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## Mondo Taxali

By Peggy Roalf Thursday October 6, 2011

**Gary Taxali is having a double-whammy of a fall opener, with not one but two retrospective collections of his work published.** Actually, it's a triple, if you count having his work included in the recent Made In Polaroid exhibition and auction at Phillips de Pury last month.

I wasn't able to get to Gary's recent book signing at Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario, so I caught up with him by email for this Q&A:



*Spreads from Mondo Taxali (left) and I Love You, OK (right); courtesy the artist.*

**Peggy Roalf:** What is there about bowling and golf that make them such great subjects for you?

**Gary Taxali:** Definitely the clothes. I have no interest in either game but I love the traditional costumes one wears. I also like the *paraphenielia* (golf clubs, bowling balls, etc) as well.

**PR:** What was the first live monkey you saw and what did it do to keep your interest alive?

**GT:** It was in India when I was a small child. I was only a baby when my family moved to Canada so seeing monkeys for the first time on a trip back to India when I was a child was a delight. The monkey was scurrying around in a temple guarding a piece of food he either stole or was given. He seemed to be looking for more food but all the while guarding his prize. I tried to get his attention and wished I had some food to give him but since I didn't, he grew bored with me quickly. I thought he was awesome and hilarious and he definitely lives in all the monkeys I draw.

**PR:** You often capitalize on struggle, contradiction, and losers in your art, but you seem like a pretty cheerful guy. Where do ominous ideas like "I Own Your Dreams" originate? Do you remember most of your dreams?

**GT:** I am cheerful but I have my sardonic side. A lot of the text and language in my work is derived from purposely humorous and cynical responses to things and ideas, real or imagined. I'm interested in the hilarity of the way things sound and often times that means just twisting and modifying words and expressions. I have no remembrance of the origin of "I Own Your Dreams" but I'm confident it derived from comedic circumstances. No, I don't remember most of my dreams, thankfully. I blame a lot of my bizarre dreams on many a late night burrito.

**PR:** Your sketchbook drawings are extremely clear and detailed. Do you ever just scribble to warm up—or is the mind's eye always ready with a picture for you to make visible?

**GT:** The latter. I'm a storyteller. I love abstract art but I think in narrative pictures. The drawings shape themselves but my mind wants to see pictures and scenes.

**PR:** How did you come up with the idea of creating characters out of undefined inanimate objects [here, thinking of that zigzag, as in *True Believer*, 2007 plate 002 in MT]

**GT:** I never really conceive a tangible idea. It happens as the drawing takes shape. It's purely random but oftentimes, I like a past character I've past created that I introduce it again in some form, or just modify it. I love geometric shapes and undefined objects as characters. There is a real beauty in letting the expression and mood dominate its being rather than quantifying something as human or animals. It's all the same to me.

**PR:** What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you?

**GT:** When I was a kid, I dove into a pool and my bathing suit slipped right off so I was buck naked in the water. It was during a swimming class and the other kids were in hysterics standing on the deck watching the whole thing. I'm pretty sure the swimming instructor was too. Every time I think about it, I laugh.

**PR:** Are there any children who have contributed character ideas for your art?

**GT:** I have no children of my own, so when creating projects for children (my kid's book, my toys), I try not to 'think' like a child and imagine what a child would like. Making that leap is not only impossible, it can result in making something that usually is off the mark because it's mere guessing. Rather, I create for myself and try to come up with characters and designs that I like and the rest falls into place.

**PR:** Where do you find your best materials to paint on? When you visit a new place, do go hunting for old stuff? What was the most surprising find you've made so far?

**GT:** I acquire my materials from all kinds of places. From finding interesting random things on the street, attending flea markets and estate sales, shopping in antique stores and on occasion, people will just send me interesting materials they have found. The most surprising find was a beautiful old piece of steel sign that I screen printed on. I love those kinds of discoveries.

**PR:** In his introduction to *Mono Taxali*, [Steve Heller](#) mentioned that so far, you haven't done any animation work. The characters you create in your paintings and multiples are so alive, are you tempted?

**GT:** Yes! The project has to be the right one, though.

**PR:** What advice would you give a talented young artist who is struggling to find his/her identity?

**GT:** Do the work you love but at the same time, don't isolate yourself from your community of artists. Other artists will keep you honest; well, the great ones will. Keep the company of established artists who are happy with their lives and work because positive people encourage and those who are bitter, will discourage. Draw every day no matter what and never get attached to a picture you make. That picture is not you, it's just a historical record of a momentary thought you once had. Good or bad, let it go and move on to the next one. The process is where the artistic magic, compassion and love lies, not in the glorification of the finished product.

**PR:** What advice would you give a talented young artist who is just beginning to make a mark in the commercial world?

**GT:** You have a social contract to other professionals to uphold industry standards, prices and ethics. You need other professionals to survive as they need you. Commercial artists are nothing without each other.

*Mono Taxali* (27-9, 2011), with essays by Seymour Chwast, Steven Heller, and Charles Hively; and *I Love You, OK* (teNeus, 2011), with essays by Shepart Fairey and Aimee Mann are available on Gary's [website](#).

*Gary Taxali is an award-winning illustrator whose work has appeared in many major magazines. He has exhibited in many galleries and museums throughout North America and Europe including The Jonathan LeVine Gallery. In 2005, he launched his first vinyl toy, The Toy Monkey, which included a special edition along with a silkscreen print commissioned by The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. This led Gary to create his own toy company, Chump Toys, which recently saw the release of his OH NO and OH OH*

*vinyl figures. Aside from his gallery shows and illustration work, Gary also devotes a portion of his time teaching and lecturing at various arts organizations and schools such as OCAD University (Toronto, Canada), The Art Director's Club of Houston (Houston, USA), Dankmarks Designskole (Copenhagen, Denmark) and Istituto Europeo Di Design (Rome, Italy). [\[more\]](#)*

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