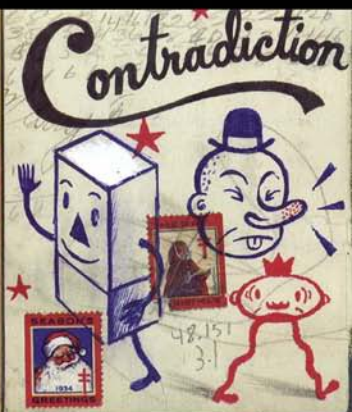


PIERCE



\$6.95 US \$8.95 CAN





GARY TAXALI

INTERVIEW BY ATTABOY



the awkwardness in the characters and logos to praise their humanity and innocence by purposely highlighting their imperfections. As Leonard Cohen says, "Everything has cracks so the light can get in".

Does your Indian heritage factor into this, etc does it give you a fascination or pang of disillusionment concerning the more shallow elements of Western culture and our commercial values?

I was a year old when my family moved to Canada so I was brought up in this culture I grew up in an open-minded and forward thinking family (my father always encouraged me to draw and paint from an early age). My family consisted of lots of mixed marriages and so my family had lots of religions and people of various backgrounds. We spent lots of Christmases in Woodstock, New York with my cousins who were half Indian and American. My family was not traditional by any means so it's hard for me to think about my Indian background in relation to Canadian culture in such stark, black and white differences. Therefore, I was never 'surprised' by anything with regards to cultural oddities growing up. I am both fascinated and disillusioned with Western culture. It's culture is such a mishmash of stolen elements that it's hard to even compare, in a way. But in all honesty, wouldn't you say that most people on the planet, North Americans included, are both fascinated and disillusioned by North America? I think it's a universal phenomenon.

You have done many layered collage pieces, drawing and painting on found book linings and covers. You use (or recreate?) worn out ink stamps, cancelled postage, all sorts of estate sale ephemera in your pieces. And the mixed media pieces look as if they're splayed out, being dissected. You

must have a huge collection of items! When did you start doing this?

A few years back, I found some old Indian school textbooks belonging to my uncles in my parents' basement. I was immediately drawn to the beautiful surfaces and aged paper. I began immediately drawing and painting on top of them. It morphed into an exercise whereby I would jump in head first and create random, final pieces with no preliminary sketches or ideas. This process resulted in my creating some of my best work in years, along with the worst, of course! This brought me to scour the antique stores and garage sales for the old paper and books. There's an endless supply of such material and I even found a vendor who would regularly burn books (!) so I conducted many search and rescue missions. Working in this manner forced me to begin working in a reductive way. That is, approaching a picture as if it is already 'completed' and so every new mark is carefully applied with the understanding that I am only enhancing and not taking away from its already beautiful form.

It looks like some pieces were made with block printing and all sorts of by-hand techniques.

I use all kinds of methods to make pictures and that includes screen printing, rubber stamping my characters, drawing and painting with pen and inks, acrylics, gouache - basically anything I can get my hands on. Even Liquid Paper.

How do you know when a piece you're working on is done?

It hits me suddenly and it just feels right. I cannot say exactly how or when that happens. I rarely ever look back and think a piece is incomplete.

There have been a few cases where I thought areas in a few pictures were over-worked. It's been so long and I cannot 'recollect' which works they were, exactly. It's an awesome feeling at the completion of a picture where you feel everything has come together to make this brand new creation.

(the Flap jacks have arrived. Not sure why, but the chefs have put these whipped cream smiles on them, except these are barely smiling)

Ha! They must know you here Gary.

Funny, I've never been here before.





I just thought you'd dig it because I hear a lot of good things about the food. I usually don't eat this kind of food and it's bizarre that I ordered an herbal tea and fresh fruit plate and I got this crap instead. Although the whipped-creams smiles are a nice touch.

There's an eerie, disconcerting quality to using these things in your mixed media work. I mean, most of the original owners of the pieces you use as canvases are most likely dead now.

Very interesting you see it as eerie, it's recycling, man. Maybe it's my Hindu roots. We cremate people and put their ashes in rivers. Ash is a carbon which is a natural filter for purifying water. Even after death, a person can help the living, you see. We are born with nothing and die with nothing. Every material thing we have in life is just 'borrowed'. Even the act of making a picture is a fleeting exercise. It's not like you take your art when you die, right? Using discarded scraps and making them something new and revitalized is not eerie. It's saying homage. I was in Nepal once and looked up a friend of a friend named Narayan Chitrakar in the remote village of Baktapur. Chitrakar means 'thankpainter'. Thankpaintings are essentially intricately detailed paintings on woven cloth of Hindu and Buddhist allegories. They're illustrations hung in temples meant to aid in meditation. Narayan's father was a thank painter, as was his father, and so on. His son

was being trained to become one too so it's passed on from generation to generation. After talking in length with Narayan about thank painting, I told him I was also an artist. "This is not art," he said. "Art is for man, this is for God." In a second I was humbled by what he said and it made me realize the utter self indulgence of western motives for making pictures and why we do what we do. This is why I revere my sources and think of myself as a link in the chain with regards to my process and materials. Taking found paper and working with that constantly reminds me of that.

Your work is really distinct. I'd really like to know who's work you admire and what influences you.

My influences are long and wide. I like the work of Dr. Seuss as much as I like the work of Robert Rauschenberg. Of course, old packaging and typography is evident and lately, I've been immersed in the Russian Avant Garde. The artists whom I really admire include mostly friends who offer inspiration beyond their work. The Clayton Brothers are my best friends and their work along with their friendship have been a big impact in my life. In terms of admiration, I would easily say the work of amazing artists here in Toronto who are emerging and are making new inroads. Artists such as Team Macho, Michael Comeau, Melinda Josie and Christopher Hutsui are going some brilliant work. We all show in a gallery called Magic Pony which is our HQ. Steve Cober and Kristin Weckworth run the gallery and have succeeded in not only providing a home for us to show our art, but helped cement the Toronto scene as a pertinent movement in the art world. Many galleries emulate art trends but Magic Pony creates them. You heard it here first.

Your Toy Monkey vinyl figure produced

This is Taxali's toy monkey we discussed.



by Chump Toys is a wonderful 3D representation of your work. The windup monkey seems so lonely and sad, yet I get the feeling that if you tried to console him he'd slap our arm away, we'd find him to be a real prick. What's he really like?

He's moody, just like me. He is also confused because I created him as a painting first. Watch out for him, he'll be back in ways you cannot even imagine.

I imagine that in fifty years he'll be scuffed and worn like many of your paintings.

Probably. But don't tell him that now because he's got other worries.

Your illustrations for magazines are wonderful. They don't look like assignments at all. Are you adamant about being free of art direction when you work with a client? Is your approach the same when taking on an illustration?

You hit the nail on the head. Atta. I cannot nor will not work in any other way. But I've been lucky in that I mostly work with great people who understand that. It's not that I won't take art direction, I have no problem with that. I won't take bad

art direction. One must preserve one's methodology in creating work and not let the work suffer because of outside input. Many art directors have given me great direction and the collaboration resulted in some amazing results. Nicholas Blechman, Art Director at the New York Times is an example.

With our fruitless flapjacks now mostly devoured and faceless, Taxali and I ended the interview. He headed north in his Lexus across the Canadian border and I southbound in Annie's duct taped VW, firmly clenching the directions he diagrammed on my syrup stained napkin.