms, marginalism, and individualisms: let us abolish the images, let us save immediate Desire (desire without mediation)." – Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida 1980.

Tell us a little bit about your process for making work. What are some of the major elements of design that you bear in mind when you make work?

A: I appreciate simplicity and sensibility in design. If an object is meant to be functional and useful, that has to be clearly communicated by the form and the balance of the piece. Function follows form, not the other way around. We create with purpose and intention and good design demonstrates that with subtlety.

I always begin with deciding what the piece will be used for and then determine what essential design elements are required to aide that usefulness (handle size, wall thickness, height, volume, balance, geometry, ect). I don't do much sketching or rigid planning for this but I do have a basic goal when I begin. I work out most of the crucial, or obvious, details on the wheel. There are many decisions to be made along the way but they are more fun (and informed) in the moment. My aesthetic tendency is to allow the natural texture and color of the clay to show through (although sometimes I cannot resist a beautiful and colorful high temperature glaze!). I also throw very thin and delicate with the hopes that people will have a desire to touch the piece and hold it.

One of the most wonderful things about ceramics is that the craft has not changed much over the centuries. The same basic designs for the same basics tools (bowls, jars, cups, ect) have been refined and perfected by thousands of potters over thousands of years. There are classical forms and singular functions and the role of the potter is to master the material, where you create a form that is complete and balanced. This requires intense intentionality. As with any craft, participating in this process where you are sorting out all the details and almost infinite variations on a theme, is participating in a ritual where over and over again, you explore and struggle to create a form that is obedient to its utility and yet beautiful for its grace in bearing that purpose so naturally.

Are you working on any major projects right now? Tell us about them.

A: Yes, thankfully I am producing a lot of work right now. I was fortunate enough to be encouraged early in my career to constantly be creating work and to find joy in that process. It can only do so much good to sort out a design in your mind, or even on paper, if you will be creating in clay. You have to train your hands and your eyes to work out those details on the wheel, with the clay between your hands. In order to perfect your craft you must constantly be making work and refining the details.

Currently I have been experimenting with different forms for a chalice and paten set, and baptismal font and ewer set for Immanuel Anglican Church in Uptown. There is something really special about creating a piece that aides the sacred ritual ceremony of the Eucharist. The function and symbolism in these pieces are ancient and historical and holy. Focusing in on a sacred tradition is another way I have found to quell the mediated cultural noise of the hyperreal highway of today's society.

Who are some other artists, ceramic or otherwise, who you admire and take inspiration from?

A: Jennifer Lee, Lucie Rie, Rothko a number of contemporary Japanese potters like Misa Kumabuchi and Kazunori Ohnaka. Additionally, I have been influenced by the writings and/or philosophies of Marcuse, Kierkegaard, Ellul, Beaudrillard, Constructivism and the Christian concept of obedience.

What is your customer base like? Do you work mostly from commissions?

A: I work primarily from commissions and studio shows/sales. Most of my commissions come from connections I have made through networking or being recommended to someone by a friend. The studio where I rent space, Lincoln Square Pottery Studio, helps me reach a broader group of people through frequent shows and sales. I also have work displayed in the studio window gallery that can be purchased at any time.

Johnny Wator started making guitar pedals to use in his own playing, having played in rock bands for much of his life. He still tweaks new pedals after playing sets with his band, but today you'll find Daredevil Pedals far outside the circle of friends he sold to when he was starting out. When I talked with him, he was gearing up to head to the National Association of Music Merchants' Summer gathering in Nashville to show off his new designs.

Interviewed by Dan Sloan

Daredevil Pedals

Photo by Hank Pearl

Did you have a background in electronics when you got started?

JOHNNY WATOR: No. Up to this point it's been completely self-taught. When I actually think about it, it blows my mind that I actually do this now, because it's like, how the hell did I teach myself to do all that? But you know, over the course of a couple years, I read a lot, I was just so obsessed with it and I liked it so much. If you really like something, it doesn't seem like work. I didn't think it was going to be a job, you know, I just liked it. And I started selling to friends and stuff like that, and it kind of clicked, like, I could do this as a hobby and still enjoy it. And then it escalated from there until it got to the point where it's like, alright, if I'm going to do this, I might as well make a push and really go for it, being that I like it so much..

The biggest driving force making me want to succeed with this is the fact that I can completely do whatever I want in this whole process. Like everybody else that's had a million jobs trying to be a musician, having to work all the crappy jobs that go on the other side of doing that, you definitely get burnt out, constantly having bosses and not liking what you do. Now I get to be in complete control, and whatever ideas I get I can follow through with, and there's no compromise with what I do. That's the biggest driving force, because I don't want to go back to working crappy jobs and doing all the stuff I did to try to supplement while I was trying to be a guitar player in a band. I can still play guitar in a band, but now I have my own career, which is super liberating. If I can make a living doing that, that's a dream come true. And that's where I've been for the last two years, and it makes it easy to bust my ass 24 hours a day to try and make it work.

How long had you been doing it when you had the thought, "I should try to sell these to people?"

J: At that point, it was just kind of a self-supplementing thing. I'd get one or two, and then I'd think, I want to get rid of these. I didn't want to start investing too much of my own money into it. So I'd make a few, sell them, and then put that money back into getting some other cool stuff. And it just grew that way. So I had to keep finding other people, because my buddies would buy some, and then I had to find some other musician buddies. It just spread from there. I got the website going and started to try to find some stores, and it took off really quickly. At first I didn't know if stores would want to carry them, so I just went around and hit a few places, and right away I had three stores in Chicago that were into it, and I was like, wow, now I've really got to work.

So you tweak your pedals playing your own music. What kind of music do you play?

J: It's just a really straightforward five-piece rock band, with two guitars, and we play classic-style hard rock. The stuff we grew up on. That's what I'm into, and the stuff I do is for everybody, but there are definitely some people that'll get into it a little more. It's just really straightforward, and it's real raw. I think being in Chicago and the Midwest, and all the blue collar stuff that has been my life since I was a kid, is just naturally going to come out in the music that I play and how I approach things, and definitely in how I approach what I make. I don't do stuff that's super weird with a million knobs on it. It's going to be loud and raw, and it's going to have one or two controls, and it's going to do one thing really well. All of my favorite artists have been really straightforward in what they use, and I'm sure other people can find cool applications for it, but there are definitely those guys that'll be like, "this is the kind of rock and roll shit that I'm into." I'm just doing what I like, and making things that I want to use.

People ask me if I want to do things that sound like spaceships or something, and I don't because I don't really care enough about that to put the time and effort into something where I'd make it and then go to play it, and be like, "I don't know. Whatever." I wouldn't get off on that. Or people will ask me about something and I'll say, you know what? Check out these guys. For all the time and effort it would take me to make something, they have one that's way better and you can get it right now and it's cheaper. That's not my thing. I'm not bummed out, I'm just doing the kind of stuff I want. And that's why there's enough room for everybody out there.

Johnny Wator

DAREDEVILPEDALS.COM

Photo by Hank Pearl

What's the process like when you design a new pedal? Do you have a certain sound in mind, or do you just kind of sit down and play around until you come up with something you like?

J: It's really natural. I get crazy ideas, and in the middle of the night something clicks, and I go, "Yeah, that's it." I try not to force it too much, although I definitely have deadlines and stuff where I want to have things ready, like for this week. That's what I love about it. You just get some random idea throughout the day, and you think, "That's it. That'll totally fit." And it doesn't always have to make sense, but I don't work at a bank or something where you're confined to sense. It can be as different as you want to be. And again, it's like being in a band where you can write a crazy song, but other people connect with it and identify with it. It's like, cool! They get it. And this weird little thing that popped into my head, I turned it into this box. And now other people think that's cool too, and it's like, influencing their music. Which totally blows me away, because it's like, I've sold things to bands that I totally idolize, and then they've told me, this is great and it's influencing what I'm doing. To be able to do that is super rewarding. To be able to help people write their music, in a cool way it's different than just being a guy writing music.

And you do custom stuff too. Is that newer for you?

J: No, I've always done it, because I wanted the business. I wanted the work, and if someone says, "I want a 1967 Tonebender," I'm like, dude, I'd love to build that. And if you're going to pay for it, cool. And my buddies and people that I know, a lot of these old pedals are four, five, six hundred bucks, these vintage pedals. So they're happy to find someone that can do the same thing, and it's brand new, so it won't break on you, and it'll still sound great. I love doing that; it's like building your own toys. So I'll build one for them, and maybe one for myself. I dig it. As long as it's fun and creative, you don't mind putting all the work into it. You spend hours focusing on this little thing, but then you plug it in, and not only does it work, like shit, it works, but then you get to turn it up to deafeningly loud levels and then play it, and it's like, my god, I made that. I made these sounds that my neighbors can hear.

It sounds like more than a full time job for you right now. It seems like you're doing everything all the time. Do you see yourself expanding and taking on employees at some point?

J: Oh, yeah. I hope to do that before the year's over, or even before the summer's over. It's why I put a lot of work into going to this show. Just crushing it and getting enough stores that I have way too much work to pull off myself, totally get in over my head, and then get one or two people to jump in, and just go for it. It's a twelve-hour a day job, and it has been for at least the last year. Which is great, though, I don't mind it, because I know it's going to pay off. The cool thing is once you've designed something and you've put in all those hours to get it how you want it, it's done. The hard part is over and then it's just making them. And that's the fun stuff. It's always there, forever. And then you turn it over to the public and see what happens. And then you see a video or a live recording or a show, or something, and someone's got your stuff. That's such an awesome, unexpected thing, and then you get to hear it live and it's like, wow, that's just some little thing I made in my basement.

Dovetail Chicago

Owner of Dovetail, Julie Ghatan, grew up in Southern Illinois and spent her childhood dragged reluctantly by her parents to flea markets, estate sales, yard sales, and thrift stores. However, by her teens, she developed an appreciation for antiques and vintage clothes/accessories. I sat down to interview her, and left with a vintage copper belt and a new appreciation for entrepreneurship and for dynamic and driven Chicagoans.

Interviewed by Emma Saperstein

How and why did you get into vintage clothing and retail?

JULIE GHATAN: Since I was a child, I always knew I wanted to have my own business. I don't know why. I've always been very entrepreneurial. Shopping for vintage and antiques is kind of in my DNA. My mother's grandfather was an antique dealer in Iran. Both my parents are big on antiquing and when I was a kid, they'd make my sister and me join them--which we hated. But when I became a teenager and started liking material things, I became very fond of vintage shopping. Mostly because I quickly realized how difficult it is to find something unique in a mall or retail chain. So vintage shopping was my way of buying unique items and staying stylish without shelling out all that money to look like everyone else, like most of my peers in high school were. After I graduated from college, I had a friend who was working at Lenny & Me in Wicker Park, which was a vintage shop on Milwaukee Ave. He came to my apartment one day when I was going through a major purge and suggested I sell a few items at his shop. I was a bit incredulous because I could not believe that someone would actually pay a retail price for a vintage garment. I was so used to thrifting (and thrift store prices) that the thought of "high-end vintage shopping" was really hard for me to wrap my brain around. But I let him pull some pieces (haha I know you love that word) and a few months later, Lenny & Me sent me a big fat check! And it blew my mind! From that point forward, I realized I could make money from something that had always been a hobby. So I started buying with the intention of selling to Lenny & Me, Store B, and Recycle and I saved all my money for a few years until I had enough to open my own shop, which I did in May 2008.

DOVETAILCHICAGO.COM

Julie Ghatan

Tell us a little bit about your process and philosophy for the store.

J: Well, as you know, the shop is very very, very small, so I have to be particular about what I choose to buy for it. I like cutting the fat. I really believe my writing background has helped a lot with editing all aspects of my life. I studied poetry in college and 4 years of my life were spent adhering to forms and eliminating the excess. After graduation, I got a job as a professional resume writer and once again I found myself adhering to a restrictive form and eliminating the excess. And now, my tiny storefront is the restrictive form and I choose to fill it with only the items worth keeping. That's why my philosophy for the store is, "You don't need more stuff. You need better stuff." I'm all about quality over quantity and that's why the shop only sells vintage and handmade goods. I truly believe that splurging for the one thing you truly want will quiet your need to buy more things. Yes, I'm in the business of selling things but I'm trying to sell those things that will never wind up being donated or sold at a yard sale—the things you'll look at and feel happy to own.

I can't change the way people shop but I try to use my shop as a platform to get people to think of accumulation in a different way. For instance, if you buy an $80 sweater from TopShop and it's made in China and it's 100% acrylic and the tag says "WARNING. EXTREMELY FLAMMABLE. Do not wear near heat or flame." (they really say that!), what are you paying for? You're paying for a junk synthetic material that might burst into flames and it was most likely made using slave labor--and you're paying a premium for it. It doesn't make sense. And to top it off, because synthetic materials are poor quality, it's going to look terrible after a few wears and you're going to donate it to your local thrift store, where no one will buy it because it looks like total crap and it will end up in a landfill, where it won't even biodegrade because it's made of plastic. Acrylic. Polyester. They're all plastic. If you care about the environment, you need to look at labels and ask yourself if your purchase is compounding the problem. If you care about human rights, look at the label and see where the item is made. If it's in a third-world country, chances are it's made from sweatshop labor. If you care about value, ask yourself, "If someone got paid less than $1 to make this, why am I paying $80 for it?" Ask yourself about the cost per wear. If you pay $80 for a shirt you wear 4 times before it's worn out, that's $20 per wear. If you pay $200 for a shirt you wear for 10 years--even if you only wear it once a month--that's only $1.66 per wear. Also, ask yourself at about resale value. Take a look at Craigslist. A nice vintage dresser sells for $300 or more. An Ikea dresser may cost that much new but if you wanted to resell it, good luck even getting a third of what you paid for it. And we'll never see "vintage Ikea" or "vintage Zara" in the future because those products won't even last the 20 years it takes for something to be considered vintage. From all standpoints—environmental, quality, ethics, value—buying less and buying well is a no-brainer.

.

Who are some other artists, business owners, writers or otherwise, who you admire and take inspiration from?

J: Gosh, there are so many I don't know where to start. I really admire Robin Richman. I remember the first time I walked into her eponymous boutique. I was completely blown away by how lovely and perfect it was. She has exquisite taste and everything in her shop is special and made extremely well. It's all so unique and timeless. I hope one day to create something like she has, but in my own way.

What is your customer base like?

J: My customers are wonderful! They have a similar philosophy on accumulation. I think most people who shop vintage or handmade have a similar philosophy--they know that the manufacturing world is in a sad state and most mass-manufactured items are made poorly and unethically. Shopping vintage or handmade is practically the only way to escape cheaply made products and slave labor. It's really sad but it's good to know that there are other options out there.

Where do you see West Town going - and how have you seen it change?

J: I think West Town is moving in a great direction. In the six years since I opened Dovetail, I've seen new businesses entering the neighborhood and filling up the empty storefronts on Chicago Ave. I've also noticed a shift in the type of people who live here—a lot of young adults and people who used to live in Wicker Park but left once it became so saturated. I think West Town has that exciting vibe of a neighborhood on the brink of something and I think people are really drawn to that energy.

Tell me about your writing!

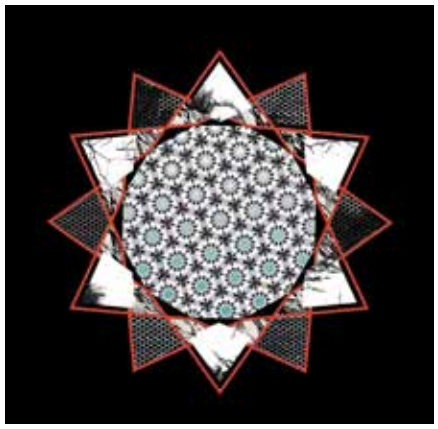
J: Well I haven't been writing much more than copy for the shop lately! I still write resumes for my business Resumental and I was copy writing for HowAboutWe for a while. I take on writing projects when they come to me but my main focus these days is Dovetail!

Doug Kaplan & Max Allison

Doug Kaplan and Max Allison founded Hausu Mountain Records in 2012 to release music by their own projects as well as those of like-minded weirdos. In addition to running the label, Doug works part-time at Thrill Jockey, and Max moonlights as a humanities researcher at Northwestern. Alongside various other projects each is involved with, the two perform with Natalie Chami as Good Willsmith.

Interviewed by Dan Sloan

HAUSUMOUNTAIN.COM



How have you sought out community in the your corner of the independent music world?

DOUG KAPLAN: It's all happened very organically. It's just like how you make friends. All of these people who are super interested in bizarre electronic music, they kind of gravitate towards each other on the Internet and in real life, and we've been fortunate enough to travel all around and meet the people that we meet on the Internet and cherish meeting them and try to foster relationships with them.

MAX ALLISON: I would also say that even with this universalizing concept of the Internet and everything— there are so, so many infinite people that it's possible to construct a community in one's own image without even getting close to the breadth of people that are out there. So we're saying 'everyone is connected,' but really, it's more that we are connected to the people that we have sought out and exchanged our information with, and that's just a tiny fraction of what's out there. And we saw so much more of that demographic of musicians when we, as a label, were accepting demos. Just seeing people send in stuff from everywhere that many times are approaching experimental music or drone, whatever, from a different standpoint. That exemplifies this underground mentality that's happening now with people owning synths, with people getting back into this tape-driven drone and noise and that sort of thing. I guess my overall point is that there is a huge and growing number of people doing this, that we have maybe read about on Twitter or seen in email or Soundcloud message, that are floating off in a parallel cloud.

One thing I think that drives interest in this era is the notion of consistency and curation within one label, and people being able to see a label put out a lot of releases that are not necessarily similar, but attacking their expectations from different angles, and especially using all the resources that exist on the Internet and spreading the news, and that's kind of how you stand out in the Bandcamp model: delivering as much well-curated stuff as you can.

Yeah, it is definitely those labels that have maybe not a "sound," but a definite perspective, that I seem to be drawn to on the Internet. You guys have put out a lot of super different sounding stuff, but it does seem to cohere— what do you see as that sensibility of Hausu Mountain?

DOUG: Zones. Max and I love everything, and in almost all of our musical projects the goal has always been to incorporate as many genres and far-away-from-each-other ideas as possible and try to have them congeal, and I think that's always been a major factor in our releases. We're really into people who can perform what they're doing live in an interesting way, and that's definitely been a really important part of who we select, like they have to be able to throw it down live and do things that are interesting and keep us engaged.

MAX: I think that no matter what, we listen to music from different perspectives as listeners, as musicians, as gearheads. We're interested in how things are being made, but also in their literal manifestation. Like Doug was talking about genre combination, or not necessarily genre, but just moods, ideas. And that manifests in a more textural, impressionistic fashion for us in terms of drones and noises— those are things that we like as tones, that can really upgrade a pop song or a more "conventional" rock song or something — if it has tones that engage us, in addition to the ideas, that's something that we're interested in because it's a different take on something that's more recognizable.

There's another aspect, and this is definitely tying into the notion of live performance, but a lot of the people we're interested in working with are friendly, it's easy to connect with them online, people we know who play shows, who exist in this real world and the digital sphere. Even that is something that helps us relate to them and spread their music in addition to the sound.

DOUG: For sure. There are very few artists who we want to work with who are bad at promoting themselves. We want to work with musicians, for the most part, who are interested in continuing to grow themselves.

MAX: And release more music, even if it's not with us. Being able to demonstrate a trajectory within a set of releases— that's what we aspire to as musicians, and that's what we look for in our releases.

The art on your releases is so distinctive — when you started out, did you have a sense of what your aesthetic was going to be, or what has the process of discovering that been like?

MAX: We're still just learning everything. It's just like, autodidact photoshop nonsense.

DOUG: Initially we were doing the artwork collaboratively, but the last year of releases has been pretty much all Max, and outsiders when artists want that, but

the stuff that Max does is the stuff that's super "Hausu Mountain-y."

MAX: I'm approaching it from having zero experience with drawing or painting, which forces me to source everything from somewhere. That definitely manifests in all kinds of jarring juxtapositions that inform the goofy collage madness. A lot of it is chance-oriented, in whatever I happen to plop into a given place, and a lot of it is coming from comic books I've been scanning, which give the raw material. I guess it's more improv, chance-based than poring over a deliberate structure.

DOUG: I would say that consistent elements across all of it has been super psychedelic'd out stuff, and circuitry.

MAX: Circuits, tentacles. All this stuff that's coming from comics' backgrounds, like fire, water, superpowers being used, energy blasts. Video games, for sure. Definitely part of what informs the aesthetic is that I'm scanning physical objects that are very faded and old, which results in this weird grainy texture. A lot of the elements of the recent art have been more comic book oriented— that's like, stuff that's scanned straight from the book, with various degrees of fading and graininess. Stuff from my past, that I'm not necessarily clinging to nostalgically, but more like, exploiting because it looks cool, and it's fun to dig through.

Doug, I'm curious about how working at Thrill Jockey affected you and your outlook when you were getting things started.

MAX: I was just trying to learn as much as possible from everything that was happening around me, and trying to soak up a lot of information. Just learn how everyone was doing their shit. I definitely talked to Eric a lot about how he was running Immune. I remember we went to a bar one night and I brought my Zoom recorder and he talked forever and ever about all the shit that he does. It's just been very helpful, and my job there, basically assisting everyone, is invaluable to the way that I run Hausu Mountain. Everything that I've learned I've learned experientially, and not in school, and I don't think there's a way to really learn how to run an independent label. Everyone does it differently, and has their own systems.

It's interesting, the different roles that Hausu Mountain and Thrill Jockey fill. In a certain sense, labels are just different things than they were when Thrill Jockey was founded— not to say that it's in any way outdated because I think it's as vital now as it's ever been, probably. Thinking about Ralph Records, which has obviously been a huge touchstone for you guys and a constant source of inspiration, made me wonder: given the fact that a lot of this world exists primarily on the Internet, is a label a different thing than it was when Ralph was in its heyday, or is the mission the same as ever?

MAX: They played close to the chest so to speak in terms of the aesthetic— the roster wasn't enormous. They had a definite personal touch with their overall imagery and the curation of their roster and like, the sound, which was very post-Residents very willfully and in almost every different permutation. And that's definitely something that makes them out to be a "label label" within maybe, at this point, what you're implying is a more diluted, networked system. I don't know; I think that no matter what, labels are looking for novel stuff to release and that's what drives them. Even if the workflow is slower or more deliberate, someone really has to believe in something to spend X dollars on it to release it. So no matter what they have to be driven to expose something new, or to reissue something. So that's kind of like the underlying mission.

Do you guys think there can still be, or needs to be, a record label as local scene documentarian, in the way that maybe we'd think of K Records having been for Olympia?

DOUG: I think it's important to just keep your ears open to what's happening in the world. There are interesting things happening everywhere, and I think it's even better when you establish a global community instead of exposing a local community.

MAX: I mean, yeah. It comes down to the question of who are you exactly looking to prove it to? If you're banding together people in your local zone, you're approaching it from that angle that puts the label of geography on it, as opposed to a more ideological or thematic or aesthetic condition. And then, does that limit your audience or does it make a layperson who approaches your label from like, Japan or something, does it make them alienated in a way—

Like, fetishizing a certain sound as a signifier of a given place.

MAX: That's certainly what's happened with Chicago footwork, internationally. And that has huge positive, but also stereotyping, aspects. There are definitely labels that are our size and maybe stratum of the underground that are overtly focused on certain cities or physical scenes.

I'm reminded of Ehse Records, in Baltimore, which is explicitly focused on releasing Baltimore bands.

MAX: Well they have a lot of great bands. We're not at all lambasting that model, because that roster is sick and there's obviously a high level of quality control, even just within to that local area.

DOUG: But we wouldn't want to limit ourselves. I don't think there's any one Chicago sound. There's so much happening.

Hausu Mountain Records

sausage

Supreme

Open

Closed

1248

Back

Sign Painters' 1 SHOT
PAINT PEINTURE
LETTERING ENAME
LETTERING ENAMEL
132-L LEMON YELLOW
144-L MEDIUM GREEN
188-L MAROON
155-L REFLEX BLUE
3099 BLACK
CHROMAFLO 6000
Flow Enhancer
DANGER!
COMBUSTIBLE LIQUID AND VAPOR
VAPOR HARMFUL. HARMFUL
OR FATAL IF SWALLOWED.

Heart & Bone Signs

Kelsey Dalton & Andrew McClellan

Run out of a live-work studio in Pilsen, Heart and Bone Signs comprises Andrew McClellan and Kelsey Dalton, a dynamic duo of signpainters who have been bringing clean lines and spirals to businesses in Chicago and elsewhere since 2012.

Interviewed by Emma Saperstein

Photo by Hank Pearl

CHICAGOSIGNPAINTERS.COM

Who are you and what do you do?

ANDREW MCCLELLAN: We are a signpainting business that runs out of a loft space in Pilsen. We work with all different types of clients big and small in the Chicagoland area and beyond. We love what we do – we're constantly learning new techniques under the tutelage of many skilled signpainters who have been doing it for a long time.

How did you get into signpainting?

KELSEY DALTON: We were already making chalkboard signs and doing graphic work for a lot of companies and restaurants in Denver, and we had gotten a lot of inquiries about that and were doing that from Chicago when we relocated here, but not formally under a signpainting business. We came to Chicago to go to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and after completing our post-bacc degree I was working at the MCA store and the Sign Painters book [by Faythe Levine and Sam Macon] came out and I was like, "This is amazing," and we got connected with Stephen Reynolds who is a longtime Chicago signpainter, and he became a really good mentor and we learned a lot from him. We also met Stephen Monkemeier of Monk Signs and learned from him as well. The first year we learned a lot, and have continued to meet other people who do signpainting and it's been a gradual process to get to where we are today. It's gradual, you know. We'll have been functioning as Heart and Bone Signs officially for two years in mid October.

Where do you get most of your clientele?

ANDREW: All over the place. We try to stay active on social media as much as possible. At first it was a lot of cold calling—going out into neighborhoods and trying to find places where people needed help with their signage. We'd just go in and say "oh, your sign is terrible."

KELSEY: Actually you might know, that meat market/butcher on Halsted and Grand? It's really old. We always wanted to restore their sign. We went in there and it smelled like death. We gave them our card and were like, "In case you ever want your sign redone." And the guy was like "No, I want to cut pigs open."

ANDREW: Fast-forward a year... Now we're in contact with people all the time and it's actually difficult to keep up. For example, this month we're doing an overnight project with Nike for a video shoot. Then later this month we're doing a project with Heineken. They're building a bar out of shipping containers and we're painting their logo on a couple of things. We're going to be working on a food truck coming up pretty soon, and also working at Forest College and doing some work for them.

KELSEY: Yeah, I would say there's a really good balance of doing a lot of back work in the studio that takes a really long time. We have to inform our clients of this. We have to figure out all the designs, etc. If we're doing design work, we need to get paid for that. But then on-site, sometimes it's a shorter job because we can make patterns and be repetitive with things. Other times, you're being experimental and impromptu with things and you can sort of work with the medium. It's crazy because a lot of our clients think you can just show up and paint. But it's really a lot bigger than that.

NOPQRSTUVWXYZ?#&

BOYSTOWN

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Oak Park

LINCOLN PARK

Bucktown

GARFIELD PARK

BRIDGEPORT

PILSEN

Lakeview

WICKER PARK

Lincoln Square

THE LOOP

Chicago

UPTOWN

LOGAN SQUARE

UKRAINIAN VILLAGE

chinatown

ANDREW: Additionally, for certain things, like for a festival or something, it's like we paint something, it will be there for a week and then it goes away. Like for this Nike thing, we paint it, they'll film it, and then the walls will be dismantled and it will disappear. But for lots of stuff, it's meant to last for a really long time and we have more of an ongoing relationship with the client. We did a project for a bar on the north side in Andersonville called Jerry's and painted on their bricks. We constructed a logo for them that was meant to last into the foreseeable future.

Are you both working elsewhere as well? Do you vacation? Or sleep?

ANDREW: Yeah I'm at Whole Foods and Kelsey is at the Art Institute. We definitely vacation. Not a lot of sleep, no days off. In May we went to the Caribbean for nine days. A month later we went to Denver for a week, and then two weeks later we went to Seattle. Now we're back for a while and then we're going to New York.

Are there any jobs that you want or wish that you had - any fields or areas you wish you could do signage for?

ANDREW: I would say a couple different things. We just got approached by the city of Chicago to do four murals. Large-scale for us—one is 27 feet by 20 feet on the side of a residence—all over downtown. We're in cahoots with them now. It'd be really great to get that job. It's really prominent, right downtown.

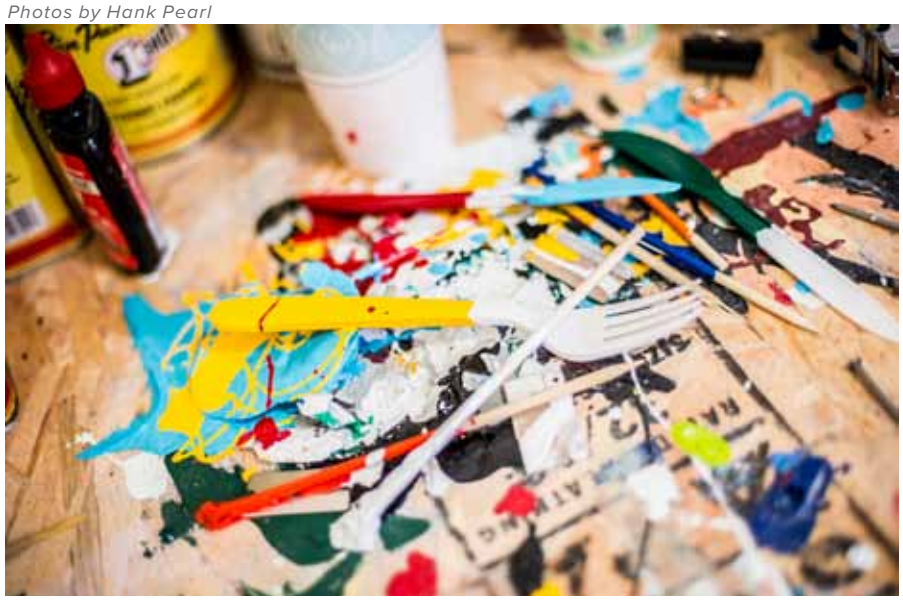
Do you make a distinction between mural work and signpainting work ?

ANDREW: Oftentimes signpainters who do mural work are considered "wall dogs." Guys who paint big murals on walls, which oftentimes involve big lettering, they use that machine that like drops you down - which is terrifying. Like window washer scaffolding. On the other side, in a much more intimate setting, we've recently been learning gold leafing from Robert Frese, a local gentleman. He's been very instrumental in helping us learn gold leafing and has been a great mentor. He runs a business called "Chicagold"— he moved here from California in 1985 and started the company. It's interesting because it's very similar to signpainting, but at the same time so different. He is hypercritical of people who do gold leafing under the guise of signpainting.

KELSEY: I do want to say as a platform for what we're doing now that we have always been interested in, not necessarily mural work, but work that involves other individuals and is based in collaboration and community outside of the studio, and outside of the gallery. I think that is a really huge part of what we do and what we are interested in as artists. I think we start as artists with everything that we do, and then secondarily we are signpainters and we happen to fall in these mutual categories. So it's really important to us that there are these opportunities for us, and for other individuals within our community that can express themselves on a broader platform like this. I think it is amazing that we have found such reception in Chicago and people have been so positive. I hope that it continues that way and that it just grows.

I just want to bring that up because we definitely got a lot of resistance at SAIC as a collaborative, because it conflicted with the ideas of traditional painter, and we always really struggled with that because we want to work with business owners and people on the street and people who have nothing to do with art, and signpainting has been such an amazing experience because they are who we work with. It's both challenging and rewarding. When I reflect back on what we do, I think that's why I want to keep doing it. My ideal client would be anyone who wants to rejuvenate their business and grow communities, and I think there is a huge place for that in Chicago.

Photos by Hank Pearl



Katić Breads have been bringing their delectable glutinous products to farmer's markets in the greater Chicagoland area for the last few years. Their breads are not adulterated with preservatives, additives or any chemicals one cannot even pronounce or even simply grow in one's garden. They make each loaf with love and class, and are the classiest husband-wife bakers in town.

Interviewed by Emma Saperstein

KATICBREADS.COM

Katić Breads

Dusan Katić

Who are you guys, where do you hail from, and what do you do?

DUSAN KATIĆ: Katić Breads is a family-operated bakery located in Aurora, IL. Although we have been settled in Aurora for more than 30 years, our family originates from the Dalmatian coast of the former Yugoslavia.

The focus of our baking is on Viennoiserie (laminated pastries such as croissants, pain au chocolat and almond croissants) and competition-level breads. By 'competition-level' breads, we mean two things: the intention to emulate the standards by which breads are annually judged at the 'Best Baguette in Paris' and the application of the same time-consuming methods by which breads in France are designated as 'de tradition'.

How and why did you get into baking?

D: While serving in the French private military, a Columbian fellow showed me how to make beignets from the flour we had bought in the village (we were stationed that summer in the Central African Republic). Being similar to donuts, I decided to kick it up a notch by injecting pudding into the interior and dipping it in melted caramel. I added some peanuts that we had purchased at a roadside market and served it that evening to the unit.

The esprit de corps was rock bottom prior to dessert, but the donuts put a smile on everyone's face, and everyone was joking about how 'it was just like Homer Simpson'. It was at this moment that I realized what effect food can have on our mood.

Upon returning to France, I decided to do a hike in Brittany. During this hike, I would stop into villages every morning and pick up a loaf for the day. Not only were the loaves radically different than the ones I was used to, but I also began to see a connection between the quality of food and one's quality of life.

The next spring, I re-enrolled in school to pursue a Ph.D. in Philosophy. I worked at a bakery to support myself and to nourish my hobby. While interest in writing papers waned over time, a passion for bread took over.

Tell us a little bit about your process and philosophy for your business, and your thoughts on the farmers market model versus retail or wholesale.?

D: As I more deeply got into the science of bread, I increasingly learned that the best bread comes from following older methods of bread making. Industrial baking killed this knowledge in its desire to be faster and cheaper. But only very long fermentation, low mixing speed (mimicking hand mixing), high hydration (minimum 80% water to flour) and good quality flour can produce excellent bread. Although this is the reality of great bread, it is also very labor intensive. This is why it is rare to find bakeries in the US that are willing to produce bread in this manner.

Over the years, our business philosophy has slightly morphed, but it is gradually settling into being a manageable, family-owned and operated business, with a few friends and apprentices along for the ride. We have learned that chasing the buck is not for us. What gives us greater satisfaction is our relationship with our customers. These folks are wonderful people to talk to, they are patient, and when we were just getting started, they were forgiving. Growing any differently would just draw us away from ourselves (the family) and from our friends (our customers and communities).

Farmers markets have been the best venue at which we can develop this sort of relationship. But in addition to the relationships we build, by doing the markets ourselves, we have the ability to listen to our customers and to adapt to who they are. This intimacy also provides us with the opportunity to educate our customers on what goes into the bread making process, and how they should treat their loaves. We feel that these markets allow us not only to deliver a fantastic product, but also to enrich people with a unique social experience that further energizes us on a daily level.

Who are some other artisans, business owners or otherwise, who you admire and take inspiration from?

D: Blue Oven Bakery, outside of Cincinnati, are good friends of ours that came from the same scratch beginnings as we did. Although we have slight differences in the way we do things, we are always learning from each other and moving forward in our own, uncommon way.

Michel Suas, author of Advanced Bread and Pastry, has been a great mentor and resource. He runs the San Francisco Baking Institute, and he is sort of a godfather for all the ambitious bakers on the west coast. Whenever I stop by to nerd out on bread science, I never know if one of the great bakers will stop by the 'clubhouse' for a chit chat.

What is your customer base like?

D: European/Europhiles, Family-oriented, Educated, Cultured, Travelled, Foodies, Locavores and the Adventurous

SMALL MANUFACTURING ALLIANCE

SMALL

Labrabbit Optics

As owner, founder and the sole employee of Labrabbit Optics, Coyote Degroot is ready to make anyone's face fancy. Awarded "Best Eyewear Shop in Chicago" by the Chicago Reader, Labrabbit's Wicker Park store contains some of the city's most interesting and unique frames.

Interviewed by Sara McCall

Photo by Hank Pearl

Coyote DeGroot

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

COYOTE DEGROOT: I'm originally from Northeastern Wisconsin. I've been living in Chicago for just about 10 years, and I've been in the optical industry for just about 17 years. So I've been doing this for a long time. I came to Chicago just because Wisconsin is pretty quiet, you know, and Chicago is the closest large city. Basically I got into this business after getting kicked out of College back in '99.

I moved back in with my parents and my mom told me, "You need to get a job, or you can't live in this house." And I said, "OKKKK." I've always been interested in medical and technical disciplines. And I just sort of randomly got a job working in an optical lab, and I was crazy enough to stick with it for as long as I have. And you know, things have turned out quite well.

Why "Labrabbit"?

C: It was just a name I came up with. It was easy to Google. There aren't many other "Labrabbits" out there. I think there's a video game called Labrabbit, but I don't think it did very well. It's this like weird, I think it was for a PS2; it was this side scrolling two-dimensional game. It looks super lame. Basically if you took all the fun and all of the color out of the original Super Mario Brothers and replaced Mario with a rabbit.

I mean I've worked in labs, optical labs, pretty much my whole adult life, and I didn't like the sound of "lab rat", because a rat is kind of a dirty animal. A rabbit is a little bit nicer.

So you were slinging frames out of your apartment?

C: I wouldn't use the word "slinging." It just kind of started as something that I did for a little side money for my friends, and friends told friends. And then the demand was there and the money was there, and I said to myself, "Might as well do this," and it's worked out well. I'm not necessarily the biggest risk taker when it comes to business. Well, I shouldn't say I'm not a risk taker, because I am a risk taker, but I'm not necessarily the most growth-focused individual. I like to keep things small and manageable, nimble, controllable. And so I absolutely need to do otherwise.

There is this expectation of becoming bigger to become "the best business possible" right?

C: And that's a very American way of approaching business.

Yes, and sustainability is a fine enough goal?

C: I definitely agree. I 'm not averse to growth, but I'm in no rush. But it's true a lot of people suggest, "You have to franchise this out." You know, open a location in Austin, Texas, and I could and make more money. But I don't really need that much money to be happy and I don't want the added stress. Just this tiny shop is an all-consuming affair. I spend about 60 hours a week here. .

When did you decide, "Yes, I want to be an optician"?

C: It's just something I've been doing long enough that I'm good at it. It's all that I've ever done. It's not that I necessarily that I wake up in the morning and want to cut lenses. I approach it less like that. For me, it's more of a trade than anything else. I would almost say that my relationship with the shop is a little, dare I say, more… "Japanese". Like I don't know, I approach what I do more as like a trade. It's something that I want to be. It's more of a responsibility to the trade itself than it is a passion.

So it's become a mode of expression?

C: Yeah, it's yeah, its kind of strange. But that's what I do. I like meeting new people. I like chitchatting with people. I think running a business itself is kind of interesting to me as well. I feel like it's less about what I do in the business and more about how I do business. I think that business is an oft-underappreciated art form. It's very multidisciplinary, multi-faceted. When you run a business it's not just about what you're selling, it's also how you conduct yourself, how you present yourself, your tone.

First and foremost I've never been much of a "sales person" per se. I really don't try to "sell" anything here. And most of the people that come here aren't interested in being "sold to."

Photos by Hank Pearl

And I try to stock some interesting things, some unusual things, also some accessible things, and the product sort of sells itself. If someone comes in and they don't find something that is a perfect fit for them, I'm not going to try to convince them otherwise.

Which of the frames that you offer are your favorites?

C: I've got a lot of favorites. I'm really into, once again, Japanese stuff. I find that a lot of the Japanese eyewear is, at least the frames that I've sought, are very much influenced by classic American styles—vintage American styles. But the craftsmanship is really excellent. It's very sturdy hardware. I'm really into a lot of metal frames right now, especially Titanium.

I like ones that are very minimal, very lightweight. The Japanese are really good at working with titanium. Most titanium frames come Japan. It's really lightweight, strong, and hypoallergenic. Some people get skin sensitivity to the nickel that is used in most eyewear, but with titanium you don't really have that problem. Even this frame, which is quite thick, and maybe it's the sort of thing that I'm more attuned to than the average person, but it's extremely lightweight.

All of the lenses are all handcrafted?

C: Lenses, by their very nature, need to be handcrafted. And I think that can lead us into a related dialogue about handscraftsmanship. There are a lot of things that we see in our day-to-day life that are handcrafted and that we don't think about. Something that comes from a factory in China we assume it's made by robots. But take iPhones— an iPhone is, in a sense, well maybe the word 'artisanal' isn't the most appropriate—it is a very careful handcrafted, beautiful item. In a sense, it is a sculpture, and people don't really think about that.

What do you mean?

C: It's very delicate. You could make comparisons to any sort of artwork from centuries past that require any sort of high level of skill. You know a lot of contemporary electronics are the same way. Eyeglasses are similar: they're handmade. Lenses are, by nature, all cut by hand. Obviously there are machines that expedite the process but there's a lot of manual dexterity, a lot of muscle memory that goes into working with frames, lenses, things like that.

It's funny because some of the brands that I have here are marked as handmade, and certain other ones aren't and people always like really react to the handmade ones. They're like, "Oh! These are handmade?" And I'm like "Yeah, well, you know all the frames here are handmade."

You may or may not agree but I think people want to feel special when they buy something. It's enjoyable to feel like something was made just for you. And Labrabbit seems to do just that: make people feel like they're the only one wearing "x" frame in the whole city.

C: And I'm more than happy to cater to that. Because I think it's cool too. It's nice to have something that no one else has.

Especially something like glasses. Something you wear everyday.

C: Yeah, with eyewear it really becomes a part of your face. It's a fixture, and it's also a very visible barrier between you and the people that you communicate with. It's a part of your face. And you don't want the same glasses as everyone else. I try to find stuff that's a little more unusual. I try to not buy the same styles, shapes and colors over and over again. I try to maintain some level of exclusivity. But at the same time, I'm not a huge fan of exclusive price points. Stuff I have isn't inexpensive, but you know some frames can be $600 for a plastic frame. I understand the work that goes into it, but a $600 frame is overpriced. Most of the stuff I have hovers around the $300 mark. Like I said, not inexpensive, but it's also a handcrafted product by someone that's earning a living wage. I don't stock anything that's made in China or Korea. It's all made by skilled craftspeople in the United States, Japan, Germany, Austria, France, and Italy.

So essentially you're curating. Not only aesthetically, but economically, and that's an amazing freedom, no?

C: Yeah, I do what I can. I have a very tiny shop; ostensibly one of the smallest retail spaces in Chicago. It's really small… There's no like, "back room." I basically built myself a cubicle; although, I'm thinking about switching things up, because as I mentioned earlier I do everything here. It's just me. I don't have any employees. Sometimes it's tough for me to keep tabs on customers in the shop and to get my work done on time. It's this constant challenging cycle of focus and distraction.

If I were to walk in here and say, "Help! I have poor vision but I don't want to sacrifice my style," how would the process of getting me set up with glasses go?

C: I take care of every step of the process except for an actual eye-exam, so you have to bring your own prescription. Then once we have that information we are good to go.

A lot of people think that a certain face requires a certain frame shape, and to a certain extent that comes into play, but the process is a lot more nuanced than that. People don't buy eyeglasses very often, and its something that people do every couple of years. So I think that they're looking for an easy cut-and-dry approach to buying eyewear. Like I said it's very nuanced. Your personality comes into play, your hairstyle, hair color, complexion, career, your lifestyle—how you use glasses, when and where you wear them. So, I ask a lot of questions, but usually the first step is that I tell people to take a look around and set aside any of the frames that interest them. Then I can step in and see what direction they're going in. Because sometimes people come in and say, "What should I wear?" And I'm like, I don't know. It's like, "What do you want? What do you like?" Then once we select a frame, I take some measurements, order lenses, cut the lenses down, hand polish the frames and that's it; we have glasses.

Local Foods

Photo by Jeffrey Marini

Dave Rand

Local Foods is focused on making the logistics from farmer to chef simple, affordable, and transparent. Dave Rand shared some insight on the void the young company hopes to fill and what wholesale distribution of locally produced food has to offer this city, and quite frankly left me high on the possibility of Local Foods remapping Chicago's epicurean landscape.

Interviewed by Sara McCall

So, where did this start?

DAVE RAND: The first formative food experience for me was working in the commercial salmon industry in Alaska, Bristol Bay. I spent five summers of my life, mostly through college, working with the local fisheries. I got to be at the source of something, like a wild Alaskan salmon harvest. It was a pretty special experience for me, seeing how these fish get to the Midwest or how it is that we eat fresh products that are seasonal, then how we preserve them. And that's freezing them in a quality fashion so that they can be thawed and eaten later, at peak freshness.

I lived in the Pacific Northwest for a bit, and worked for an heirloom organic grain farm. We had a fresh-milled flour program that shipped direct and sold into wholesale markets in Washington and Oregon, So I spent time farming, getting to know the land-side of food.

And then Chicago?

D: Then I moved out to Chicago, where my wife is from, and got my first job in the food scene as the farm forager for the city of Chicago and the Green City Market. And that was a fast track into the Chicago food scene, being really close to the farmers that grow the food that goes to farmer's markets every week in Chicago. Also, getting to spend time with chefs and getting to know their side of sourcing and procuring food for their restaurant operations. And Green City Market, which is really seen as "the chef's market", was a really special opportunity that gave me a lot of exposure to a strong network of growers and consumers. I did a lot of consumer education and really honed in on how things are grown and all the nuances in local food.

I then spent time ranching grass-fed beef, and I sold direct to restaurants and chefs in Chicago. I was driving 700-800 miles a week, hauling beef around, picking up steaks, sending them to restaurants, trying to be the bill collector, trying to be the marketer—it was really challenging. I could see how challenging it is for small-food businesses to scale-up on the wholesale side of business. So, out of that grew a knowledge of how to better this local food system, and I just happened to meet my current business partners [Andrew Lutsey and Ryan Kimura] at a time when they were formulating the idea for the more technological side of Local Foods, procurement and sourcing. Together we decided that it was the right time to grow a business that's exclusively focused on the aggregation marketing and distribution of local goods. So everything that can be grown and produced in the Midwest we specialize in.

Can you tell me about Local Foods currently?

D: We have an amazing company. We are less than two-years old, and we've already got over 150 customers in Chicago. We have eighteen wonderful people who are working for us. They are the only reason we are doing what we're doing right now. We have a small, really dedicated sales force. We have an operations staff and delivery drivers that help complete a customer-service experience and that really makes chefs appreciate us, hopefully, most of the time. We have a back of the house management team that keep numbers straight and keep our priorities and help us preserve the small amount of cash we raised to start this business. And a lot of struggle with small business is making it happen, and keeping it afloat, and planning ahead and seeing when things may become trouble down the road, and avoiding being caught in a bad spot when you're there. And that's what we all do pretty well for a young company, so I'm super happy with the family that I'm with right now.

Aside from distribution, Local Foods sounds like it also wants to educate people about increasing food transparency?

D: Well, right now our main market is the wholesale market, so we're doing this right now for restaurants, for schools, for hotels, and for other institutions that consume a lot of food. You know our whole goal is to educate them on what they're receiving so that they can educate the consumer base, because there is one more step to go before the food gets put on a menu or gets put into a dish. And they can choose to do that or not with us, but frankly we love the people who do promote the growers and do want to educate themselves, but at the same time we just sell quality food too. We still offer a full line of really great products.

Ultimately, part of our plan is to open up this wholesale showroom, a hybrid of retail and wholesale, where we can educate the broader consumer-public on where things are coming from, how they're grown, and why it's special. That permanent home that we're currently building will be the center of education, and will offer us exposure to a much wider range of the general public.

Can you expand on the brick-and-mortar store that's in the process of becoming your retail/showroom space?

D: We are building a facility that's going to house, under one roof, our wholesale distribution, a wholesale meat processing facility where we can cut fresh meat to the specifications of restaurants and where we can do dry-cured meats and smoked meats, and really expand the offering to wholesale what we can do for value-added meat production. But in addition to that, this sort of retail-wholesale hybrid where chefs and the general public can experience what we have to offer, can learn about and taste food, will also be located under that same roof. So essentially, it's a kind of "front-of-the-house, back-of-the-house" operation. The back of the house is really driving the business with volume and pushing a lot of product through the warehouse, and the front of the house can educate more people and draw in a wider range of the public. Our goal is to open the warehouse sometime in the first quarter of next year.

How do you think the opening of a wholesale warehouse, and Local Foods as an organization in general, is going to change the way that Chicago interacts with its food?

D: Well, I hope that we can have enough of an impact to where local food is the new norm. It's less about simply using the word "local" as a marketing tool and more about providing better nutrition, supporting the local economy, and those things becoming the baseline. Then we can have some more fun, we can explore all the heirloom varieties of everything and the heritage breeds of different animals. We can really get granular about not just calling things "organic" if we're not learning about the nuances of how things are grown. Really it's recreating American terroir and understanding sense of place. It's getting to understanding that this isn't just local, this is a Dutch heirloom long-beet from Montalbano Farms in Sandwich, Illinois that has these qualities, or is special because of this story behind it, and to get people to support the people behind the food, as well as the food, as well as the food's history.

What's the process from farmer to buyer?

D: This happens a number of ways. The simplest form is that we have a relationship with a given farm, or they come to us, or we seek them out, and we work with them on creating a market for their products. So if they're growing rainbow carrots we help them gauge demand for rainbow carrots, we work with them on logistics of how to get their products to our warehouse, and then we work on the customer side of things.

We have a strong network of chefs. We put out a list twice a week that goes into thorough detail about all the things we have, and what the seasonality is, and how long they're [particular produce] going to be around, like "You should try these rainbow carrots. They're from this farm, this is why they're special." And then our sales force goes out and talks with their customers, with chefs, and they might work on a dish consultation. One guy might want to braise them and doesn't mind if they're rough looking. Another guy might want to just roast them and put them on the center plate and let them shine. And then we can work with the grower and say, "okay, some of these you can cut the tops off the greens, and others need to be pristine and sized a certain way." And through all that back-and-forth, we end up being a conduit of information. We can help farmers plan better. We can help farmers have a sense of confidence that they are going to sell what they grow. We can give chefs a sense of confidence if they ask for something special, something that would help their operation or set them or their dish apart, then we can find that for them.

Basically we are professionalizing that space in between, allowing people to do what they do best. Chefs can cook, plan, design, and create. Farmers can produce, get efficient, and scale-up, and spend less time behind the wheel. They can let us do that job right in the middle, which is an important one.

Do you think that professional space between Farmer and Chef is lacking?

D: I do feel that Chicago has lacked that industry side of it. Obviously farmer's markets, and especially places like the Green City Market, have been connecting chefs and farmers for a hundred years. And before that, that's where you got food. Then food got industrialized, and big broad-line distribution companies allowed people to have a one-stop shop for everything that is shelf-stable, and from a freezer, and easy to reheat, and all of these things that made life easy. But then, chefs love to challenge themselves, so they went back and tried to find new growers ands started foraging and spending a lot more time. But now we're coming right back to the point where they need an easier solution. It's already hard enough to run a damn restaurant; I mean it's a super hard thing. And, it's a super hard thing to run a farm!

And so there's a lot of room for growth. There are seven million people in the broader Chicagoland area, and twenty-two thousand restaurants, so there's a lot of work to be done.

What are we missing out on as far as what the Midwest has to offer this city?

D: The thing that's exciting about the Midwest to me is that it has four very distinct seasons. You don't get that in San Francisco. And we get these bursts of seasonal flavor and freshness, and these new tastes that aren't supposed to last that long. And we can preserve them and hold onto them in different formats like canning, freezing, puréeing, and pickling but you have to move on. You know, you can't expect to have asparagus on your menu all year, and that's what I think Chicagoans are starting to recognize.

I read somewhere— do you eat one steak every day? Is that true? If it's not true I don't have to tell.

D: Haha! No, that's not true. My wife would kill me if I ate a steak every day. I think you probably got that off our website? We were just having some fun. I do love steak, and I respect a good T-bone though.

Metal Magic Interiors

John Taylor Wallace and Emily Moorhead and I talked about their various creative and business endeavors on a cool summer night. They are a dynamic team of artists with feet in many doors - Metal Magic Interiors is their furniture and interior design company, and they both have independent sculpture and curatorial projects. I had a lot to talk about with these Chicago creatives.

Interviewed by Emma Saperstein

Photos by Hank Pearl

John Taylor Wallace & Emily Moorhead

So what exactly do you do??

JOHN TAYLOR WALLACE: My business is Metal Magic Interiors, and we do furniture and interior design elements. Mostly metal-based, because that's what my shop is, but mixed materials. My building is super cool and collaborative—it's on 37th between Racine and Morgan. It's called the Bubbly Dynamics building, the Chicago Sustainable Manufacturing Center. It's called that because of Bubbly Creek is right there. The landlord is the guy who is doing all the aquaponics, with the tilapia farm. His name is John Edel and he started it in my building and expanded to [the current location of] the Plant. The Plant is a better space for what he's doing, everything there is dedicated to food. He's a great landlord and does everything on a shoestring budget, so we rent from him and that spirit of collaboration is such a huge part of the building.

How many people are in the building?

EMILY MOORHEAD: There's at least ten…

J: There' s a business upstairs that pays a lot of his rent, some weird windfall with the government and education and getting garbage from China and packaging it and giving it to inner city school kids.

E: There are a lot of people you never see… Five bike builders upstairs, a printmaking shop, us, woodworkers in the basement.

So are your personal studios in that building as well?

E: Our personal studios are more here in the basement. It's kind of hard to have both spaces. Our building is really cool. There's a rooftop garden. It's really nice that if you need to trouble-shoot stuff, the building has everyone that you would be interested in talking to. The bike builders have special machines we don't necessarily use that often but it's nice to know we can.

J: Yeah, one of the groups, Legacy Frameworks, builds bikes from scratch and they're Chicago handmade bikes. He does precision, weird, minor degree cuts all the time that I couldn't figure out, but I can go to him and say "Can you make these cuts for me at 16 degrees" and he's like "Yes, no problem!" and my woodworkers downstairs have tools they'll let me use. It's great that I can say yes to any job and feel confident about it and not have to be lying.

How long have you been in business?

J: Over two years—since June two-and-a-half years ago.

What were you up to before then?

J: Just hustling. The Chicago hustle! It'll be four years that I've been in Chicago in September. The first year and a half, we worked at the Northwestern Block museum together.

E: Yeah, I still work there and kind of do the hustle a little bit. It allows us to have a little bit more flexibility with the business. Just because, yeah, there are ups and downs with construction, right, and we've learned that winter can still be really busy, but it all has to do with what the trend is. So patio season is big for us and during that time I work with Taylor a lot.

J: It's funny though, because people forget it's going to be warm until they're like, "Oh god! It's warm! I need a patio!" When you're a small business there is a lot of damage control and putting out fires.

METALMAGICINTERIORS.COM

Do you have any employees?

J: That's interesting, because when I took over the business we had one main client, and he was a designer, and he essentially would send me screenshots of things and do a drawing and say, "Hey can you make this?" and he would send it out to a client. So it was an awesome pipeline of work, but at the same time I didn't really get to put my name on anything, since I was going through him. But he went away, and it's kind of been a blessing. There are three different things in business, I heard this once: you can have it cheap, you can have it fast, or you can have it well made. You can pick two of those things, but only two. You can't have all three. It doesn't work that way.

This is what you do full time, correct?

J: Yeah, I've kind of adjusted, my employees went to the Art Institute and are kind of going their own ways now, so I used to have five people and now I have one, so I'm sharing hours with him and other people in the building since he wants full time hours. So yeah, just trying to make that transition from having easy work to looking for work. It takes a little bit of time to get your name out there. It's odd because I'll have a three-month drought and then I'll have like three big jobs, which makes things interesting with budgeting.

Where did you study?

J: I went to Washington St Louis for grad school, and undergrad I went to University of Tennessee.

E: We met at Washington in the MFA program. It's a good program, I think. What's really interesting for both of us is we went to very craft-heavy places for undergrad, Bauhaus model, where you have to learn each thing, and grad school really wasn't that way. It really has informed both our museum work and what we are doing with the business. It's important to keep up with all the technology and stuff, but in terms of being a good craftsman, people forget how important that is.

J: Especially being a really rounded craftsman. Like, people's minds are blown all the time that I can do woodwork because I have a metal shop. Because my metal shop is what I'm doing right now, but we're also the tech go-to for the museum install.

What projects have you worked on recently?

J: We did a tree project on Halsted - carve a tree on 29th and Halsted. The Chicago Sculpture Group selected ten artists in collaboration with the Parks District. It took a village, but it was really worth it. You can't miss it. I worked on that for two months.

What is the Chicago Sculpture Group?

J: It's a chapter of Sculpture Magazine. The Chicago group has been up about ten years and they are the people who put up the sculptures on the lakefront. They do a lot of public work. We're both members and super involved with them. They're on a mission to push art into the neighborhoods.

You mentioned Emily, that you are a part of an artist collective?

E: Yeah, me and two other artists. A friend I went to grad school with, and another friend I met when I was teaching after school. We all have very different aesthetics, but the things we are interested in, in terms of community engagement, are really in sync. In the city we kept on running into these problems where we wanted to do something big but were too busy, so we formed the group so we could actually be productive. Usually it is spurts and you're hanging out then you get something done. We did a project in Pilsen last year for Chicago Artist Month: a parade and workshops in the park. Recently we just did stuff at I Am Logan Square—we did an installation/residency. They gave us the space for six weeks and we started brainstorming with the curator. We made ten structures that were woven, with different abstract items coming out of them. We did a performance that we projected. The first night of the opening, to kick off the exhibition we did a performance where we were just weaving the whole time. It just happened to fall during the Milwaukee Ave Arts Festival, which was really awesome. We've done stuff at my family farm in Indiana where we just go and make and invite a couple people to come, the goal being to just make for the weekend. I just feel that this is so hard, when you have a project in mind and just don't have the physical space to build larger things.

What else are you up to, Emily?

E: Well, I'm partially at the Block, but also doing some collections management. The city had a lot of problems because of the cold weather, unanticipated problems. We work with the Chicago Conservation Center - I went down to their facility, and it was so much work, and they were really busy this past winter since you have to take everything offsite, catalogue it, and repair it.

Nancy Klehm

Photos by Nancy Klehm - Above: wild foraged chicken of the woods and maitake mushrooms

The Ground Rules

Nancy Klehm is a steward of the earth. She is an ecological systems designer, landscaper, horticultural consultant, and permacultural grower, as well as an in demand consultant, speaker, and teacher. She is respected internationally for her work on land politics and growing for fertility. She recently hosted the first ever Radical Mycology Convergence on her land in Northern Illinois.

Interviewed by Emma Saperstein

Tell us about the journey to what you are doing now, especially in terms of permaculture and ecological systems.

NANCY KLEHM: I have always been connected to and working in collaboration with land. I do this both in urban and rural settings as I split my time between both. The strategies and responses as one might imagine are quite dissimilar, but my approach and goals are the same. I am a collaborator with place. I hold a loose idea about how I am going to do and as I work with this material called 'place' or 'land', my body receives cues from the land itself about how and what exactly needs to be done to achieve my goals of supporting its health and vitality.

Land holds a complexity that both humbles me and blows my mind and my long term, everyday practice involves building habitat for nonhumans, designing ecological environments for humans, growing and foraging food and medicine for myself and others, growing our and archiving seed, raising a menagerie of animals, teaching and training others and transforming wastestreams into fertility streams.

Which leads me to your next question:

Tell us about some of your recent projects - the Ground Rules project, specifically, and soil remediation in general.

N: Like Marx's proletariat, Soil, along with its partners Air and Water, is the strata upon which modern industrial society is built and is utterly dependent, its dumping ground, and its source of redemption. Ignored, contaminated, compressed, and dormant, the dirt that underlies our urban sidewalks, roads, and buildings, waiting patiently in vacant lots, contains the potential not only for its own miraculous biological renewal, but for the regeneration of many of our social, economic, and material structures.

By receiving and transforming plentiful local waste streams of organic matter that are currently shoved aside and sequestered in landfills to await the far reaches of geologic time, working with Soil offers a broad and generous context for community building, alternative economic arrangements, and shifting of consciousness.

Which brings me to tell you about one of my projects, The Ground Rules.

The Ground Rules is a community action and research project in Chicago that proposes a timely and highly visible model to reimagine the waste and biological infrastructures of a city. Participants engage in an exploration of the structural causes of damage to urban ecosystems (soil biology, water cycles, native flora, invertebrate and vertebrate life forms), with the ultimate aim of restoring right relations between these ecological flows – relations that support, rather than undermine, their health.

The Ground Rules Community Bioremediation and Soil Center project uses four tools: bacteria, fungi, plants and community organizing. Bioremediation uses living organisms to safely break down, bind or remove harmful substances from soil, water and human made structures. Bioremediation looks at the whole system, including the living soil communities and aims to restore optimum health conditions to people and communities. Bacteria and other microbes to metabolize contaminants and chelate metals so they are less bio- available in the soil. Microbial remediation is largely done with com-

Left to right: installing king stropharia bunker bags for mycofiltration of aluminum and e-coli in brush creek at the Radical Mycology conference ; Collaborative design session to set up test bioremediation plots in an old agricultural field at the Radical Mycology conference ; Installing mycellium, inoculated biochar and compost tea on bioremediation test plots Radical Mycology conference

post and compost teas. Fungi accumulate and metabolize contaminants. Plants accumulate and then extract heavy metals from the soil.

Are you working in any specific neighborhoods or areas of Chicago for this project? Are you hoping to expand outside of the city limits?

N: I was able to kick off a prototype of this project a few years back in Philadelphia when I got an Annenberg grant. And I have worked on an iteration of the same idea in Warsaw, Poland called 'Soil Garden' and went to Berlin to present this project at The Global Soil Week. I also do some consulting and community trainings on building soil fertility, general soil health and bioremedation 101.

It has actually taken awhile to get things rolling here in Chicago and in that relative dormancy (admittedly, a pretty frustrating few years) the project was able to morph and had become more complex. I have a west side focus as a concentration of my connections are there and we worked on sites in Garfield Park, Humboldt Park and Logan Square. We have been invited to work on two more sites, one in North Lawndale and one in the Back of the Yards and we are currently conducting research and meeting with the community involved on Each of these sites are extremely different in terms of current and historical uses, sources and nature of soil disturbance and contamination, community dynamics and finally the strategies and goals for bioremediation.

What is the Radical Mycology Convergence and how were you involved?

N: The Radical Mycology Convergence is a unique gathering of mycologists, mushroom enthusiasts, and Earth stewards coming together to share skills and information on the numerous benefits of the fungal kingdom for humans and the planet. The RMC is a weekend long event consisting of workshops, presentations, and various mycoremediation installations. Beyond the skills shared, the RMC also works to build a community among like-minded mycophiles (aka mushroom lovers) and community-based earth healers to collaborate on remediation and restoration projects during and after the RMC.

I am one of the main organizers and hosted the RMC on my rural land this past October.

Now that the Radical Mycology Convergence is over, give us some initial thoughts on what came of it. Was anyone present you did not expect? What kind of conversations and discoveries appeared?

N: I have officially been 'mushroomed'. Needless to say, the convergence is an accessible event and everyone who came threw in. We built a kitchen and got local organic veg and grain donated, pulled in and processed a road killed deer or two and foraged abundant poundage of wild mushrooms to rock food for the several hundred participants. We set up a mushroom lab for sterile cultivation. We built four dry privies and four low water foot pump sinks for sane sanitation resulting in four greywater pits that were in turn inoculated with spawn for future mushroom fruiting and a huge humanure pile that is currently cooking itself into some compost for my fruit orchard. Essentially, we built all of our infrastructure and cycled all our food and bodily wastes into the soil. There were many workshops happening simultaneously. During the convergence, we did forays on the land. We had an exuberant contra dance in the barn one night and a 'passion play' aka talent show another. Our firepit discussions around Dark Ecologies or other such things went late into the night.

Not only do I have lots of dried, medicinal and edible mushrooms in my pantry, I also now have an impressive list of wild mushroom species identified on my land – wood ear, oyster, enoki, blewitt, dryad's saddle, puffball, shitake, white elm, honey mushroom, maitake, etcetera etc. We created mushroom installations modeling a collaborative design process and worked with substrates from local trees that we prepared with axes, chainsaws and a chipper from local trees and scythed waste materials. Some of these resulting mushroom installations are for straight on production, some for mycoremediation and a few for mycofiltration on the creek.

I was one of the main organizers, a presenter during the convergence and also the host for the event. Radical Mycology is non-hierarchical, open collective who really do model their actions on the life cycle of fungi. From this, I learned a lot of skills as an organizer and developed some trusted working relationships with the other members of the collective.

Where is your rural land located and what other kinds of activities do you do there?

N: My land is in Orangeville, IL a few miles south of the Wisco border west of Rockford in the Driftless Region. The land is comprised of 50 acres, some wooded, and some in a restored prairie. There is a creek that runs the eastern length of it requiring some footbridges to cross it. I raise bobwhite quail and honeybees, have a 16,000' edible and medicinal garden and two small orchards. I tend and build on the medicinal plants of the 8 acre restored prairie. I am revitalizing the degraded old ag field with hundreds of native edible native trees and shrubs to create habitat that not only I can enjoy so can the creatures I share this land with. There is much wildlife here– sandhill cranes and bluebirds nest in the area, bats and raccoons live in my barns, barred owls, wild turkeys and woodchucks live in the woods, pheasants, deer and bull snakes sleep in the meadow and in the winter I see the snow tracks of weasel and mink who I haven't caught sight of otherwise.

This land is to be enjoyed by others and I invite people as individuals or groups here to do related work and study or take respite from urban living.

Who are some other authors, artists, environmentalists, mycologists who's work you admire and support?

N: My parents to start with! I admire anyone who I feel is truly engaging deeply in PLACE/HABITAT and works to share that reflective and challenging practice with others with real and dirty projects and/or in juicy narrative. And I tend to be attracted to folks who are provocative at doing so, these include the well known: Snyder, Starwhawk, Manning, Ray, Berry, Proulx, Holmgren, Buhner and my contemporaries: Vickers, Lakeman, Schindler, Ray, Babcock, Hayes, Lancaster, Crawford, Marszewski…

In terms of the Ground Rules project, how can folks get involved? What is the easiest way to get plugged into this initiative?

N: I take on only the most deeply practical, intrepid and joyful interns and volunteers. If you fit this description, by all means you can join the Movement..

Pilsen Outpost

Pablo Ramirez

Photo by Hank Pearl

Pablo Ramirez and I sat down on a rainy afternoon to talk about his new artist-run retail shop and gallery in the Pilsen. Showcasing some of the freshest artist handmade products, custom toys, special edition prints, books and fine artwork, it is a retail environment that introduces and immerses customers in the unique and exciting work of local emerging community artists. He chatted with me about his other creative endeavors, and how he ended up doing what he is doing.

Interviewed by Emma Saperstein

Tell me what you're up to.

PABLO RAMIREZ: Two years ago I started to learn how to silkscreen. I also do poetry, and that's when I started making the poetry zine Zacapuntas. Then I was in a motorcycle accident and it made me have to transition from silkscreening to doing something else, which is when I came up with Art Tank Toys: laser-etched, hand-cut CTA trains with their own tracks. People can purchase them and paint them themselves. Often what ends up happening is people paint them and give them right back to me, which in some ways makes it more like a project than a business. I started making these because of my cousin who was incarcerated. He's an artist who I always looked up to and he would send me little wooden carved trains. These trains are inspired by his work. I started making them last May and I had a huge art show and then started selling at fairs and a few boutiques. We have new products in the works and are excited to introduce them soon.

What is Pilsen Outpost?

P: Pilsen Outpost is an artist run pop-up store in Pilsen. We will sell prints, t-shirts, toys and original artwork and we have already collaborated with over 30 local artists. Before we found this space we wanted to do a dry run. La Catrina Cafe had expanded their space and they allowed us to use a corner of their cafe to sell work. We were there from October of last year to May of this year. So this space is a new venture. We're building it out, and it will be a full-on retail store with a grand opening on November 1st.

We will give our artists a 60% commission, so even if it is $30 or $300, they are getting something every month. We want to make and sell art that is attainable for the community at an affordable price. In this market, it is hard to go out and buy art, and if you can't go out and buy art it's hard for anyone to get familiar with it. We want to change this.

Why did you pick this space specifically?

P: We were looking for a place in Pilsen for over a year. Initially we wanted a trial place, but nothing really fit the bill. When we saw this place we knew it was what we needed. I think we can create a new scene over here, especially partnering with Cobalt Studio. Hopefully we can start hosting workshops and events here as well.

When did you first become interested in being a maker?

P: My father is a huge influence in my wanting to be a maker. He has built cabinets, staircases, fishing boats and even an airplane. One of my first jobs was helping him restore million-dollar Frank Lloyd Wright furniture.

Tell me more about Pilsen Outpost: its launch, philosophy, design...

P: Pilsen Outpost was born out of our love for our neighborhood and its culture. Artists make this area interesting and vibrant but rarely get anything in return. We want to give those artists a stage to show off some of their work—not only to the community, but to the city, country and world. I think our design influence is "street" meets "pop" with a hint of cilantro.

How do you see Pilsen as a neighborhood growing and changing in the next few years? How have you seen it change in the past...

P: I think as the neighborhood gets more desirable to live in, my hope is that the people moving in respect the tradition and beauty of our community and I also hope current residents realize how sweet it is to live here and take better care of it. I like the influx of the new small businesses, but don't care for the large chains trying to move in. More La Catrina Cafe, less Dunkin Donuts.

Tell me more about your collaborators. What do you think is unique about your collaboration?

P: My collaborators are two of Pilsen's finest: Teresa Magana and Diana Solis. I am truly their biggest fan and I love seeing them grow as artists and as business partners. I think we work well as a team because our strengths and weaknesses balance each other out and we are brutally honest, at times, with each other but it helps us in the long run. I'd also like to mention Brad Ahrens from Booshworks who helps birth all of my acrylic creations with his creative savvy.

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Pure Joy

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After working for a decade as a labor union organizer in Chicago, Jes Skolnik set her sights on establishing a community center and all-ages music venue for the city. She is the central force behind Pure Joy, the six-person collective that is building an essential piece of infrastructure for Chicago's independent music community which has been, until now, sorely lacking: a permanent, above-ground home for all-ages shows. The collective is working with the city to find a perfect home, and aims to start classes and shows as soon as possible..

Interviewed by Dan Sloan

First, would you give me a snapshot of your vision for what Pure Joy should be??

JES SKOLNIK: It's really a community center first and a venue second. We're designing it to be a place where, especially kids in the community, not only feel safe coming but want to make it their own. It's their space. We're aiming to be like, "Look, you guys can come in and design this space." We want to have a youth board, we want kids to come in and design the space that they're going to be hanging out in themselves. We don't want to be like, "Hey, we're adults, and we're gonna decide what's best for you!" We're just there to put on the shows and run the classes, and make sure that they have a safe time. I think it's really really important to nurture younger kids in DIY— there are six of us in the collective and all of us absolutely had our lives saved, in the most serious sense of the word, by being able to go to shows and DIY stuff. It's so important to have that for kids now, because there isn't a space in Chicago that's like that. Like, we all had access to places where there were church shows and community center shows. And that just doesn't really exist here.

Or there are houses that get shut down before you know it.

J: Right, exactly. And if you're a parent, you don't necessarily feel safe dropping a kid off at some warehouse or some house where a bunch of 22-year-old kids live, and it's not well lit. Not that those spaces aren't great spaces, because they are, but if you're coming in from outside you don't necessarily see that. So we wanted to make a permanent, solid fixture that's not going to get shut down. It's above ground, like, we're working with the Aldermen's Arts Commission. People are stoked about having this community space. From the very beginning Girls Rock was involved— they're going to have their office space in the building, and we're working on designing some after school programs. So ideally, it'll be an after school class and then a show every day.

So you've worked with DIY spaces before. How have your experiences with these spaces impacted your goals or your thoughts about what might be the challenges for Pure Joy?

J: I grew up with Positive Force, in D.C., and so I started going to shows really young, because I have parents who are musicians. Not because I was cool in the least bit, but because my parents are like, these older hippies who were nurturing of the punk community. They're sweet, sweet people. Like my dad repaired amps for Minor Threat, so they knew about stuff that was going on, and they'd be like, "I think that you should go do this, you little weirdo." And I did, and I loved it, and it became my life. I started out doing shows in the Wilson Center and stuff like that, and having a space like that really impacted me as far as like, this was the big show that everybody would go to, and it was at a safe, all-ages space.

I've lived at punk houses, and I helped start Charm City Art Space in Baltimore, which is still going, but they run on a very different model than what Pure Joy is going to be doing, and I think that my experience with that kind of colored the way that we're building this. They run on a membership model, which works for a much smaller community. It works for them, but it wouldn't for us. I considered that when we were getting started, but we would have way too many people, and especially because we're going to be working with kids and you have to be really careful about background checks and that kind of stuff. Vetting everybody would be a big process, plus making sure that everybody puts in equal work. At Charm City it works because it's a fairly small collective and everybody who's a member there puts in work. We used to have a problem where people just wanted to book shows and didn't want to do any of the actual work-work, way back when that space first began and we had to sort that out. Like, no, you can't just pay your membership dues and come in and book a show and not do any of the cleaning or maintenance of the space.

Do you think that your time working as a labor union organizer impacted you in terms of what you think a community space should be, or do you think of these tracks in your life as separate?

J: No, they're definitely very much the same. I believe in equitable spaces and spaces where everybody gets to come in on the same level, and being a union organizer most definitely impacted that. We're building a space that doesn't just default to white middle class folks. We want everyone to have a stake in it from the get-go.

I'm working on a reissue label with Sean Gray who does Accidental Guest Records, and I was just on their show talking about accessible spaces— Sean has done a lot about accessibility in DIY— and we started talking about necessity of physically accessible spaces because not a lot of them exist. And few spaces are able to take that into consideration, because if you're putting on a house show, you're like, "Yep, I live in this third floor loft, or this crazy warehouse with no elevators," and you just have to run with it because that's the space you have. And that's totally understandable. But it's crazy to all of us how many clubs don't take that into consideration.

Is it too early to start thinking about what types of classes are going to be offered?

J: No that's totally all on the table. Since we're working with Girls Rock, there's definitely going to be instrument tutorials and stuff like, how to book a tour, how to repair instruments and do basic maintenance, the financials of being in a band and that kind of stuff. There's going to be all the sort of things you need to know for running a DIY band. And we have folks who want to come in and do yoga classes, folks who want to come in to do roundtables for queer kids, we have folks who want to come in and do writing classes, and still more stuff. We're going to have a whole range of stuff. I'd love to do basic cooking classes— obviously we'll have limited kitchen materials, but cooking on a budget, that kind of thing; arts and life skills.

I saw on the Indiegogo that there's a plan to have as part of the space, a sort of record and art store— is that still in the works?

J: Yeah, that's still in the works. I can't really talk about it super specifically because the person who's going to be running the record store is still at his full-time job, so I don't want to endanger his livelihood, but he's lovely, and that's going to be part of the thing for sure.

That's awesome. And so that, along with having tenants who are other arts groups or community groups— is that what you're thinking of as a way to keep this self-sustaining?

J: Yep. And we're going to be offering meeting space for free or very low costs for organizations, depending on what they can pay. The attitude is like, "Come in and use our space! It's here, come and use it. It's for you guys." That too will I think be big, if we can offer it, why not? Meeting space is always at a premium. If you don't have to go do it at somebody's house, you can do it somewhere you can spread out and take advantage of office supplies and whatnot.

As an outsider, it seems like securing the loan would really be the toughest thing. So having that done must be a huge load off your back?

J: Yeah. We were going full speed on a couple of spaces and had to put them on hold because of the loan. It's been really hard. Ivy, who is our business wizard, she has been saving for over a year to make this happen. Before we even started talking about this, she had been thinking of working on a space with another friend of ours in Baltimore, and circumstances changed and she ended up staying in Chicago, and that's how we started talking about all this. She's been working a second job and saving everything from that for over a year, and she still had to put up personal stuff as collateral on this loan, because that's how tough the banks are.

It seems like something that the city needs and that a lot of people have been craving. I bet you've gotten a pretty good response with people wanting to volunteer. In case there's anybody who reads this who may be interested, what

J: There's all kinds of stuff for volunteers to help with: staffing shows, the work of making sure the space is clean and safe, teaching classes, working on sound and lighting (we're especially going to need folks to help us build that stuff up during the next few months), fundraising stuff, I know we have some folks who are incredible fundraisers who are volunteering right now. The nature of a nonprofit is that you have to keep asking for money forever, which sucks, but is also an opportunity to do some cool fundraising events.

We've gotten a great response so far. It's been amazing. My experience with Girls

The Salsa Truck

I first encountered The Salsa Truck during a special event at Maria's Packaged Goods & Community Bar in January of 2013. Tacos, donuts and hot cocoa were served in almost sub zero weather and it was amazing. That night I met owner and founder, Dan Salls. The Salsa Truck was the first food truck in Chicago to have on board cooking, which was a major feat for food trucks in the city to achieve. Since then Dan opened up The Garage, a great lunch counter and hang out place. The West loop hotspot with a rotating guest chef curated menu also happens to double as a food truck incubator and commissary kitchen for the burgeoning food truck scene in Chicago.

Interviewed by Ed Marszewski

Why did you start Salsa Truck?

DAN SALLS: Well I was in a different world, working as a financial advisor, and I was super bored. Being the chubby little kid that I was I loved to eat, and I loved tacos and I wanted to be in the food world. At the time the only ways to do it were to either start as a dishwasher and work my way up for the next 20 years or cheat and open up a food truck, so that's what I did.

So you jumped ahead in the line in terms of seniority in the restaurant world?

D: Yeah, I am a real egomaniac and I just wanted people to start calling me chef right away.

Well it's easy to start a business, but to stay in business is hard. At the time you were opening there were quite a few trucks in Chicago, right?

D: Sort of— there were trucks that could not cook onboard. There were several dozen of them and they had a really crappy product. Our truck was the very first one that could cook on board. So when the legislation was rewritten in the summer of 2012, that was right around the time we decided to build the truck. We built our truck based on those regulatory rules and we were the first ones to get that license. upy movement sprung up. The battles for social justice and equality are going strong.

Yeah speaking of regulatory rules, it seems to me that it was a nightmare for anyone. Actually it is very difficult for anyone to start any business in Illinois or Chicago.

D: Correct.

And it must have been even more difficult to operate or to start a food truck.

D: Yeah it was literally nine months of back and forth with the city. And we had a completed project that entire nine month period and it was just stalling on their part. There were some leadership issues, and some stuff that is water under the bridge now. We've got our license and there are other food trucks. At the time it was extremely difficult, and it's still difficult to do, but we were kind of the guinea pigs. We sort of cracked the code and now people can open up a truck much more easily. It's still Chicago, still Illinois, but as far as what we went through, no one else will have to bear that burden again.

Well one of the interesting things about your project is that you opened a truck and then you opened up The Garage, which is a really unique project and there isn"t anything like it in the city. Can you describe exactly how the facility functions?

D: The Garage is really unique. There is really nowhere like it, as far as we know, anywhere. First and foremost, it's a 106-year-old garage in the West Loop that was a cold storage facility and then a horse stable for the fire department. It's been a lot of different things. When we found it, we gutted it out, we put it in a commercial kitchen. And that commercial kitchen was built to support my food truck, the Salsa Truck, and other food trucks in the city. Because commissary space, which is something every food truck needs— kind of like a home base— is few and far between in Chicago, and where you do find it it's incredibly expensive, there's a long wait list. So we built this place as a community space to help serve the food truck community because we needed help. So we are a food truck commissary. There are currently five trucks that work out of here and then with the excess space we're also a restaurant. So it's a lunch counter upfront with a daily selection of food from my food truck, the Salsa Truck. And we get bored and we like to cook other food so everyday we bring in either a guest chef, another food truck, or we grab out our own knives and cook with a different theme and different ideas.

So who are some of the people you collaborated with on this menu change that you do?

D: Sure, so every Monday we bring a truck and called Yum Dum, which is kind of one of the first groups that we worked with and does street dim sum. We helped them build a truck, develop their menu, and they have been serving out of here every single Monday since we opened. We have the Donermen, who do German-Turkish street food, really rad doner kabob and currywurst. As we speak today Art Jackson from Pleasant House bakery is here, with whom I'm sure people are familiar. We try to bring in either other food trucks or other guest chefs. David Posey, the former chef de cuisine of Blackbird is coming to do French street food. It's just really fun.

Yeah that"s pretty amazing. One of the most interesting aspects of your business is this kind of incubator function and I think it"s really unique that you actually give a shit about

Photo by Aron Gent

Dan Salls

other businesses. I also like the fact that you want to help all these different food trucks in planning and food trucks in operation. How did you decide to get into that— why was it important for you?

D: Well it kind of goes back to what we were saying before: we cracked the code. It was so difficult for me to get my food truck open, coming from someone from a totally different world who knew next to nothing about operating a food truck, or even a restaurant. It's been baptism by fire for us. I say, "I made all the mistakes so you don't have to." And the food truck scene in Chicago absolutely needs help and support so we are here to provide that. We don't take it for granted for one day that we will be allowed to have fun and make food and see people eat it so I just want to push forward. And it's great because it helps me hone my craft. And it helps support the scene and it's just the right thing to do.

Well lets say there is a person out there that has dreams of opening up a food truck or a restaurant. What would they have to do to kind of get the ball rolling? I mean first obviously, a concept.

D: Yeah well first they need to admit to themselves that they are totally, certifiably insane. And that they have to go get a tattoo and put it on their forehead that says, "we asked for it". Because it's crazy.

How is it crazy?

D: It's a lifestyle, it's not a job. It's 7 days a week, it's -20 degrees, it's 120 degrees, it's stress, it's deliveries not coming right, it's breakdowns, it's legislation, it's red tape, it's parking problems, it's HR, it's funding issues. You have to become a mechanic, a plumber, a chef, a dishwasher, everything in the world and you gotta do it all. So we try to scare the shit out of people first. And then you gotta have a concept. And you gotta have a really specific one. Food trucks aren't like restaurants. Restaurants can just have a cool name and sort of do whatever they want. A food truck has to be a very specific concept that is easy to repeat over and over again in a very specific niche. You do just tacos from this area, you do dim sum, you do doner kabob. Generally you are only going to have 5-6 different menu items. You better do them really well to stand out. You gotta have a cool concept, and marketing, and you gotta hustle, and do all that stuff but you need passion, and you need a lot of time, and you need to be willing to learn, and eat a lot of humble pie.

Obviously there is a need for this kind of incubation, this kind of commissary space, and we have talked briefly about wow it would be great if there were a large space for this. Do you think the legislation will support that environment here? Will the government support a broadening of this kind of culinary experience, or do you think it"s going to be another uphill battle?

D: That's a tough question. We have toyed around with it for a really long time. Ours is definitely a microcosm, you know we only service five trucks out of here and we could probably get seven or eight in. We have always talked about, wouldn't that be great to have a commissary, an incubator for 50 trucks and serve every truck in Chicago, and do it the right way? And while we know we could do that, we just don't know if there are enough trucks right now, if you asked me that question a year ago I would say ask me in a year and I'll have a better idea, and we are closer. Food trucks are definitely here to stay in Chicago. There are some parking and weather issues that are hampering the scene. It's just difficult to go out there and park. You know— think about your car. Now triple the size and put a food truck in there, and say we can't be within 200 feet of a restaurant, and come up with a bunch of other bullshit. And then it's going to start raining. So it's okay, I think that we could do it, it's just the full story hasn't been told how big Chicago's food truck scene will get. It's getting bigger, it's substantiating, it's getting better all around. I think that maybe in another year that would be something people would be into doing at a much larger level.

Do you think the model that you see in Portland where they have this kind of food truck or food cart courts and pods on parking lots, as something that could be possible here in Chicago?

D: We've tried it. We do food truck rallies in front of the Garage, and that's great. The way food trucks are starting to work in Chicago is a double edged sword. We work by high volume lunch shifts. It's not good to do a late night in front of bars. Everyone would think my taco truck would kill it in River North or Wrigleyville, but it doesn't. People don't have the attention span or large enough wallet. In the regulatory environment in Chicago right now, you can only be parked someplace for two hours. So that's a huge issue. And you can't congregate in an empty parking lot, which is another huge issue. So with that being said, the pods in Portland and stuff really can't come to fruition, so we are trying to do it in our own very Chicago way and that's whats really cool about food truck owners in general and Chicagoans in general: we are resilient, we think outside of the box. You go to LA, every single food truck comes from the same source and they all look exactly the same, they just have a different paint job and different menu. In Chicago there are no two food trucks that look the same, that do the same thing, that make the food the same way. It's a really unique situation and that's what I love about it. As much as I want to shoot myself sometimes for having a food truck in Chicago, I would have it no other way because of the unique nature of it all.

That"s awesome man. Can you tell me about some of your future plans? I know that you're planning on releasing the Salsa Truck salsa line.

D: Yeah, I've signed a bunch of paperwork that says I can't say where they are going to be available, but check this fall on the shelves. There is a grocery store chain with seven regional, local locations that we are going to be selling salsa out of. Right now it's in some ma and pa shops— we sell some salsa here and there. We've got eleven different products from hot sauce to escabeche, which is a pickle product, our house rub and our foremost popular salsas. We are working on another truck, which is not going to be the Salsa Truck— it's going to kind of follow The Garage. The inspiration is street food and street culture from all over the world. So every week it will be a changing menu from a different city, town, region of the world's street food, and we're going to get different local artists to paint the truck and it's going to be a celebration of street culture. And then in the meantime we've got some other things. Expansion is always on the mind but we are really committed to making sure that what we are doing here at The Garage, that the mission is not lost here. And that is going to take some time to make sure that this whole thing is sustainable, and the last thing is I'm just going to try and stay alive and wake up every morning, try not to kill myself.

Wolfbait & B-Girls

Founded in 2006 by Shirley Kienitz and Jenny Stadler, Wolfbait & B-Girls has become a Logan Square staple and showcase for local designers. The duo design and construct their labels—Bruiser and Brazen Judy, respectively— in-store, offering a unique shopping experience that closes the gap between consumer and artisan.

Interviewed by Sara McCall

Photo by Aron Gent

When did Wolfbait & B-Girls start?

SHIRLEY KIENITZ: Wolfbait & B-Girls started in 2006 when Jenny and I met. We were both local fashion designers, and we were selling our respective brands to different boutiques in the area and different fashion-focused events. And at that time we were both looking for some studio space, maybe some retail space. We were kind of at the same phase, fresh from fashion school, starting our own lines, trying to find venues to showcase new and local talent, and we found it really challenging that a lot of people didn't want to bet on a newbie or invest in these local start-ups. We decided that it was a void that we could fill, that we could facilitate relationships among these people with little to no retail experience, but with great products, great ideas. Jenny found the property that we're in, when Logan square was an entirely different neighborhood, and this space was just a dirt lot. It hadn't even been built yet. That was nine years ago.

You constructed the building?

S: This is a commercial condo unit within a larger building, but we built everything in here, like all of our worktables and the storage. Jenny continues to salvage and repurpose all sorts of upcycled things for display, and we always try to keep it fresh.

JENNY STADLER: : There are some pieces in here built by the Rebuilding Exchange.

So you mentioned that the impetus for starting Wolfbait & B-Girls was that there wasn't a place that was really open to local artists and designers...

J: We were having a hard time getting our stuff into stores, and people would just say, "No." There was no feedback. There was no constructive criticism. We really take enjoyment in helping; we do offer lots of constructive criticism. If we don't take your stuff we'll say "No, but here's why…" and then the designer can come back and we take their stuff. No one was offering us that kind of thing.

J: And some artists have really excelled with the help that we've given them. We've had artists that maybe came in with some vintage clothing that they were adapting with some sort of embroidery or silk-screening on a used article and we were like, "your graphic here is great but you need to make this more accessible, you need to buy shirts in bulk. You need to silk screen them all identically so you can sell them in different sizes." And steer them towards a more marketable product, and those people are in Nordstrom's now. Those people are too big to restock us!

How does that feel?

S: It feels good, we feel proud. It feels good that we participated in some small part.

J: We've had several relationships with people, from the get-go, that we're still consigning with. They grew at exponential rates, but we maintain a lot of our relationships.

As local business advocates is it strange to see other designers move on to big corporations like Nordstrom's?

S: No, I think that's a personal choice, and it totally depends on what your product is, and why you got into making it. Just because your message is reaching more people it doesn't mean that what you're saying no longer matters.

J: We're not bitter yet… Because they're still restocking us several times a year. Maybe when those ties are completely cut… [laughs] I'm just kidding.

One of the things that keeps our store so fresh and interesting is that we're always meeting new artists. We're not "depending" on those artists that outgrow us. There's always fresh-meat in the area. There's always a new artist that wants the exposure and the learning experience of this early retail market.

As far as your products go, Brazen Judy and Bruiser...

S: Jenny's line is Brazen Judy and my line is called Bruiser. We could very easily up our production and try to get into bigger stores, but it's just not our primary goal. I don't think we find a lot of joy in big fashion shows or the managing of a brand, which happens when you become big. We really enjoy the hands-on experience of actually creating something and participating from the concept all the way to the people who try it on here at the store. It means something different for us.

What do you think constructing and selling your clothing in the same space has allowed for you and the customer?

S: I definitely enjoy it, and I think that customers enjoy seeing that, but coming with the store are a whole bunch of responsibilities. Organizing almost two hundred local artists is a feat unto itself. We started with only 12 artists, now we have nearly two hundred.

How do you go about selecting these artists?

S: The store is curated to some degree. You're not automatically "in" just because you're making products here in Chicago. In the beginning we would run ads and host different events, but now, because we've grown, we can rely on word-of-mouth.

So what exactly is "Wolfbait" and who are "B-Girls"?

S: Well it's from a book called Chicago Confidential, which I believe was written in 1931. It was more of a tour guide that they gave out to people to try to lure them to bring industry to Chicago. And one of the chapters is "Wolfbait", referring to the women from farms that came into the city and who they could easily underpay and take advantage of. Later in the book there's a chapter called "B-Girls" which is about barmaids and burlesque dancers, the counter-culture of women. The bottom line is that "Wolfbait" represents women in business in Chicago and what they are doing for themselves. And "B-girls" is "Brazen Judy," it's "Bruiser," but also it's just the "B-side," the alternative to the A-group. It's not the mainstream.

So you're taking that term back?

S: Totally. We are embracing it and re-appropriating it.

So do you guys really print out "shop-local factoids" on all of your receipts?

J: Yes.

So you're taking that term back?

S: Totally. We are embracing it and re-appropriating it.

What's next for Wolfbait and B-Girls?

S: I think we're open to opportunity, just personality-wise we both are. Just recently I've been thinking "What if we did it in another town like Nashville or Austin?" But I think we want to enjoy this moment where it's working out. One of our employees always says, "Oh this place is so unconventional." I like that, and I think people are starting to embrace that. Maybe you don't have to do it this corporate way. Maybe you can have a personal relationship with your vendors.

J: You can see your product be made. Someone one time came in and said, "This is crazy. I can't even see where my food comes from, but I can see you make me a pair of pants right here."

Shirley Kienitz & Jenny Stadler

Working Bikes

Marie Akerman

Founded in 1999 by Lee Ravenscroft, Amy Little and a team of dedicated volunteers, Working Bikes has become an integral part of Chicago's bicycling community. The bicycle-recycling co-operative, located in Pilsen, is responsible for bikes all over the city of Chicago and also abroad. I rode into the Working Bikes store, skirting around the countless collected frames and parts to speak with Marie Akerman, the organization's Outreach Coordinator and one of the many people responsible for Working Bikes' much-appreciated success.

Interviewed By Sara McCall

What does Working Bikes do? How did you get involved?

MARIE AKERMAN: Working Bikes was founded about fifteen years ago, and we don't really call ourselves a "charity" but it is a 501(c)(3) federal non-profit. It's more along the lines of like, a Goodwill of bike co-ops. We sell about one-in-five of the bikes that we get, and the proceeds from the sales fund our donations. Those other four bikes get donated. In general we donate 5,000-6,000 bikes a year, and 5,000 of those bikes go abroad, and 600-800 of those go to Chicago. Last year we donated 700 bikes; this year we're already at 700, so far more will be donated this year to Chicago

Where do bikes that "go abroad" go?

M: We donate to partner organizations in Africa, Central America, and The Caribbean—they're located on our website with shipping history if you're curious. Mainly though, Ghana, Sierra Leon, El Salvador, Nicaragua and South Africa are the countries we donate most to, and it changes with political conditions.

If I had a bike that sat on my back porch for a year and I wheeled it into one of your drop off locations, what would happen from there?

M: Donors donate to us in a few different ways. One is coming to the warehouse, if not during store hours. Another is by donating at one of the events that we have throughout the year, like cycling events. And the other way is by dropping off at one of our bike drop-off locations. We have close to fifty drop-off locations around the city and the suburbs.

Once the bike comes in, if it's a mountain bike, we will probably ship it abroad. If it's a really "pricey" bike, we might repair it and sell it here in the city.

Why is that?

M: We basically sell the bikes that are of highest value. That's because we wouldn't have much money to pay for the repairs if the bike wasn't a name brand bike, because American bike standards are higher. So locally, we sell the bikes of higher value. Mountain bikes, we tend to want to ship those because the tires are thicker on mountain bikes, and so they're the most desired in developing countries where they don't have great road conditions.

It's a great model, because road bikes, which are usually more expensive, are in higher demand here, where we have paved roads, than in those developing countries. And so we get to source one main kind here and then send the other main kind abroad.

How is Working Bikes different?

M: In Chicago, as far as bike co-ops go, we're bigger in terms of the breadth of what we do. Working Bikes, our main thing is donating bikes internationally and selling bikes locally. And while the donation program is "amping up" we now have youth programs as well. We're currently doing a program with One Summer Chicago, and we have volunteers from different schools that come in all the time. We have a program aligned with

Photo by Hank Pearl


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Streetwise that includes doing a soft skills job training course, learning bike repair with us, and then preparing those people to work as apprentices in a couple different shops. I called a few different bike shops around the city and asked if they would take an apprentice, and they said yes.

What's up with that Working Bikes bike machine that I've seen around?

M: Our founder Lee is a retired electrical engineer and he started using some of the exercise bikes that were donated to us to make these bike generators. I think it started as a fun side-project, but now it's a great way to get people interested at events because it's so interactive. Basically, the bike is connected to a generator and then we can hook up a record player so people can hear as they pedal. And little kids are the best—they get so excited about these bikes.

And some of our international partners make similar machines, but for things like pumping water out of a well so people don't have to walk as far, and to grind up corn into maize. And so the bikes here become a link to show people how our partners are using similar machines to do these kinds of things elsewhere.

How can someone get involved with Working Bikes?

M: One, you can get involved by donating. Not a stolen bike, because we can tell. Two, you can volunteer at our shop three days a week. The hours are Tuesdays from 5 to 9, Wednesdays from 12 to 5 and Saturdays from 12 to 5. When you volunteer you'll be working on the bikes that we donate locally. And you don't have to have any experience. You volunteer and you work on the bikes and you work your way up. But the last way that you can get involved is by hosting a bike drive. It can be a really cool and fun project to do. If you're a church or a school, etc. it's a really cool project to do. And those always make a big difference.

It's amazing that there are literally just hundreds of bikes just sitting around.

M: I know! I read, that about 15 million bikes get thrown away every year. And I believe it, because we started by just getting truckloads of bikes from the scrapyard.

So what's going on with these little kids in the shop right now?

M: Oh the little ones? They just hang out. And my boss was like, "We need to start a bike club for them," because they come here almost every day. But as of now we just let them hang out, and they learn about fixing bikes and helping.

So you've organically created this space that they enjoy hanging out at. That's fantastic.

M: In general, that's what I like about it here. With the volunteers we get lots of different backgrounds: retirees, teens, students, young professionals, lots of people who are in transitional housing learning bike repair skills. So it's a really neat community of people here. It's definitely a community space where you can come and do something productive they learn about fixing bikes and helping.

Photos by Hank Pearl

Rebuilding Exchange

Up until this past summer Blake Sloane headed up the Rebuilding Exchange's RX Made line, which creates home goods using reclaimed and locally manufactured materials, and also does custom furniture. The Rebuilding Exchange promotes sustainable building and deconstruction practices through its public programming, jobs training and retail warehouse.

Interviewed by Dan Sloane

Photos by Hank Pearl

Have you been involved in furniture design from before your time here at Rebuilding Exchange? Could you talk a little bit about your history in furniture design, how you got started and what that was like?

BLAKE SLOANE: My background doesn't directly feed into this field: I actually studied music composition when I was in college. But my father is a bit of an antique collector, furniture repairman, refinisher of fine woodwork, so I grew up around that. I also just grew up helping him fix up the old family home, and I think that's where my interest was born. But then for most of my high school years, and in college, I wanted to do the music thing. I moved to Chicago to be in a band, but all the while, I kept doing little side carpentry projects and picking up odd jobs. Then there was a critical point, this was maybe eight years ago, when I made two websites, one for music, because I really wanted to do composition, film scoring, recording and production, and a website pitching carpentry, design, stuff like that, and kind of decided to just go with whichever one worked out better. And the furniture worked out better.

Around the time I started getting busy doing that stuff freelance, Elise, the founder of Rebuilding Exchange, was actually a regular bar guest at the bar that I worked at for many years. So I knew that she was opening this place. So I started volunteering back when Rebuilding Exchange was two staff, and that pretty quickly led to a job training in the shop, because I knew a little about tools. I think I got really lucky, in that the company was young enough that I was able to grow with it. Because when I started working here, I'd done some freelance stuff and designed a bunch of furniture, but certainly didn't have an amazing portfolio. So yeah, we just organically grew together.

How did the RX Made line come to be? Was that something that was part of the Rebuilding Exchange at its inception?

B: It was a later development. Like I said, when we first opened up, it was just a warehouse, we were doing job training with a dozen trainees at a time, and we got a donation of shop tools, and built a shop, and it sort of become, "oh, we should teach them a few shop skills," and then we developed a curriculum, and after a few months it turned into this three-tiered program, of deconstruction out in the field, taking the houses down, then working in the warehouse to warehouse and sell the materials, and then working in the shop to process the materials. We were young, and it was a little scattered trying to do all three, but it was this perfect full circle: they went out in the field, took the material out of the house, figured out how to store it and sell it, what's worth something and what's not, and then actually working with their hands to make something out of it. We've since kind of dialed back the training, because it was too much to manage. But to answer your question, when we started teaching shop skills, it just kind of happened. We made birdhouses, and then we made a bench, and we would start to put things we had made on the floor for sale, because we didn't know what else to do with it. And the response was good.

One of the first custom projects that we did was for a little grocery store that has since disappeared down on Division Street, called Naked Foods or something. We built a couple of counters, some produce bins and stuff like that. Then the next job we took on was with Bang Bang Pie Shop when they were first opening up. They came to us and were like, "we have no money, we're just trying to do this pie shop, is there any way you'd consider making us tables on trade?" So we gave them a great deal and made tables and that was one of our first showcases in a restaurant. People saw it, and then it was crazy how quickly it turned into folks showing up like, "Hey I was at Bang Bang, I love those tables, can we do that?" Black Dog Gelato was one of the next local businesses, and that practice has just grown and most of what we do now is restaurant work and interiors.

The RX Made line is designed in-house, but also through collaboration with other designers from around the Midwest. I was wondering, how do you cultivate those relationships and what the process is like when you collaborate on a piece with a designer?

B: It depends. We've had a few different formal collaborations. We worked with Strand Design, a local husband-wife team that's had a good amount of success, and we worked with them in a very traditional sense: we paid them to develop three products and they brought us, it started with a dozen, and then we narrowed it down. So that was a little more typical. We've done a lot of other, sort of like, roundtable discussions. We did a big thing for the Neocon Furniture Show a few years ago, that was a dozen local design people all just having fun for a few days; that was way more informal. We did something with the Art Institute: for one of their classes, they sort of modeled the class around materials here, and I worked with a professor to help him choose our three hardest-to-use materials. And that was their challenge, to create products based on that. So we gave them tile, hollow-core doors, the cheapest, flimsiest doors that no one wants to buy, and sawdust. And the students came up with some really cool ideas. We're still sitting on those ideas. Money is always an issue here; where a traditional company would be able to pay a designer to prototype something and then you bring it to production, our budget is so tight. The collaboration with Strand, that was really an investment for us— it was really hard to go through the legitimate channels. So, something like a class of students doing it as homework, that's really the approach that works for us because we're not putting a ton of capital into it.

I know that part of the goal in starting the RX Made line was to showcase possible uses for materials in the warehouse, and part of it was also to support local businesses that deal in materials and manufacturing. Is there ever a tension involved in designing pieces that incorporate both of those goals, or do they form natural complements in your mind?

There's a little bit of tension. People who come in here to buy a toilet and see a table— the pricing for our custom furniture is a little bit different form the pricing for the reclaimed materials we're just pulling out of buildings. So, trying to be responsible with what we build and trying to use local manufacturers, support other local businesses, it's really a challenge to still hit the price point of the audience we're trying to reach. The clocks are a great example, that was one of the things Strand designed. It's a beautiful design, you just take it apart and it makes so much sense. It's this gorgeous little thing, and what you can't see is that there's a steel plate in there that's locally made, and there are twelve screws that are tapped out, and all the screws are local, and we spent, you know, two bucks on each screw, versus

Blake Sloane

REBUILDINGEXCHANGE.ORG

two cents if we were getting them overseas. But as a result, it's a clock that we retail at $105, which is a little prohibitive for a lot of the people who shop here. So we could easily cut costs by sourcing some of the material elsewhere, or even sourcing the manufacturing overseas. I don't know if that answers your question, but there's definitely a lot of tension in trying to make responsible choices.

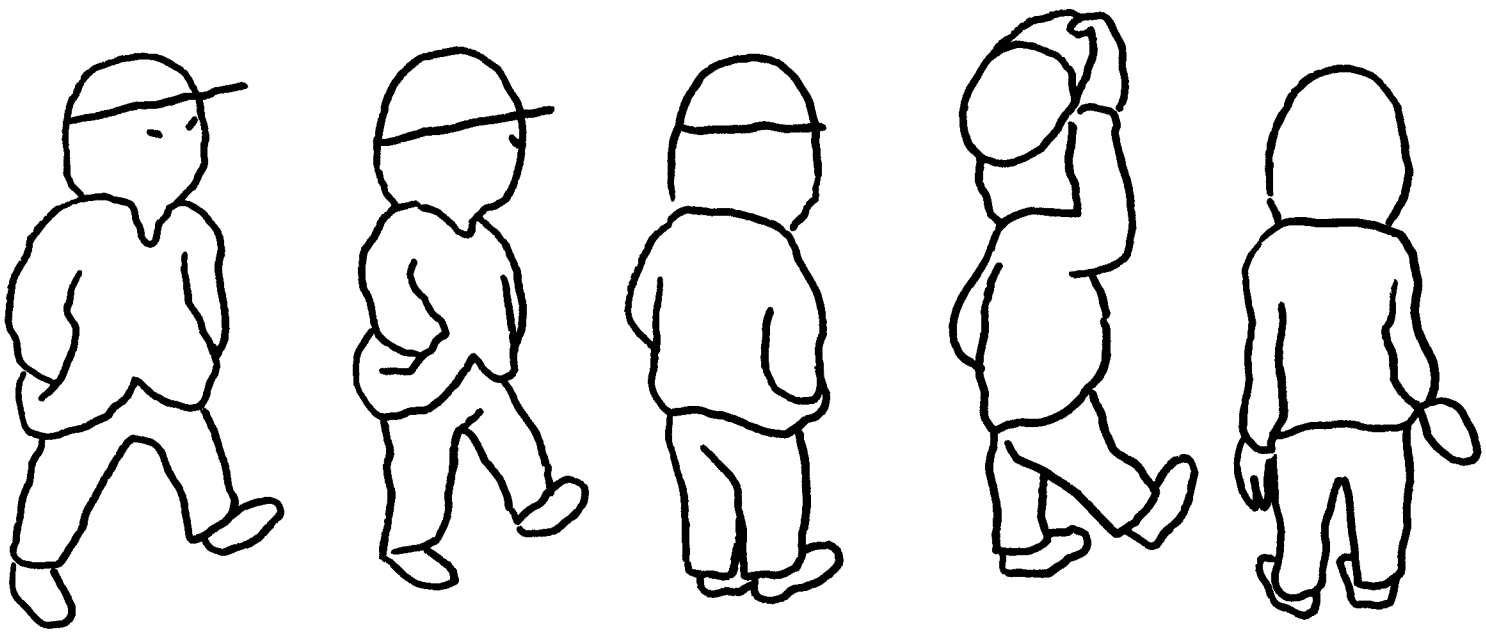
I saw that you have worked with The Greater West Town Training Partnership with the bottle openers you make. Could you talk a little bit about how that collaboration came about?

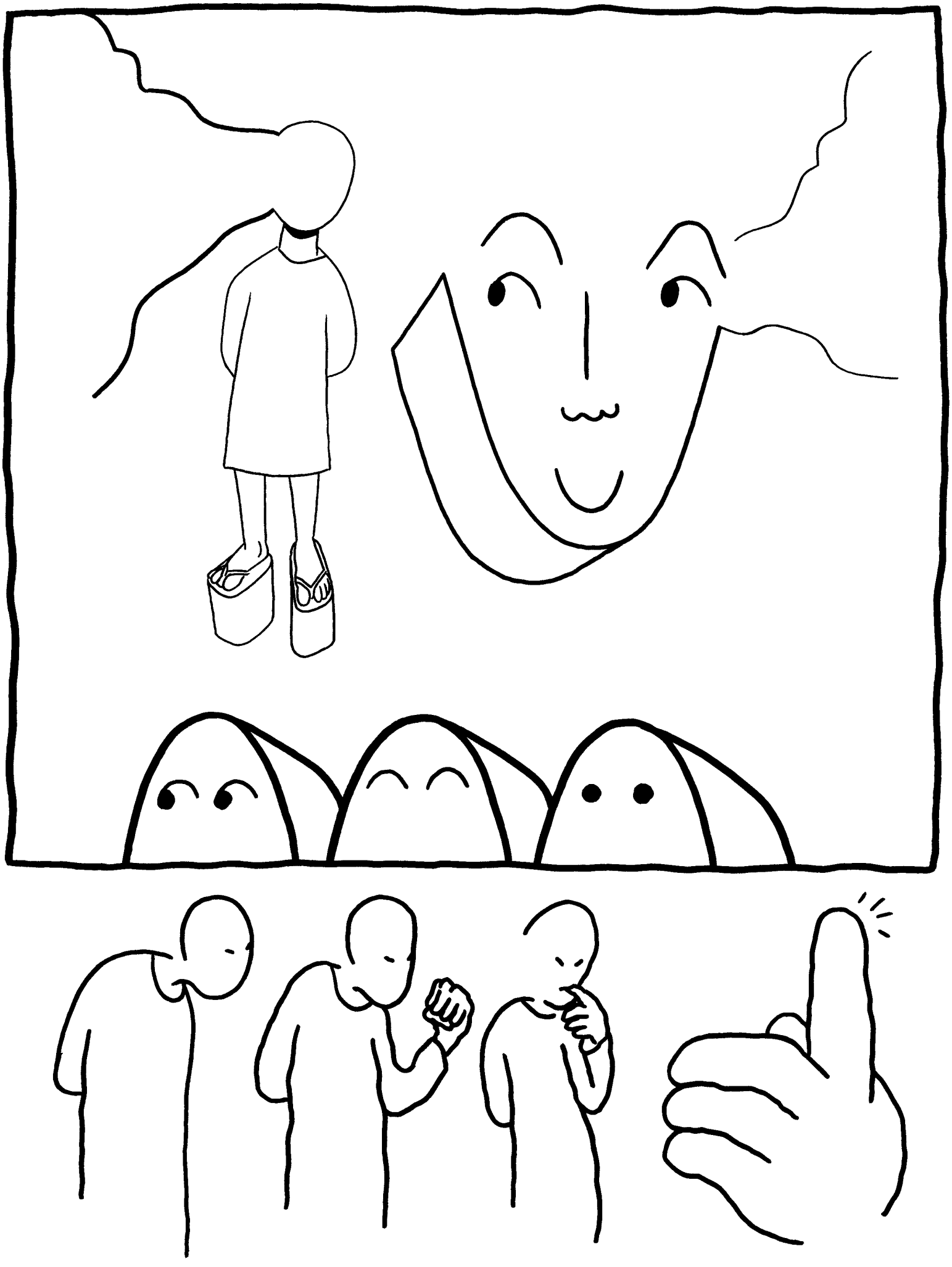
B: When we were first opening up, the Greater West Town Project had been around for a couple of decades already, and they have a gorgeous shop down there. One of the instructors, this guy named Doug Rappe, who's just the nicest guy, was really excited about our business when he saw it starting up, and immediately got involved, and said, "I can help you, I built the shop at Greater West Town twenty years ago." So he helped us get those big tool donations from the Merchandise Mart and the public schools. He served as a technical advisor for many years, and then when it came time to collaborate with Strand and to produce these clocks, getting into that midscale production level was a far cry from the birdhouses and benches that we had started making, so we brought him in to help us figure out how to efficiently produce these items. So he helped us make a lot of fancy shop jigs and things that help expedite the processing of those materials, and ultimately, it was sort of a battle, because in our shop, we teach workshops four days a week to the community, and then we're doing production work five days a week, and the two don't really align themselves. You've got newbies making a lot of mistakes on our tools, and meanwhile we need these tools to be running at their optimal condition to make these pretty high-design items. So that was ultimately what led us to decide, we should really just broker this production through Greater West Town. They're doing the same job training with the same underserved population that we're doing, creating local jobs and supporting the local economy, so that's how that came about. We do a lot of work with them.

In a lot of your own pieces, the materials come to the fore and there's a sort of functional minimalism that highlights the former lives of some of these objects. Would you say that working here has influenced your own perspective as a designer, or would you say that this is just the perfect job for someone with your sensibility, or is it a little bit of both, maybe?

B: Definitely a little bit of both. Working here has changed things a little bit. In some ways I kind of miss the glory days. It's really the same thing at the end of the day, I guess, but when I was doing stuff on my own, it was a lot easier to just spend my spare time driving down alleys and picking up pieces, finding that cool old whatever and turning it into something; whereas here the scale is bigger. We're trying to develop products that can be made over and over again to create the market for it. And we've moved away from the one-off pieces, but I really miss that. It was fun, finding the old radio or whatever it was. But you can't make a spreadsheet and a business plan based around the likelihood of finding crap in alleyways. So in some ways it's been a little bit limiting. We try to use materials that we know will be around for a while.

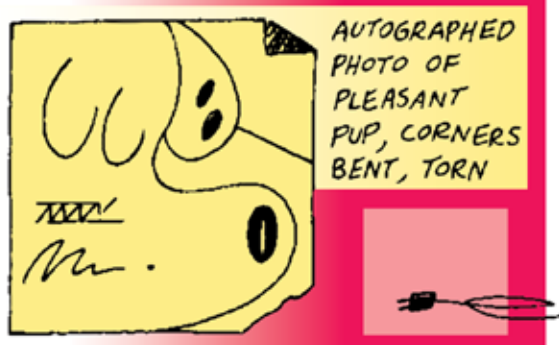
$$\sin 30^\circ$$



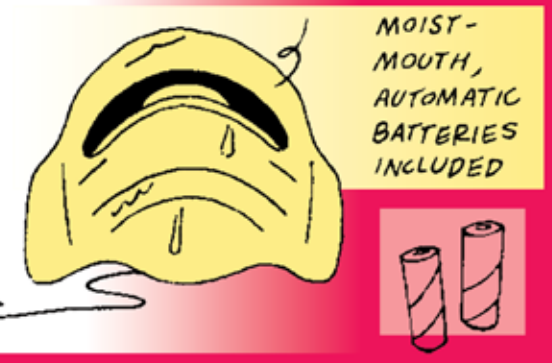


SET OF SERIES 1 SLUDGEMS, MINOR SCRATCHES

AUTOGRAPHED PHOTO OF PLEASANT PUP, CORNERS BENT, TORN



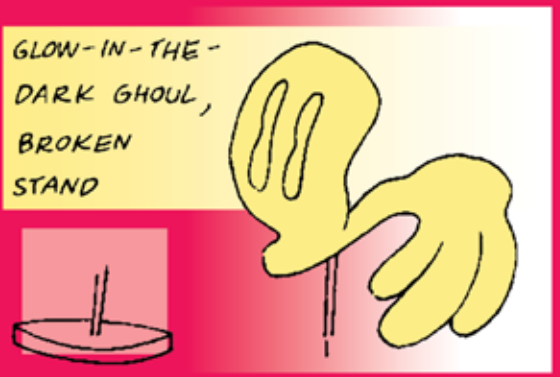
MOIST-MOUTH, AUTOMATIC BATTERIES INCLUDED



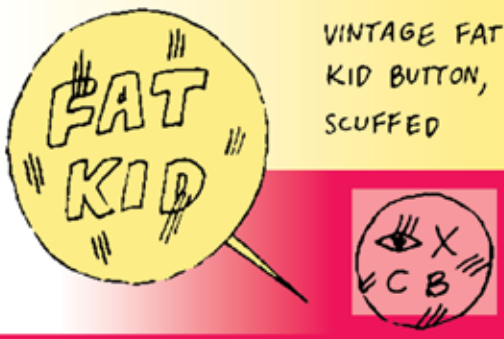
SERPENTINE CHALICE, REPLICA

FRIGHT MASKS, CHILD AND ADULT SIZES

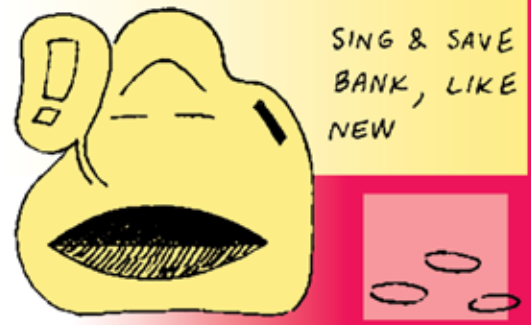
GLOW-IN-THE-DARK GHOUL, BROKEN STAND



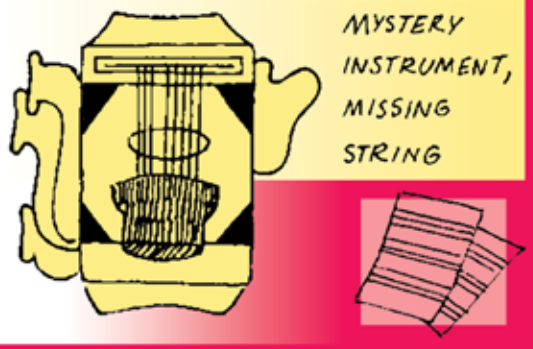
VINTAGE FAT KID BUTTON, SCUFFED



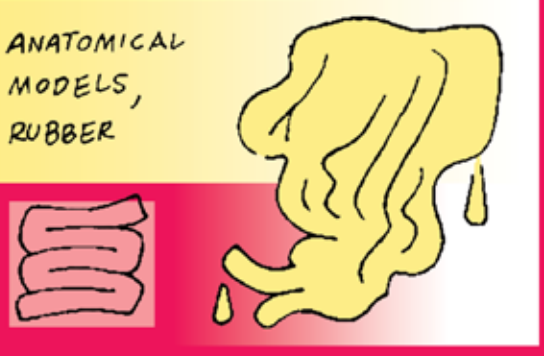
SING & SAVE BANK, LIKE NEW



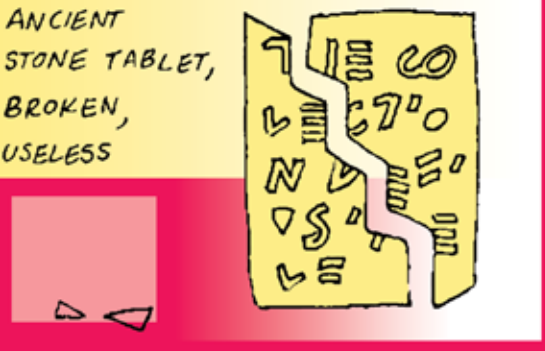
MYSTERY INSTRUMENT, MISSING STRING



ANATOMICAL MODELS, RUBBER

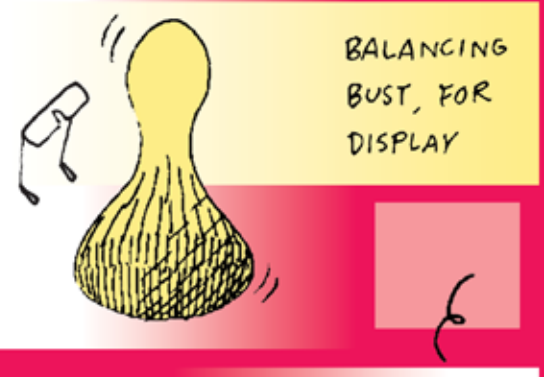


ANCIENT STONE TABLET, BROKEN, USELESS

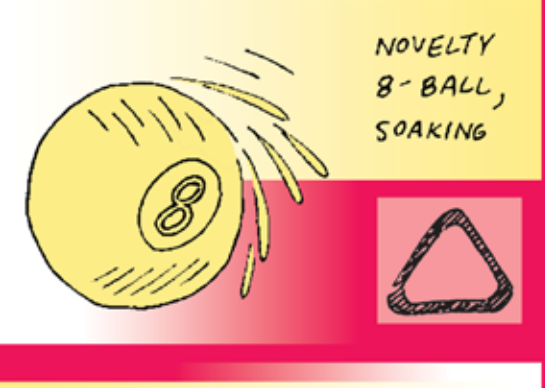


HAND SCULPTURE, ARTIST UNKNOWN

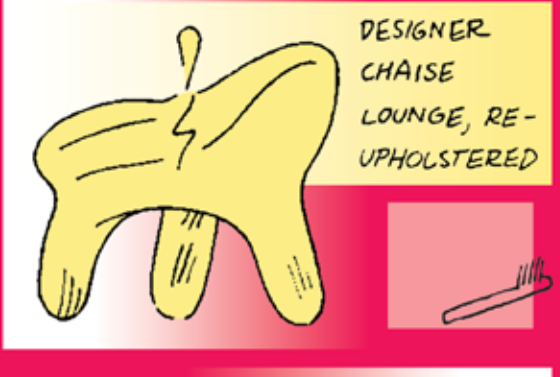
BALANCING BUST, FOR DISPLAY



NOVELTY 8-BALL, SOAKING

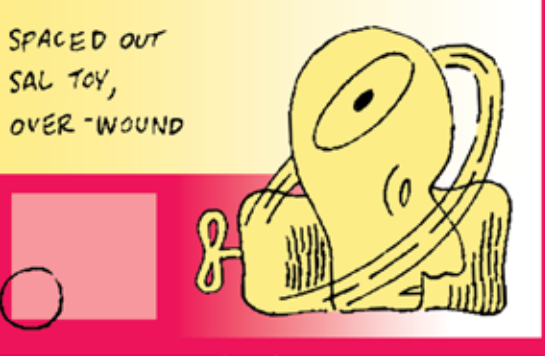


DESIGNER CHAISE LOUNGE, RE-UPHOLSTERED

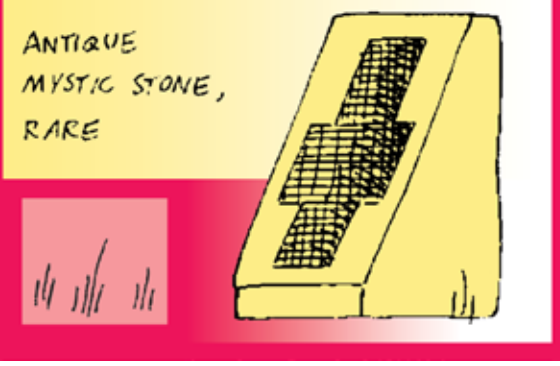


LUXURY CAKE, RUINED

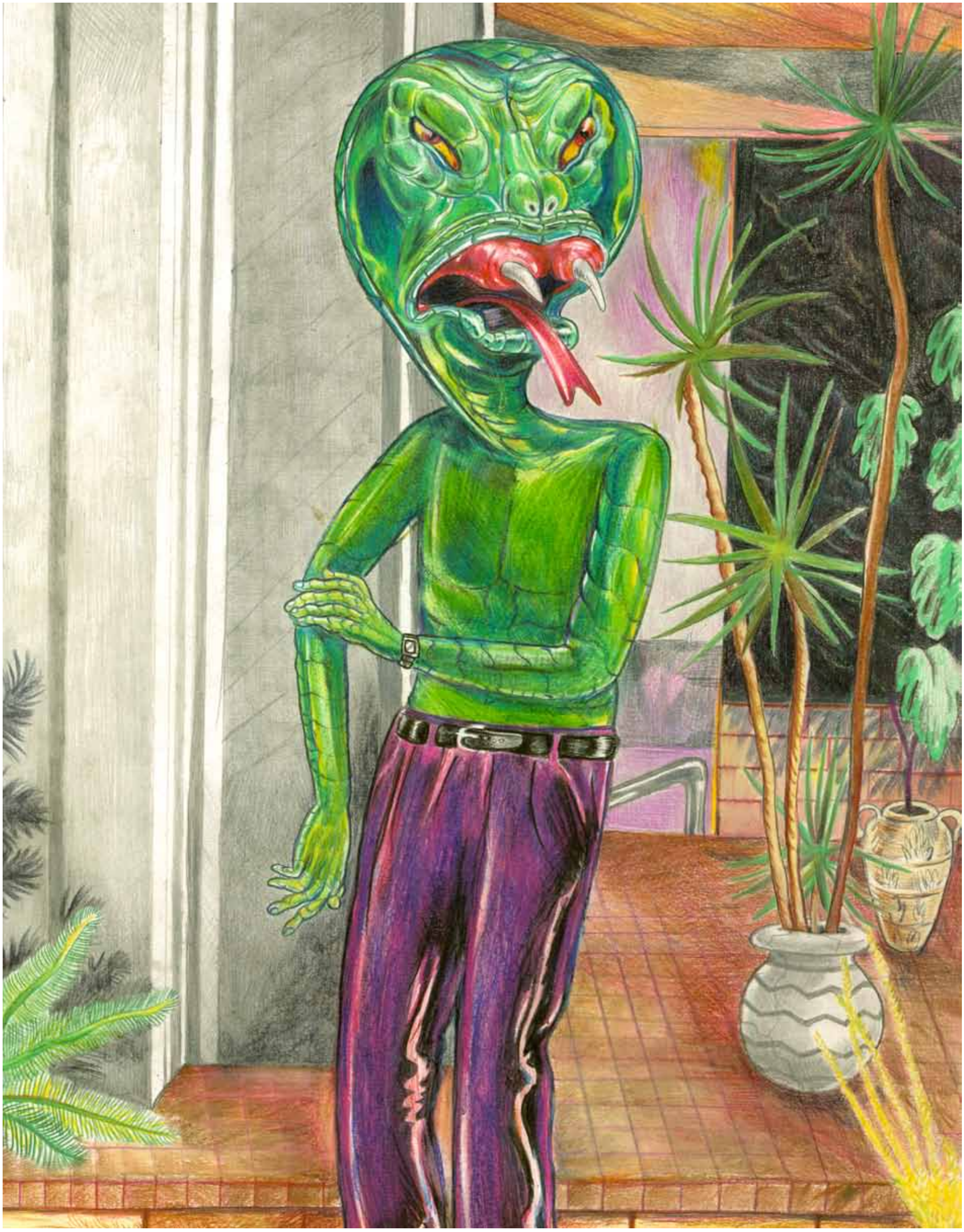
SPACED OUT SAL TOY, OVER-WOUND



ANTIQUE MYSTIC STONE, RARE



BEN BERTIN ⊞ 2014




EVENTUALLY
BY DANIELLE CHENETTE
dad- did u hear? call
home asap !!

RAMIRO IN NEW LOOKS

DAVID ALVARADO

WOW THAT IS A VERY NICE CLOTHES, I WANT TO BE A MACHO MAN.

MACHO MAN!

LATER...

BOY IT IS VERY HOT TODAY! I AM SWEATING A LOT.

OH LOOK THE OCEAN

OH I KNOW I'LL GO FOR A SWIMM

DOGGY

EEE EEE EE

OH NO MY CLOTHES ARE WET.

OH I KNOW I'LL DRY EM IN THE SUN

END.


THE MEN SIT FOR LONG STRETCHES OF SILENCE
COULD I GET SOME WATER, GUYS?
BLINKING
YEAH..
..YOU'LL HAFTA WASH A CUP..
SMOKING CAMELS
AS I AM DYING
FLICKING THRU TEXT MESSAGES
FLICK FLICK FLICK

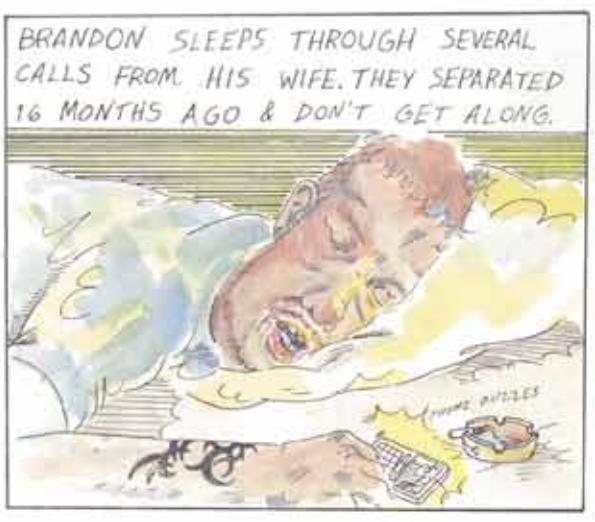

OFTEN, FRIENDS CYCLE THROUGH FOR ALL-DAY VIDEO GAME BINGES.
IF I SEE BRANDON I'm GONNA KILL HIM, I SWEAR TO GOD


RESPAWN! COME ON! SNIPER RIFLE! FUCKIN'... OK, SWITCH TO THE BOWIE KNIFE! ENEMY TWO, SLICE HIS THROAT! HA- SWITCH TO FRAG, THERE'S TWO IN THE BALCONY! FRAG! FRAG! FRAG!

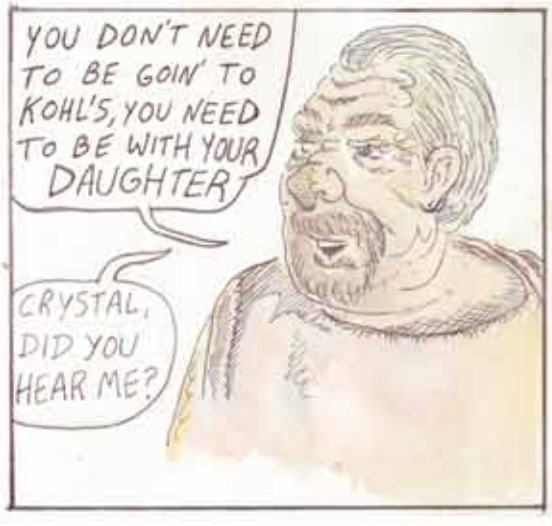

SHIT! FUCK YOU, BEACHSERPENT! I'm OUTTA FRAGS! AH, FUCK HIM IN THE ASS!
IS BRANDON COMIN' OVER WITH THOSE DUBS?? I'm FUCKIN' BORED


HOW MANY DUBS YOU GET?
FIVE
TWO ARE FOR ME


LET'S ROB BRANDON. HE OWES THIS HOUSE SO MUCH FUCKIN' MONEY, DUDE

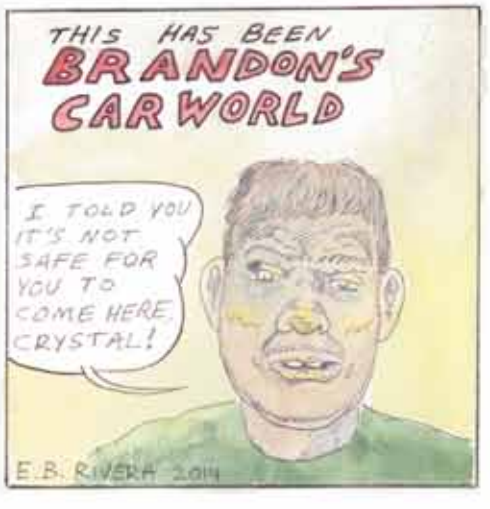

BRANDON SLEEPS THROUGH SEVERAL CALLS FROM HIS WIFE. THEY SEPARATED 16 MONTHS AGO & DON'T GET ALONG.


KOHL'S
WHERE YOU GOIN' NOW, CRYSTAL?!


YOU DON'T NEED TO BE GOIN' TO KOHL'S, YOU NEED TO BE WITH YOUR DAUGHTER
CRYSTAL, DID YOU HEAR ME?


CRYSTAL DRIVES HER '96 DODGE NEON TO BRANDON'S APARTMENT.
65 M.P.H.!


WISH I NEVER MET BRANDON
WRECKED MY LIFE


THIS HAS BEEN BRANDON'S CARWORLD
I TOLD YOU IT'S NOT SAFE FOR YOU TO COME HERE, CRYSTAL!
E.B. RIVERA 2014

POEM

GRANT REYNOLDS

I REMEMBER WHEN YOU USED TO CALL ME METAL HEART,
AND YOU WHISPERED CHARMS,

mi corazon,

OUR DIRTY DANCING IN THE LIVING ROOM,
FUMBLING, [redacted] SHOES SLIPPING IN SPILT BOOZE,

TOGETHER IN YOUR BED I TOLD YOU,
"IF ONLY YOU WERE A WOMAN,"

YOU PUT UP WITH SO MUCH OF MY SHIT,

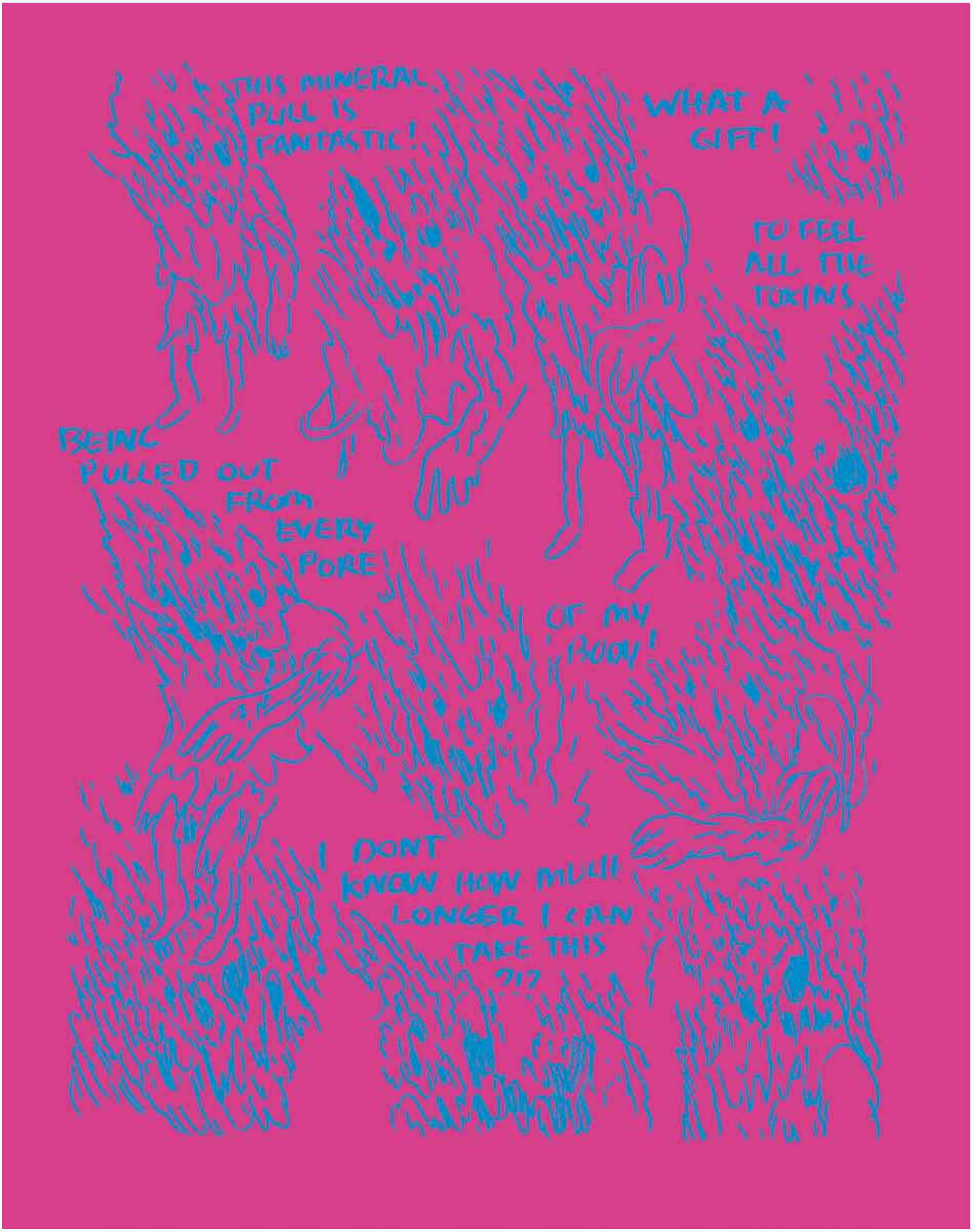
mi corazon,

BUT THIS METAL HEART IS A TARNISHED THING,

OUR ANTIQUE LOVE, DUSTY AND INERT,
LIKE A METAL CONCH IN A JUNK SHOP,

I LISTEN NOW FOR ITS SONG,
A DIM SURF THAT WHISPERS,

mi corazon


THIS MINERAL PULL IS FANTASTIC!
WHAT A GIFT!
TO FEEL ALL THE TOXINS
BEING PULLED OUT FROM EVERY PORE
OF MY BODY!
I DONT KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I CAN TAKE THIS ???

↑ KRYSTAL DIFRONZO → LESLIE WIEBELER

AUTHOR

PHOTO

↑ NATE BEATY → SARAH LEITTEN

Dear SKYE

By. Sarah Leitten

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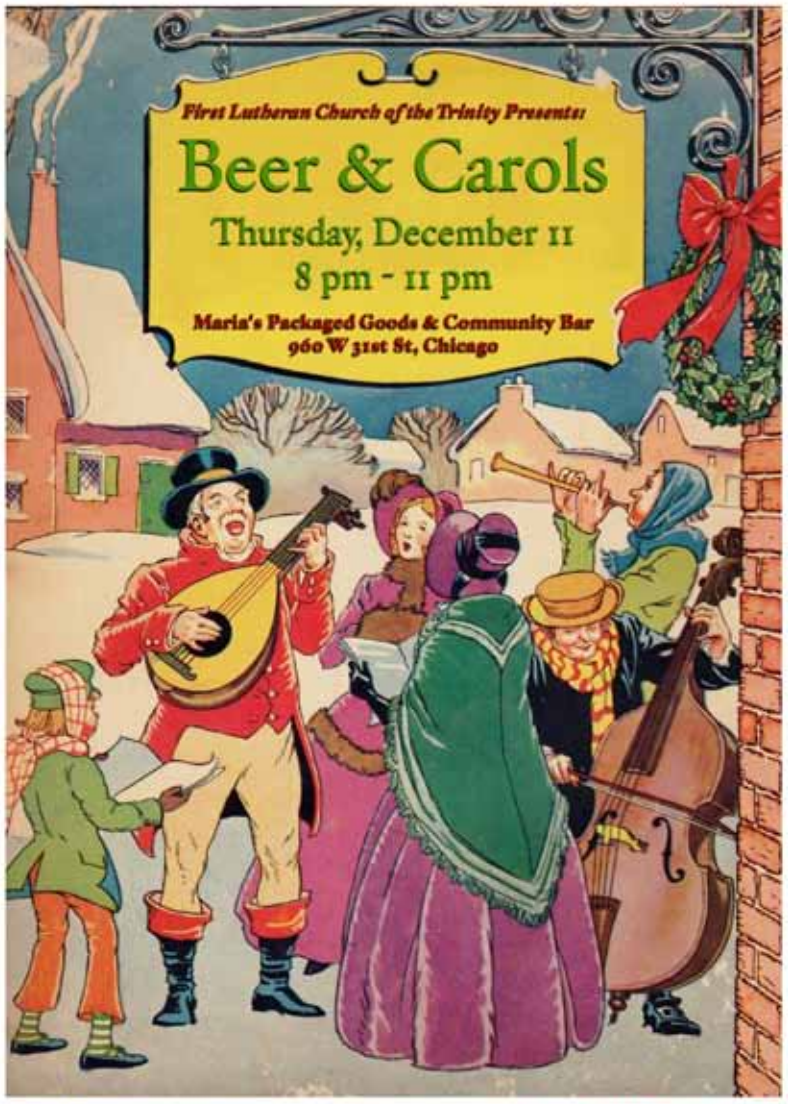

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AT PARTICIPATING LOCAL BUSINESSES

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VISIT 10 PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES, GET YOUR PASSPORT STAMPED,

ENTER THE RAFFLE TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR GREAT GIFTS / CERTIFICATES

FROM LOCAL BUSINESSES, SUCH AS;

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Bridgeport Comics & Games
Chef-AJ's
The Frame Shop
It's All Here
Mitchell's Tap
Oscars Jewelry & Watch
The UPS Store
Bake for Me
Bridgeport News
Chitown Pickers
Grandstand
Jackalope Coffee & Tea House
Monster Island Toys
Richard J. Daley Library
Wet Paint Chicago
Bark n Bites
Bridgeport Pasty
The Flower Cottage
Hardscrabble
Marquette Bank
Nana
South Central Bank

Check for a list of participating businesses, special discounts and events happening on Small Business Saturday, November 29 at the South Loop Chamber of Commerce Website at: southloopchamberofcommerce.com

Mash Tun

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A CRAFT BEER JOURNAL

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HAND BREWED IN CHICAGO

TM

CHICAGO CRAFT BEER
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MARZ COMMUNITY BREWING CO.

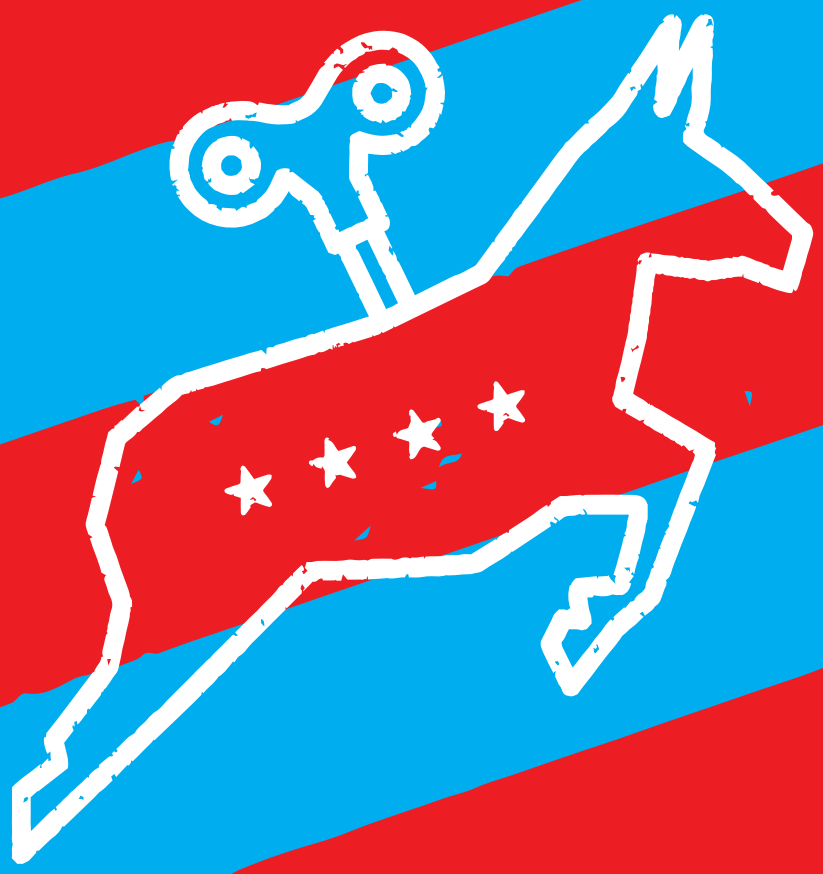
4/3/14 6:37 PM

MARZBREWING.COM

the machine

AMERICAN PALE ALE

ABV. 5.3%



DON'T MAKE NO WAVES. DON'T BACK NO LOSERS.

BREWED AND BOTTLED BY MARZ COMMUNITY BREWING CO. / MARZBREWING.COM

Greetings from Maria's in...

BRIDGEPORT

THE COMMUNITY OF THE FUTURE

Maria's

The Community of the Future is a not so tongue-in-cheek reference to the burgeoning cultural scene in Bridgeport. Stop by Maria's Packaged Goods & Community Bar at 960 W 31st Street to get your bearings. While there enjoy one of the largest selections of craft and imported beers and ales in the city of Chicago.

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BAR: 3PM – 2AM SUN - THURS / 1PM – 2AM FRI & SUN / 1PM – 3AM SAT