



DISPOSABLE A History of Skateboard Art

Skateboarding has given birth to many different subcultures over the years. Apart from the obvious and often loud personalities that have recently become pop stars, there are however, other, quieter currents that have spawned from skateboarding. One aspect that has been, until recently, been ignored is the artwork that adorns the decks and the artist that create and collect these. Sean Cliver has been at the core of skateboard design since the 1980s, working as an artist at Powell Peralta, World Industries and then later at Big Brother as an editor and also working on MTV's series "The Wildboyz". He has just published his first book, "Disposable-A History of Skateboard Art", to give us an insight and pay homage to the world of skateboard art. Stw2d had the opportunity to catch up with Sean and ask him a couple of questions.

Stw2d: What was the inspiration behind "Disposable"?

Sean Cliver: There were a few things that kicked me in the ass to write and compile this book. It first crossed my mind in 2000, when I quit my editor's position at Big Brother and still had the writing bug, but at the time I was still only thinking of serializing my own history with graphics. There were just too many good stories from behind the green door of the skateboard industry and as an artist I witnessed some pretty dramatic events at both Powell Peralta and World Industries when I worked there in the late 80s and early 90s. Then I began getting heavily into the skateboard collecting scene and the idea of a broader-based book took root. Throughout the years, though, I've also been somewhat unhappy with the other books published that dealt with skateboard graphics, Dysfunctional aside, of course, since it's probably the best published visual overview of skateboarding on a whole. In general they never spoke to me as a skateboarder, or as an artist, for that matter and the one that really made me mad was a book published in 2003 by Rhyn Noll called "Skateboards That Rock!" It was just thrown together, there were horrible misspellings, and it was a large disservice to the history of skateboard graphics – and I thought the more books that came out like this the harder it would be for me to get that fabled book deal, because every publisher would think the niche was covered. So in the end I just wanted to make the book about skateboard art that I always wanted to have on my shelf, something wholly dedicated to the boards and artists behind it without the typical pop culture condescension, arty mumbo-jumbo, or extreme clichés to hook a mainstream market. However, there wasn't a single established publisher that wanted to touch it as such - at least not on my idealistic terms. Luckily I found interest within the skateboard industry with Concrete Wave Editions and Blitz

Distribution, so I was able to get away with everything I wanted to, which primarily meant making a book created by skateboards for skateboarders. If it wasn't for them, though, I'd probably still be collecting rejection slips.

Where did the majority of decks come from?

As I'd mentioned before, I got heavily into the skateboard collecting scene, so I had a good platform of people to start from. And since a lot of collectors tend to specialize in one brand; this made things a bit easier in tracking down and shooting all these elusive boards. The artists themselves were always a great source for the decks. Interestingly, a number of companies didn't even keep deck archives, and those that did, many of them have been looted throughout the years or disappeared altogether, as was the case with World Industries' stash of boards. But the deeper I got into the book, I also started to uncover people who aren't in the collector scene but still held onto all these amazing boards throughout the years – many of them just boxed up in storage gathering dust, sadly - and this was where it became really, really fun for me, kind of a gay little Indiana Jones trip, I guess, uncovering all these seemingly lost treasures and rarities because I may be an artist in the industry, but I'm really just a fan at heart.

How long did it take you to compile the book?

Almost two years. And this was all while holding down two very different full-time jobs: one as an artist for Birdhouse/Hook-Ups, and the other as a producer on the MTV series Wildboyz. So most of my spare time was on the weekends, when I'd run around California shooting board collections or sending out a weekly barrage of emails, tracking people down to ask them about all these old graphics.

What is your personal favourite out of the selection?

Tough call...they all have different memories associated to them now. Pushead's was fun, if only because I had no idea the bizarre history of Zorlac over the years. And Jim Phillips was really cool about providing a big history on his time at Santa Cruz. Actually, come to think of it, John Lucero was a good one, too, because he's probably the most forgotten artist when it comes to graphics and he's made some truly historic contributions that are never mentioned in other books and a lot of people have no clue as to what he's even done including myself on a few of them.

www.disposablethebook.com

Text & Interview: Steven Vogel