



hardback: *disposable: a history of skateboard art*^o

words: sean cliver^o

Once upon a time, I used to be the editor of a skateboard magazine. Nothing grand, just that menstrual rag Steve Rocco started in 1992, *Big Brother*. It's greatest strength—and possibly its Achilles heel—was that it was a haven for the professionally inept and socially bankrupt, and that's the only reason I ever managed to attain such a lofty title in my janky career as a journalist.

You see, I've got major ill-communication skills—and no, that doesn't mean I'm a master of dope speak. I'm simply a dope who can't master the ability to speak. Everyone on the staff understood my vocal deficiencies too. I wasn't known as the "mumbling chimp" in the office without good reason—but in the few instances the responsibility of interviewing someone was plopped in my lap, my heart and lungs began racing each other in a full-on sprint, and all

my regularly suppressed speech impediments came stammering to the fore like Special Olympics contestants at the starting line of a cross-country run. Acting in concert, these afflictions gave way to a conversational Chernobyl, where even the mildest exchange melted down into a wreck of incoherent mutterings and deathly pockets of silence.

There was, however, one Q&A scenario where I'd achieved a modicum of success, and that was when I interviewed myself. I not only asked insightful questions, but I was able to respond like a competent human being. So, when it came down to promoting my book, *Disposable: A History of Skateboard Art*, in *The Skateboard Mag*, I offered to interview myself and make life easier for everyone involved. Here's what I had to say:



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So what's the big idea behind your doing this book?

I just got tired of seeing books about graphics that didn't mean anything to me as a skateboarder. Most, to date, have attacked the subject matter from the fronts of art theory or pop-culture curios, and many of the people responsible for them appear to have no sincere ties to skateboarding—the books are riddled with inaccuracies. Case in point: for years now I've been slugged with the misdirected praise for Blind's Guy Mariano, "Accidental Gun Death"—a graphic I was mistakenly credited for in one such book. It was actually drawn by Marc McKee, and I figured the only way to set the record straight was to get my own book published and give Marc his due credit once and for all.

Did this project evolve over time or was there a big bang?

It gradually snowballed. After resigning from *Big Brother* in 2000, I entertained the idea of serializing my history with skate graphics. The eternal procrastinator, I never got around to doing it. Then two years later, through my idle pursuits of buying and selling old skateboards, several collectors expressed an interest in hearing stories of what inspired certain graphics and what it was like working for the companies that I did. Since I'd just finished writing my first book [*Jackass The Movie*; MTV Books, 2002], I decided to pursue another published work dedicated to those very things I was always being asked about—well, it was that or just keep on typing out the same old stories in random e-mails for the rest of my life.

I noticed that a third of the book is devoted to your personal history. Are you an egomaniac or what?

I'm the first to admit my contribution to skate graphics is pretty marginal in the grand scheme, but still, I do have a rather unique history with them. Originally a know-nothing kid from the Midwest, I started skateboarding in 1986 because I thought

deck graphics were the hottest shit I'd ever seen. Two years later, I entered and won an advertised Powell Peralta art contest, moved to California, and started working for the company without any prior industry involvement whatsoever. Over the years that followed, I became a firsthand witness to one of the most tumultuous times in skateboarding: when Powell went from being the dominant player of the industry to a flagging company struggling to contend with changes in the marketplace—all mostly due to Steve Rocco, whom I wound up working for after being laid off from Powell. I just used my convoluted history as a skeletal backbone for this era when graphics played a significant role in skateboarding.

So you're saying the book is like one big "check me out!" thing.

No, no—not at all. In fact, a good chunk of my history is intertwined with McKee's. He contributed some great tales from the early years of World Industries. I also collected tons of stories—from the seminal likes of Wes Humpston, Jim Phillips, John Lucero, and Pushead, to the inspired works of artists such as Ed Templeton, Andy Jenkins, Mike Hill, and Todd Bratrud. In the end, I really am just a big fan of skateboard graphics and the artists behind them—I just happened to get lucky and wound up being one myself.

As a self-proclaimed skate nerd, was there anyone you fanned out on while making the book?

No, I kept my cool for the most part. Well, I may have cracked on a few occasions with Jim Phillips and Pushead, but what do you expect? The Christians, they'll try and tell you that the Holy Trinity is the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but to me, once I saw the light of art through skateboarding, I came to view the holy threesome as V. Courtland Johnson, Jim Phillips, and Pushead.

How fanatical were you about finding decks for the book?

For the longest time I couldn't find anyone with

Rocco's second board on SMA, but then one day it popped up on eBay. The seller lived in Florida and didn't have a decent digital camera, so I just outright bought it—cost me like 950 bucks. Of course, the very last collector I hooked up with had one tucked away.

How did you collect the images for the book?

I refused to use any computer art files in the book—I only wanted to show the real screened deal—so I traveled all over the place shooting board collections, great and small. Overall, I amassed three thousand photos, one thousand of which made the final selection. I then stuck the book's designer, Eric Simpson, with the task of clipping all the decks out from their backgrounds. There was a good week where he didn't really want to see or talk to me at all. **Have you ever gayed off with the Bones Brigade?**

No, but there was this time in 1991 that I was in a sandwich shop near the Powell factory, when one of the pros claimed he could stick his penis in his butt. There were laughs of disbelief, but he stood up in the middle of the restaurant, dropped his shorts and stuck it in there. But I really don't think that qualifies as gaying off... does it?

Definitely. Any other last-ditch sales pitches?

Just that through the combined recollections of all the artists, skaters, and company owners, the book provides a pretty cool timeline of skateboarding, solely through the board graphics, and I think even the most jaded hardcore skaters will get a bit misty-eyed with nostalgia while thumbing through it, at some point.

For more information on *Disposable: A History of Skateboard Art*, plus a neat little *QuickTime* slideshow, and a self-deprecating journal by *The Artist Formerly Known as Sean Cliver*, visit this web site: disposablethebook.com