



MENTIRAS #1 - HP

J

I feel that your work is creating and combining shapes that generate power, more than beauty. I guess we should define power, which is tricky when it comes to pictures, symbols and shapes.

H

The way I talk about it to my students is that you learn a visual vocabulary, and then use it to articulate thoughts as clearly as you can, and the measure of success becomes how perfectly you've articulated what's in your head. We inherit quite a bit as the idea of power goes. I believe that if you look at these things really carefully and with some skepticism, you start seeing some patterns in how history is constructed.

J

I know someone who does studies in « mathematics applied to social sciences », or something like that. He does extract patterns and operative functions from historical datas. I remember him talking about how physics reactions and social movements can be read the same way, it is just a matter of scale. Anyway, something which surprises me is how much you talk about the language, the tools. The content of your work seems to be precisely the vocabulary and its efficiency. But what you do reaches a much more transcendental level, in that it creates a space for something which is not there.

H

If religion is an attempt to explain our existence through poetics, then its manifestations must reflect that conviction. I'm of the thinking that we think a little too much of our own potential, and have erroneously divorced ourselves from some very basic natural principles. Some history will repeat itself because these principles will always be the same. The potential that a notion like choice provides is in constant eclipse of very blunt physical realities, and there is even more beauty and truth in accepting that.

J

You have a global reading filter on human actions: art, sport, entertainment, business, politic. For me, there is something very american in this global vision, but you pushed it further. I remember talks we had about comedians, or about fandom, or about athletes. You

were pointing out some specifics in their attitude, or image, which were echoing your way of making art.

H

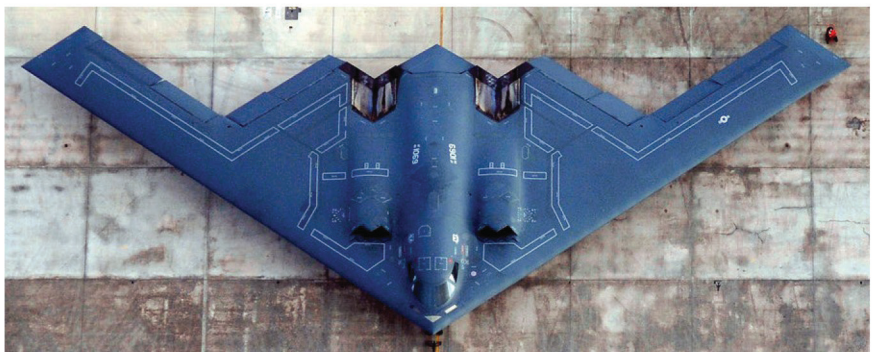
Mine is a generation that did not see a flattening of career choices that the Internet imposed. We were trained to think of a ladder, with some idea of commercial and critical success at the top, and a short selection of approaches to choose from as getting there came. I would always like it more if my work spoke to people without art educations. The thought that populism and intelligence cannot go hand in hand is a falsehood constructed by clueless cynics totally out of touch with the real world. This is not to say that I do not consider design and art thinking from that stratum. It's just that I'll always have more respect and interest in those who perfectly articulated a stance, consider the system a bit adversarial, and are most interested in engaging with our broader, shared experiences. These sorts of thinkers have always been around. I find more truth in not limiting my observation of them to just the art field, which is at times hatefully opaque as engaging with the public goes, maybe to protect it's own history of very pointed private interests.

J

For example, about comedians, we never discussed how funny they are, but you were very concerned about how difficult their chosen path was, or wasn't. There was one or two you dislike, not because they were bad, but because they have chosen to play easy cards.

H

Yes, I think that the best comedians understand the feeling of humiliation very well. They have been shamed repeatedly, and engineer a method of engaging with others that effectively works to protect them from this feeling. Which simply means considering approval necessary, and sense of self as very elastic. The comedians who lived and breathed this ethos simultaneously achieve a very warm but shallow sort of acceptance, and all the problems that go with it. Patrice O'neal, Mitch Hedberg, Greg Giraldo, and Phil Hartman died in my lifetime. If you read about any of these guys, you get a very clear idea of what creative survival is really about. Richard Pryor was before my time, but I know why he's considered the greatest – he profited from a transparency that exposed his shortcomings to an audience he considered equally, eye-





to-eye, same level. Living through that was the trick, which is probably why he called Dave Chappelle his successor. Chappelle refused to let a profit-driven model destroy him by spinning his piercingly honest sadness about racism into a contemporary minstrel show. He left it before it could do that, which many of his equally talented peers could not.

J

The actual lack of cynicism in your work - which is not its most obvious aspect - is one of the main reasons why I enjoy it. It is interesting how much you value truth, honesty and precise articulation of personal ideas, the way you link this to populist/mainstream productions, and, eventually, how everything is merged into a very elliptic body of work. Somewhere, there has to be an addition of something else than just honesty or clarity. I think the added notion is one of conflict, of aggression. Not that you produce a comment on conflict, but you actually create the conflict. The military references are not just themes, but it seems to me that they reflect some of your intentions.

H

That's a fair read. War is not a romantic thing, and I would worry if I conveyed that feeling. As « applied » design goes, it's necessary to look at, and very closely. Maybe as a product of my class upbringing, I'm very interested in the method of creation wherein artists are expected to work within limitations, and reveal their personality through engaging with what they inherit, relying on outside society for their sustenance. As an illustration, everything next to the Third Reich's visual ministry pales. They grappled with a very peculiar idea of efficiency and return, and, as their existence was relatively brief, the resultant documentation is especially valuable research toward this idea. The example I find most interesting second to that is certain traditions of Black music like dancehall and grime.

J

I always felt a very strong racial load in many of your works, in almost every symbol you use or build. It has an unpleasantness which is appealing to me. As a white spectator, it makes me feel that I am not part of your world (or, ironically, only when I do *Nazi Knife*). But this is what I am looking for: I don't want anything to give me a feeling of

belonging. It is too much what art is about. I want to know if there is a precise audience you want to address. When creating *Zulu*, or using those Black music references, do you have a black spectator in mind? Is it someone who is supposed to be able to understand your symbolic architecture, or even to be a part of it?

H

I understand the take on my work being graphically alienating, because very few people have such a specific combination of cultural biographies. All I'm doing is speaking with the vocabulary that I know. I'd love if what came through to a viewer was that they can construct things in the same way, and convey or correct, by example, something about a history that they consider misunderstood or not considered at all. My interest in Black culture rests plainly in observing how creative labor and societal pressures relate. That's a parallel applicable to other experiences, including parts of my own as an East African-born Indian.

J

If you only speak with the vocabulary you know, and you assume that only very few people can master your specific cultural materials, who is supposed to hear what you say? Could it be that you sometimes talk alone? I like the idea of an open monolog, that one could enter, or visit, without being its destination. It would be a work of art you could only have access to as an external being. There would be a permanent resistance.

H

The work I spend most of my time looking at and drawing points of view from are overwhelmingly outside of my impossibly specific background. I talk alone and hope that others do the same, as this works toward respecting our shared ability to accept each other's differences and find commonality through an insistence, however futile, on keeping distinct viewpoints on the same existential matters. This is a big problem that graphic design has: attempting to engineer a lowest common denominator of emotional consensus, and making it easy to find, through volume. Such a stupid methodology reflects a real fear of meaningfully engaging with and loving each other, and creates so much waste to wade through.

J

Where does your interest in the printed objects come from?

H

Books are language of legitimacy, maybe because they subconsciously suggest a devoted physical effort to recording thought. Once I began to realize that most of what was prescribed to me as truth is largely opinion, I became much more interested in the format. Words and images in printed form, when capably wielded, have facilitated genocide. It's a bit strange, seeing as I still consider a form I spend so much time with, and supposedly like that much, so blunt and dangerous.

J

All your works, for what i know, are framed, contained. They are books, posters, flags, sometimes they're even shown behind windows. Also, they are part of a limited whole, with a number for each issue, each conceptual ensemble has a title. But still, these works deal with strength, power, absolute dedication, feelings and ideas which are supposed to break bounds and limits. Do you see a contradiction there? Do you think about changing the scale of your works, like working on light projections, murals?

H

You're right about the contradiction, and you've supposed correctly that I'm moving onto different scales. *3DX* is there to push myself to apply these thoughts to new forms. If they cannot survive the push, then they were not strong enough to begin with. As I said, my generation understood the system as rigidly in place, and, is coming to grips with the idea that it is mostly rearrangeable. I swore that the show I just did a month ago would be my last to show printed material in vitrines. I'm ready to see if I can make a clearer mirror reflection of my thoughts from which to engage a receiver. This includes considering systems of production and sharing that aren't as literal.

J

I have always wondered about the importance of britpop in your own system? Is it just a matter of taste, or do you find that something specific becomes precisely incarnate in Oasis, Elastica or The Charlatans? Also, is Suede a part of it, or a whole different thing?

H

Just that intelligence and populism can go hand in hand. What was happening at the top of the charts during that time was pretty surreal. The music media placed these groups in a sort of competition wherein you could assert loyalties to certain socioeconomic backgrounds by supporting them. They all made very smart music, as well, which is not as unpopular a viewpoint as I once thought. Suede is my favorite band, and, they existed reluctantly in the classifications as the outsiders, maybe for maintaining seemingly ambiguous attitudes towards sex and class.

J

How do you connect all these references altogether? Runes with grime, military design with britpop?

H

They're very distinct in form, but I'd maintain they're addressing the same things if you read into them. They created their own systems, saw them resonate with the outsiders on whom they'd be relying for support, and didn't compromise themselves entirely.

J

You may not know that, but you are the one which brought me into looking fashion design. Still, I am unsure about what i find so interesting and challenging in it. I have a difficult time trying to grasp those ideas: they do work for the luxury industry but at the same time they work on their own tight field of shapes, materials, mind images.

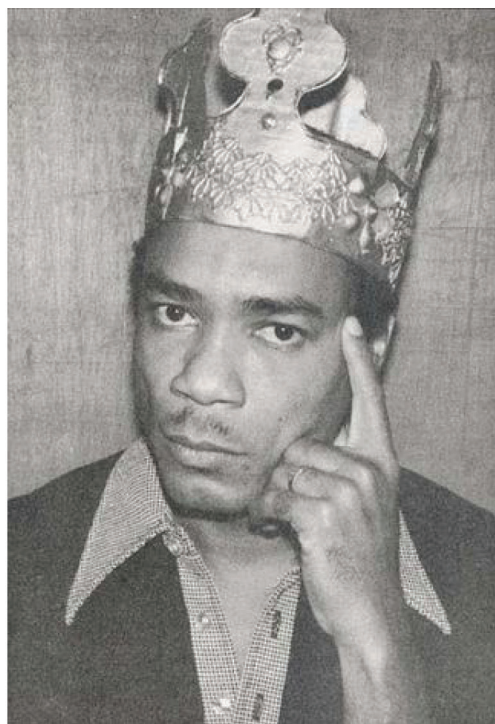
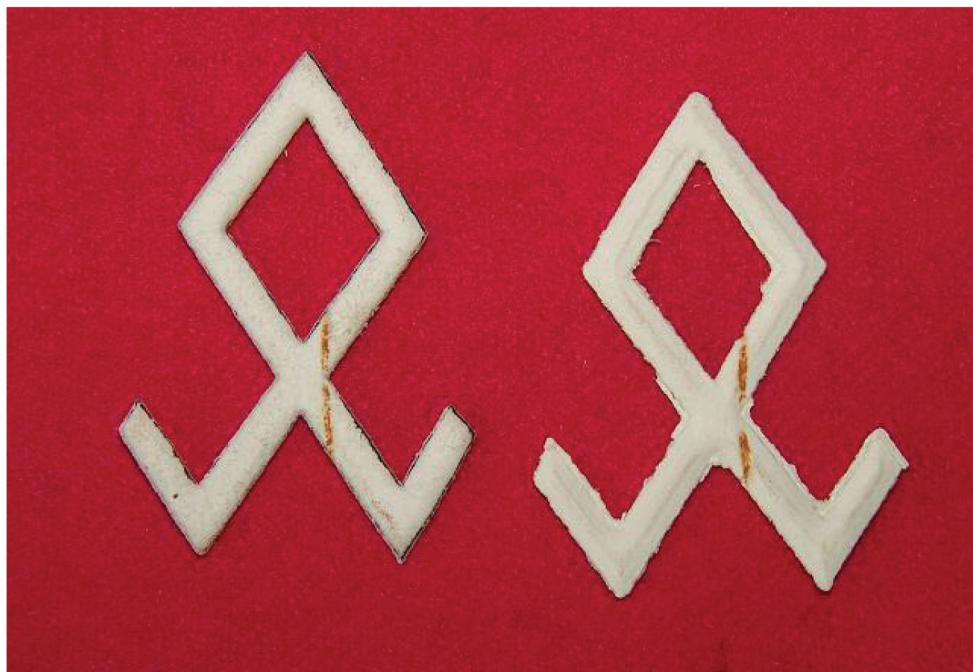
H

They embrace construction, presentation, engagement, and critique of work equally. The tangible details have to say the exact same thing as the more poetic ones. Saville & Yamamoto's collaborations were big for me in pushing this along. A graduate level design student once challenged me to defend fashion, arguing it was an classist system that survived on an oppressive idea of vanity – this told me everything about why I feel so ideologically far apart from most graphic design education.

J

Why precisely do you feel so far apart from the institutional





understanding of things? Was your student's talk too much of a naive teenager statement?

H

I feel apart from their definition of truth. Truth, science, nature, and God are the same, and they're very hard to accept because in doing so, we admit our smallness. That student's misguidedness about a discipline that is built on such punishingly high standards of emotional articulation reveals the institution's failure to instill truth and philanthropy in him. More waste to wade through.

J

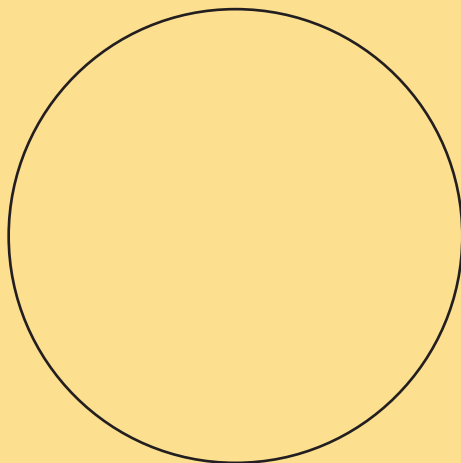
Some designers you like make this straight connexion between appearance and content. But other ones work on a more decorative level. What do you think it says on what these objects are? Where does elegance takes part in this process? Isn't elegance, or any other cultural judgment, a contradiction, or at least a pointless addition, to the powerful dialectics between a shape and its content?

H

Perfume, like a baroque ornament or a fountain, very precisely exhibits power because it reveals a seemingly impractical allocation of resources and time to a very traditional, very blunt notion of return that adheres to timeless natural principles. Even the most suicidal creative operations have a return in mind.

MENTIRAS (2014-)

#1	HP	2014	#14	AM	2020
#2	HH	2014	#15	AB	2021
#5	RS	2017			
#6	JW	2018			
#7	OV	2017			
#8	P*S	2017			
#9	AB	2017		cancelled	
#10	LS	2018	#4	IT	
#11	JH	2019	#?	JC	
#13	PB	2020	#12	CF	



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