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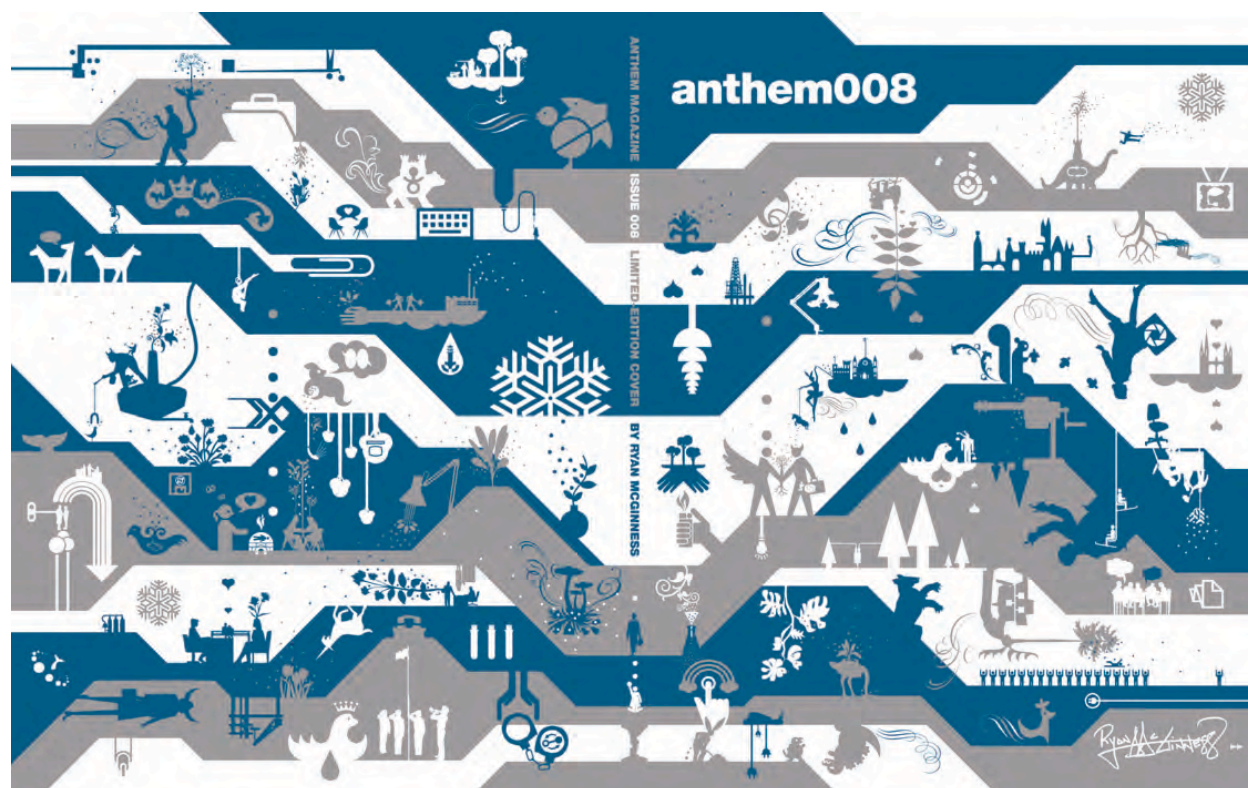
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ANTHEM MAGAZINE

ISSUE 008 LIMITED EDITION COVER BY RYAN MCGINNESS

PEOPLE

ryan mcginness

DUSTIN A BEATTY TEXT
ANGELA BOATWRIGHT IMAGE

Minister of manipulating the topography of our current landscape, Ryan McGinness' critique of culture through redefining icons, art and design paradigms has been recognized world-wide. Delving into McGinness' history expands on a deeper iconoclastic nature and reveals that things aren't always what they seem.

Can you give us a brief background on how you got involved with your art?
Yes. I attended Carnegie Mellon University where I majored in graphic design and minored in fine art. Most of my studio classes were in graphic design and my fine art minor was made up mostly of lecture classes on post-modernism and independent studies. Upon graduation, I moved to Manhattan with all my paintings and worked for the design firm Pentagram. Shortly thereafter, as my own projects began to take up more and more of my time, I began to work on my own. That was almost 10 years ago.

There is a lot going on in your vector collages. What is(are) the inspiration(s) behind those?
Dreams, memories, fantasies, hallucinations, surrealism, Dadaism, theater of the absurd, comedy, popular culture, unpopular culture—everything.

How much does your environment play into your work?
As for my global environment, (ie. the world around me, culture, media, etc.)...a large part. I definitely want to embrace our times and be a part of our generation in both my production and consumption.

My local environment (my studio) is of most importance to how I work and get things done. Because I have a lot of different projects going on, I try to keep my environment completely controlled—everything in my studio has to be organized, clean, and in its place. I'm definitely not one of those sloppy, loose, anything-goes kind of artists. I'm much more uptight with my environment, and consequently, this plays into my work, about which I'm also very uptight.

Explain the use of incongruous iconography in your pieces.
I am most interested in the interpretation of iconic signs and their use as a universal language system. In creating work that has no blunt and obvious meaning, I allow for a degree of interpretation that, I believe, is empowering. In the same way that comedy is more potent if you have a broader knowledge base to draw upon (cultural and historical references) in both the delivery and receiving of the message (joke), I hope that my work operates on multiple levels to provide a range of depth for different audiences.

There are many artists from numerous backgrounds whose philosophy support art and design as a communication tool that has the capability to change the way people think. Yet, mass culture seems so entrenched in ideology. In your opinion, does art have the power to change the way people think on a grand scale?
Yes, and I think you've hit upon an important and timely issue with the words, "art," "design," and "communication." Herein lies the crucial difference between art and design. By "design" I don't mean advertising or any client-driven message interpreting. I mean pure and formal manipulation of shape, line, color, composition, and form with visual communication as the goal. This is my interest in design, and these are issues most noticeably absent from most art programs in schools. Art students are rarely taught how to communicate

visually, as ironic as that may seem. Furthermore, the separation of the author from the form-giver is of no interest to me, and designers assuming the role of the author is absent from most academic design programs. I believe that most "art" fails to communicate. Most "art" is not intended for a popular audience. I want to create work which exists on all ends of the culture scale. I believe that a lot of "art" is boring and inaccessible, and that a lot of "pop culture" stuff is just plain dumb and insulting. I am trying to bridge that gap.

It appears that you espouse subjectivity with your audience's interpretation of your art. Is that something you work toward when you're creating a piece?
Yes, although I'm not so calculated in the approach. One cannot control the design of a Rorschach ink blot. One allows for it to be created. And of course, one cannot control or fabricate the interpretation of the ink blot. In many ways, as goofy as this may seem, I allow a lot of my work to simply flow out of me without trying to control it. In this way I hope to tap into some collective unconscious themes that can be universally understood.

This "scene" seems to be defined by numerous facets like graffiti, skateboarding, fashion and most importantly Japanese culture. Do you think your art has the ability to work independently of this or has it already been defined as a part of this bigger picture?
Yes, it certainly has the ability to work independently of this scene as I was working for years before group shows, magazines, and books began grouping and defining what was going on. However, I do believe that this "scene" provides a logical context in which my work can be better understood. When so many people are creating new models for working as an artist, it helps for the emerging trend to be defined.

Do you ever feel conflicted about designing for consumer culture?
No. "Consumer culture" is redundant. Without the consumption, there is no culture, just a bunch of messages being sent with no receivers. I believe real culture involves a back and forth between producers and consumers with everyone playing both roles. Ideas are originated, shared, tweaked, copied, and recycled creating a flow through society.

Is it possible to be original in the 21st century?
Yes.

How have previous generations influenced what you do?
Multidisciplinary artists like Warhol and Haring have laid the groundwork for what I and a lot of my contemporaries are doing.

Does the computer have the capability to kill what is historically defined as "art?"
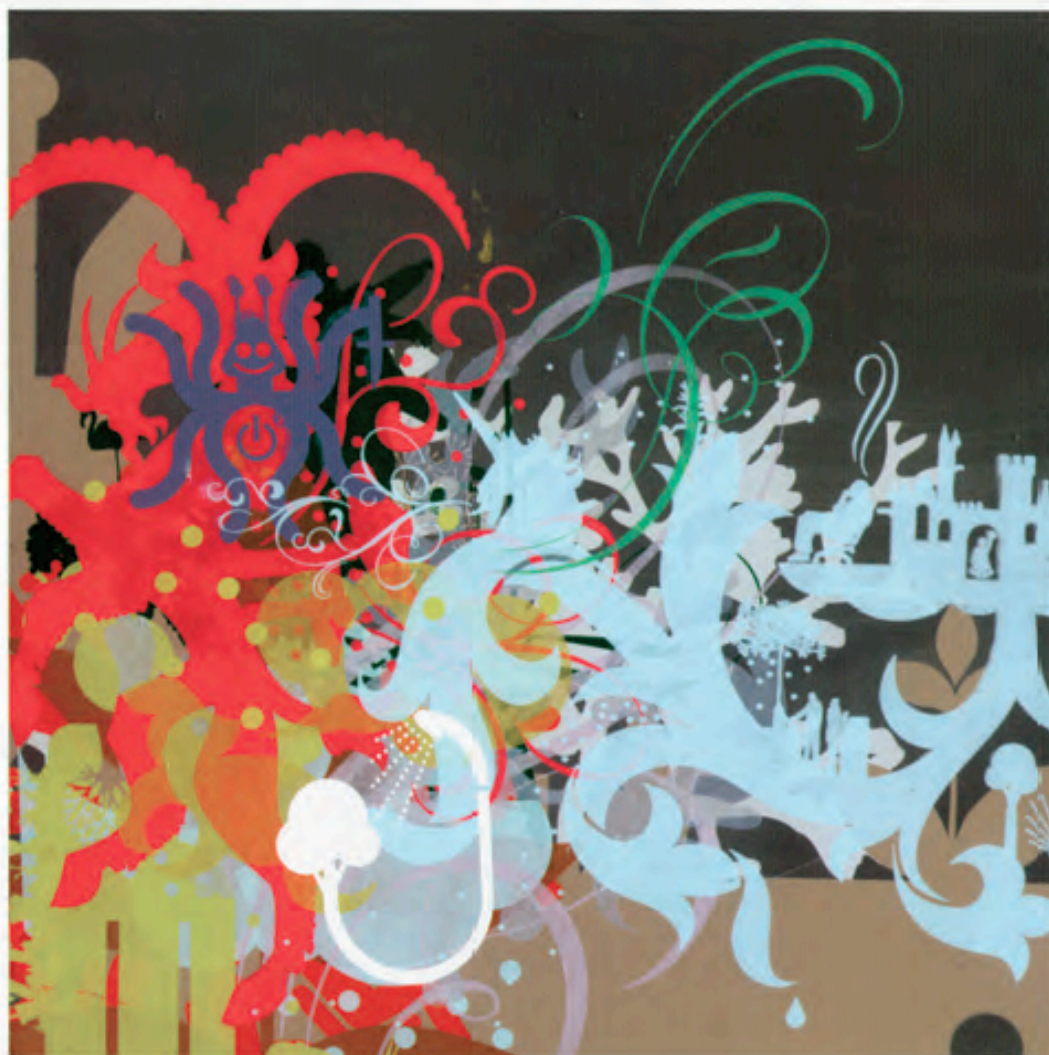No more than any other tool has killed art. ∎

Ryan McGinness, Untitled (*This Dream Is So Life-Like Series*), 2002
unique silkscreen and oil-based enamel on wood panel, 12 x 12 inches, courtesy Gas Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
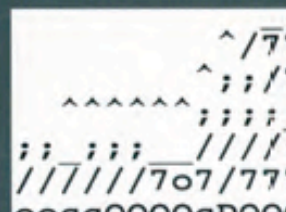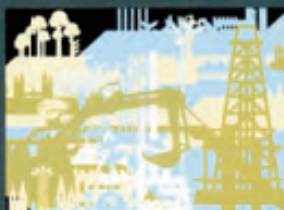
54 / ANTHEM MAGAZINE

Ryan McGinness, Untitled (*This Dream Is So Life-Like Series*), 2002
unique silkscreen and latex on wood panel, 12 x 12 inches, courtesy Gas Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

ANTHEM MAGAZINE / 65

Ryan McGinness, 1) *Double Cap*, 2002, plastic aerosol spray nozzle, 1 x .5 x .5 inches, courtesy Charlie Becker, 2) *Paper Coffee Cups*, 2002, 10 oz. paper cups,
3) *North Star*, 2002, 3:44 minute video, co-directed with Bill McMullen, 4) *The Case of The Eidetic Child*, 2002, 2:51 minute video, produced by PanOptic,
5) *Dream Garden*, 2002, installation view, with Julia Chiang, courtesy Deitch Projects, New York

Ryan McGinness, 1) *When The Hand Goes Up, The Mouth Goes Shut*, 2002, woodburned and stained skateboard decks, 32 x 8 inches each, courtesy Gallery Rocket, Tokyo, Japan. 2) *$1 Off Anything Anywhere*, 2002, toner on U.S. dollar bills, 2.625 x 6.125 inches each. 3/4) Canvas Bags, 2002, published by Gingham. 5) *flatnessisgodREDUX*, 2003, available Spring 2003. 6) *Ryan McGinness*, 2002, published by Gasbook, Japan. 7) T-Shirt Line, 2003, available Spring 2003.

Ryan McGinness, *Get Your Wings (For Tony at Alife)*, 2002, cardboard album cover, 12.375 x 12.375 inches
opposite page: Ryan McGinness, *Untitled*, 2002, digital file, dimensions vary