Oakland Museum of California

SUPER AWESOME

art and giant robot

Curriculum Activities

Grades: 9–12

Developed by Mariah Landers

Content

Introduction

The *SuperAwesome: Art and Giant Robot* exhibition features the work of artists associated with the groundbreaking magazine *Giant Robot*, an ahead-of-its-time celebration of Asian-American pop and alternative culture. Founded in 1994, *Giant Robot* grew from being a small, punk oriented zine to a multiplatform art space, with a robust online presence, retail stores, and related events. Guest curated by *Giant Robot*'s editor and publisher, Eric Nakamura, OMCA's exhibition presents works in a variety of media by some of the most exciting talents to emerge from this edgy scene.

In this interdisciplinary unit, students explore and understand the relationship between West Coast popular culture and Asia. They will understand complexities in identity and think through the nature of negotiating one's identity based on the context of cultural influences, family, and peer engagement. Students will understand how artists illuminate transnational cultural orientation. Through the multiple platforms of the *Giant Robot* world, students will understand how artists intersect popular culture with contemporary art to express the complexities of their identities.

This model is designed after the Teaching For Understanding (TFU) framework developed and researched by Harvard's School of Education, Project Zero Institute. The TFU framework is taught through the Integrated Learning Specialist Program under Alameda County Office of Education. It uses understanding goals to pinpoint content that is most important for students to critically develop deep understanding around four Understanding Goals:

Understanding Goal 1:	What makes something art?
Understanding Goal 2:	How do we negotiate our identities given the complex nature of structures and systems in place that inform our individual expressions?
Understanding Goal 3:	How do contemporary artists use pop culture to tell their stories?
Understanding Goal 4:	How do perceptions of gender become influenced by contemporary art?

Giant Robot Lesson Plans

Lesson 1: Telling Your Story through Pop Culture

Understanding Goal 3

Question: How do contemporary artists use pop culture to tell their stories?

Statement: Students understand the intersection of popular culture and contemporary art as a tool for exploring and sharing personal life stories.

Associated Performance(s) of Understanding:

A. (Initial exploration): Students explore the articles and art works in *Giant Robot*, noting the ways that *Giant Robot* artists make use of pop culture. (How do artists use Rendering, Re-categorizing and Reformatting* to tell their stories?)
B. (Guided discovery): Students critique contemporary art works in *Giant Robot* by asking the question "What makes something art?" while paying attention to the lenses they bring to the critique.
C. (Culminating): Students design an original piece using one of the creative strategies (Render, Re-Categorize, or Reformat*) to tell their personal story.

Materials:

- Post-it notes
- Copies of the article "Optic Nerd," *Giant Robot* Issue #18, 2000
- Copies of the article "King David: The Art of Falling Apart," *Giant Robot* Issue #50, 2007
- "8 Creative Strategies," powerpoint by Dr. Julia Marshall*

*See Dr. Julia Marshall's "8 Creative Strategies," available on museumca.org under Educator Resources.

Anticipatory Set:

1. Watch the video: Giant Robot Biennale 3 to give context to the *Giant Robot* exhibition.
2. Using a Post-it note, write down the most interesting piece of pop culture today (e.g. gaming, fooding, Beyoncé, Converse, hacking, turfing). Post ideas in one central area. In dyads, have students pick two new ideas and create a quick visual piece that combines the ideas into something new.

Lesson:

1. Students read "Optic Nerd" and "King David: The Art of Falling Apart". In dyads, have students read aloud the articles together taking the role of artist.
2. Whole group discussion: How do these artists discuss their identities and communicate what matters to them? How does *Giant Robot* express the connections between Japan and West Coast popular culture? What exchanges of ideas do you see happening (food, language, technology, emotion, aesthetics, histories, etc.)
3. Note the ways that *Giant Robot* artists make use of pop culture.
4. Introduce the 8 Creative Strategies: Dr. Julia Marshall ppt.
5. Sketch: Using the creative strategy of Rendering, Re-Categorizing, and Reformatting* depict the ways that you engage in pop culture.

Ongoing Assessment:

Students critique their images by looking for ways that they see exchanges of ideas forming. What is being expressed? What does it say about their identity?

* See Dr. Julia Marshall's "8 Creative Strategies," available on museumca.org under Educator Resources.

Optic Nerd

words | **Eric Nakamura**

Adrian Tomine and I started college together in the fall of 1992 at UC Berkeley. We lived at opposite ends of the hall in one of the south-side dorms and met shortly after I discovered his collection of Pixies CDs. We were your classic friend-foes. I remember eating with him a lot in the dining commons, getting harassed by him when I was on paper deadlines, checking out hot girls from other floors together, watching him sit at his desk drawing his mini-comics instead of doing homework, and arguing with him about art, relationships, and violence. In retrospect, I was just another freshman somewhat passively trying to figure out shit about myself, while he was actively building the foundation for his comic book success, Optic Nerve**. Eight years later, he has his own cult following, apartment, and book publisher, while I still dine on frozen pizzas, have roommates, and write meagerly compensated stories about him.**

CHILDHOOD

Last spring, Adrian stayed at my apartment during a nearly two-week New York visit. He was possibly the worst guest, though at the same time, one of the best guests I've ever had—and living in New York, it's like you're running a hotel for friends half the year. Fourteen days is a long fucking time to entertain someone, especially while having a full-time job (he dropped by my office at least once a day). On the other hand, he took me to see Woody Allen's band play at the Carlyle Hotel, bought half my meals and even scrubbed my toilet. That last part is due to his inherent anal-retentiveness, but for the former two, I thank his parents and upbringing.

GR: When I first met you, I thought you were some weird European or half-bred Asian. Do you get that a lot from people?

AT: I don't understand this at all, but you are not alone. Both of my parents are 100 percent Japanese American. Why does nobody believe this? I actually don't care. By the way, why are hapa girls almost always gorgeous?

GR: Does your OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder) personality fluctuate? Is it heightened under certain situations? What's your worst OCD habit?

AT: I require a certain (high) level of cleanliness and order in my apartment, especially in my studio. All my CDs and albums are arranged in alphabetical order. All my comics are sealed in Mylar and arranged alphabetically as well. I'm particularly concerned with germs in the kitchen and bathroom. I don't know if this qualifies as OCD, but probably my biggest problem is that I hate using any toilet other than my own, so it sometimes makes traveling rather unpleasant. And you thought I was just being gracious when I cleaned your bathroom. When I was younger, I had much worse OCD tendencies... I remember reading some article about the impact of positive thinking on one's health, and I was so afraid of getting sick, I would go through this insane "positive visualization" ritual every night before falling asleep. Since then, I've become more aware of OCD tendencies, and have actually made concerted efforts to overcome them.

GR: Did you ever, at any point in your life, feel that you were a normal kid/person?

AT: No. Whether it's accurate or not, I always end up feeling like "the other." Maybe it's just a certain egotism that developed from being a loner, but I always view myself as "different" from

the masses.

GR: Do you think you had a good childhood?
AT: Yes, I think it worked out for the best. The things that made me depressed growing up were also what encouraged me to work on writing and drawing. And for the most part, I had a really good relationship with my family members.

GR: What's the most traumatic memory of your childhood?
AT: Various life-threatening allergic reactions, and the time I was holding my mail-order-only Boba Fett action figure out the window of my dad's car and it slipped out of my hand.

GR: What's the best advice you've gotten from (1) your mom, (2) your dad, and (3) your brother?
AT: My mom has consistently advised me to take risks, to do things for the sake of experience, to live life in the present, etc. My dad once advised me to never get involved with fraternities. My brother assured me that life would get better after high school.

GR: What's a good day to you?
AT: I wake up and eat breakfast, shower, shave, etc. I drive down to my P.O. box and there's some good mail waiting for me. I come home and work uninterrupted all afternoon, accomplishing more than I expected. I meet my girlfriend for dinner and hang out with her for a while. I come home and do more work until about 2:30 a.m. I go to bed and don't have insomnia.

GR: What's one thing you're doing now that you never would've dreamed of, say, when you first moved to Berkeley?
AT: Doing an interview via e-mail.

SCHOOL
Adrian's one of the smartest people I know. And I know this not only from the brilliant insight he has on various subjects and people, but also because he's the only friend I have who's been doing exactly what he wants since the start, and making a good living from it. Since we were both English majors, we'd occasionally end up in the same classes. However, like me and some of his characters, he was more apt to sit through section without ever raising his hand or involving himself in discussion. It wasn't that he was a bad student, but he didn't have the time or interest to pursue school like he did his art. He didn't even bother to show up for our graduation. Despite his self-imposed anonymity, students recognized him as "that skinny guy with the thick glasses." Still, his school experiences, especially high school, were pivotal to the making of Optic Nerve.

GR: Tell me a little about the hierarchy of your high school in Sacramento. Where did you fit in?
AT: I wasn't at the very bottom, but I was close.... I think being able to draw helped a little bit. It seems like, in retrospect, a lot of the other, more popular kids had just developed better social skills... like, I would just say weird things, and people would feel uncomfortable around me. Also, there were a lot of very traditionally "beautiful" kids at my school, and I hardly put any effort into developing a "look" or anything like that, plus I was really skinny and I had braces and glasses and I was one of two Asians in my class. I wasn't exactly hated, just ignored for the

most part. So I was maybe one notch above the immigrants and "Special Ed." students.

GR: Did you ever feel pressure from your parents to do well academically?
AT: No, it just came naturally. They were putting more pressure on me to make friends or meet girls.

GR: Did you ever dissect a frog?
AT: No, the whole thing disgusted me. Once, in science class, we cultured these bacteria by swabbing things like a urinal and then rubbing the swabs in a petri dish. After about a week, this hideous multi-colored fuzz had grown inside the dish. Just as the teacher was instructing us on the sanitary method of disposing of the dishes, I rested my elbow on my dish and cracked it open. I thought for sure I was going to die.

GR: You once taught a summer art course for kids in Sacramento—I think it was between your freshman and sophomore years of college. Did you like being a teacher?
AT: No, I went about it all wrong, and I did it only because the pay was good. The class was for very young kids, like six years old; it was kind of like glorified babysitting. Anyway, most of the other teachers wore shorts and t-shirts, and the kids called them by their first names. For some reason, I decided to show up on the first day wearing a suit and tie, and I made the kids call me "Mr. Tomine." That pretty much set the tone for the rest of the summer. I remember almost yelling at a kid for always drawing the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. I should be sterilized.

GR: What did you gain from that experience?
AT: $25 an hour and a new level of self-hatred.

GR: What's the most uninhibited, wild, crazy thing you've ever done? And did you feel good afterwards?
AT: I once shoplifted some CDs when I was a teenager, and I felt really horrible afterwards. I got up on stage and performed rock music with a band a few times when I was a teenager, and I felt really embarrassed afterwards. Several times in my life, I've summoned the courage to "bust moves" on girls, and depending on the response, I felt either elated or suicidal. Am I revealing too much here?

GR: No. But, yeah, your band was called ***? Did you write your own songs?**
AT: No details about this may be revealed. If you print the name of the band I will fly to New York and rip your head off. I'm serious.

GR: Here's a list of things I want you to choose from: Margaret Yang or Rosemary Cross?
AT: Margaret Yang—duh.

GR: Tall or short?
AT: I don't have a "thing" for short girls!

GR: Smoking or drinking alcohol?
AT: Drinking alcohol... seemingly less cancerous.

GR: Golf or skateboarding?
AT: Golf. My best score on a 9-hole course is 54.

GR: Lipstick or Chapstick?
AT: Anything but Carmex.

GR: Soon Yi or Mia?
AT: In terms of who I'd want to meet: Soon Yi. In terms of their influence on Woody's films: Mia.

MISERY AND CHICKS
I moved to New York straight after college, and for a good while the only other person I knew who was as miserable as me was Adrian. Unlike depressives who become dysfunctional wretches, Adrian, as his fans already know, channels most of his angst into his art and writing. In the past year, or more specifically, since he got a girlfriend, you can actually witness his emotional upswing through his work. (See his full-page illustration in the New Yorker, October 18 & 25, 1999.)

GR: Is there any part of you that misses the romance of being miserable?
AT: Yes, I miss the fun of lying in bed in the morning, not wanting to get up and face my life. I also miss the "romance" of depending on certain TV and radio shows for company, and becoming very upset when they are preempted by sports or something. But what I really miss is the great solace of not speaking to another human for entire days. Those were good times.

GR: Does your upcoming comic reflect this new and improved you?
AT: No, because I actually wrote this story last year when I was really down in the dumps, so it's an extremely negative, misanthropic issue... maybe the bleakest yet.

GR: Tell me if this is accurate: When you first started Optic Nerve**, it was inspired by unrequited lust/love/whatever.**
AT: That's partially true. Of course, if I was trying to impress the girls at my school, I was probably misguided. But many of the stories I've written have drawn from such experiences.

GR: In the nine or so years you've been making Optic Nerve**, have you resolved the girl issue?**
AT: Of course not. I'm still extremely sensitive to how girls regard me. I can accept girls not liking me in person, but it kills me when they dislike my comic. I feel like, "Well, that's all I've got. I guess I'm just not likable." However, I think it's important that I control my subconscious desire to pander. That never pays off in the long run, anyway. I almost feel like I've gone to the opposite extreme in some cases, and written stories that seemed intentionally off-putting. I don't even understand myself.

GR: You often tell stories about how shitty your high school experience was. What was your most triumphant moment?
AT: When I managed to find a really cute, sweet girlfriend. I sensed that all the jerks that had tormented me in the past were thinking, "Damn... I guess he's not a faggot!"

GR: Did you get asked to school dances?

AT: Yes, I got asked two times. I didn't know either girl very well, and I really did not want to go. But my mom forced me. God, it was so tense after one of the dances: we went to some party and all the couples started "getting busy." My date and I awkwardly sat on the couch and watched Saturday Night Live.

GR: Did you go to the prom?
AT: Yes, I actually went twice. Once when I was a senior, and then the following year I had to come home from college to take my girlfriend to hers.

GR: Have you ever considered yourself a sex object? If no, would you like to be?
AT: No. Sure.

GR: How many times have you been in love?
AT: Bitch, please. Don't even go there.

Eric/Martin: This is a letter Adrian e-mailed me a few days after we finished the interviews. Do you want to use it somewhere?

Claud–

One more thing. I insist that in the Giant Robot piece, I be referred to (at least once) as both an "unparalleled genius" and a "graphic storyteller extraordinaire." I also need the entire story be set in a 10-point Clarendon font, justified left. Oh yes, and only two columns per page...I want a nice airy, spacious feel.

Adrian

words | **Eric Nakamura**
pics | **Courtesy of David Choe**

King David

The Art of Falling Apart

High rolling and lowbrow art collide in Sin City.

David Choe was still in art school when he first asked us if we needed illustration work. We said yes, and he delivered a drawing of "Yan Can Cook" in less than a week for the ninth issue of Giant Robot. Since then, he won the Xeric grant to publish the *Slow Jams* comic book, which is still talked about today. In between writing articles and making illustrations for Giant Robot, he has committed larceny, vandalism, and random foolishness, but has also grown as an artist. At 31, he shows work around the world, his art is priced at an all-time premium, and he's taken a bit of control of his life. On the last day of his West Coast graffiti tour, he took time to tell us about his current direction, where there are fewer pitfalls, crossroads left and right, and nothing but opportunity.

GR: Describe the last thing you painted.
DC: At a hotel, I'll take down a painting, paint a tiny little character or something on it, and put it back. You wouldn't notice. I've been doing that for years.

GR: So if it's a farm scene, you might paint a farmer?
DC: Yeah, and the farmer might be fucking a pig. You know how a lot of really shitty hotels don't have a headboard? If it's not stuck to the wall, I'll pull the whole thing out and tag the back. If there's a couch, I'll put it away from the wall and tag something on the back of that, too. I think a lot of people do this shit. It's funny because you'll never see it, and then years from now when the hotel is decrepit, someone will be going through it and say, "What the fuck?"

GR: Haven't you done other collaborative art that's gotten you into trouble? You know, painting on other's people's art?
DC: I try to live my life without any fear. If you live your life that way, you'll end up dead, injured, or really successful.

GR: For a while, it was like you were blackballed. People weren't going to show you. They were talking shit and wanted to beat you up.
DC: That's still going on. I've never met them and they've never met me, but they actively try to stop my career. When I was younger, I was a lot more talky and it came off as arrogant. But I was really confident of what I could do. In the last seven or eight years, I've painted with almost every street artist in the world and all I'm thinking is, "Why the fuck do you paint so slow?" I think the only artist I've painted with who paints faster than me is this 15-year-old autistic kid.

GR: But who wants to end your career? Who has the power to do that, and how would one do it?
DC: Here's an example. I remember Jeff Soto was curating an art show with like 50 artists. He called me and said, "Dave, I'd like you to be in this show. I like your stuff." I didn't know Jeff, but I was a huge fan of his work. It was going to show in L.A. and travel through a few different cities. Then he called me and said, "Dave, the gallery in L.A. called and said that they could put up the group show only if I get rid of you."

GR: It seems like you got over all the anti-Choe hate that was going on, but for a while you were stuck.
DC: It's frustrating when you're young. I was angry about everything. The art world now, compared to when I was starting, is entirely different. Kids have all their work online. I didn't have shit on the Internet. I was only able to afford a certain number of color copies at Kinko's and trying to decide which four art directors I was going to send them to. Kids are getting shows before they even graduate from art school. There's no strug-


LINCOLNS
LINCOLNS
LINCOLNS
LINCOLNS
WARNING
DURA
HARSH

gle, there's no rejection, and there's no time period of growth or confrontation.

"We're not going to show you at the gallery." "You're not going to work for a big comic-book company." No matter how many people try to end my career or no matter how many people want to hate on me, all I had to do at the end of the day was be as good as I can possibly be and stomp out all the competition. With nothing available and so many doors shut in my face, I was still able to create art. Then everything slowly started turning around. All the people who hated on me want to suck my dick.

Getting the shit kicked out of you is humbling. Getting robbed is humbling. Being on welfare is humbling. To get shit taken away from you and have your world turned completely upside-down is humbling. To have your parents walk in on you while you're beating off is humbling. You know?

GR: That happened?
DC: I think everyone in my family except one of my brothers has caught me beating off. It's so embarrassing that you don't think you can ever come out of your room. Then you come out of your room and you're like, "Whatever. I can still put the pieces of my life back together." I don't care if I get the girl. I don't care if I don't get the money. I don't care if I don't get the job. I'm going to do shit my way.

It's weird. I meet so many artists and so many kids who want to make art. There's such a huge lack of confidence. I know a lot of artists who are a million times older than me, and I tell them, "You know you're fucking dope. Why don't you have more confidence?" Then you see some artists who are horrible–I'm not saying this hatefully–they shouldn't have careers. It's just that art is such a huge thing right now, and what's happening is exactly what happened to comics and baseball cards. The market is flooded with tons of shit. That bubble will pop at some point, but I wake up every day and think, "This is a good fucking day to die."

GR: It seems like instead of making art, you've been gambling.
DC: Crime was such a huge part of my life that it was more important to me than art. Since I was 8, there was not one day where I did not commit some sort of illegal act. I had been arrested three or four times from when I was a kid until I was 27. Not once did I ever think, "Oh fuck! Maybe I'm not living the right way." I was like, "Oh fuck! I can't believe I got caught. I should have run faster."

When I got arrested in Japan, I was like a junkie for crime. The day I got out of the jail, I thought, "I'm never, ever going to commit an illegal act ever again." Of course, I do stupid shit like tagging up a hotel or maybe watching two movies instead of one, but I didn't realize what a huge vacuum it would leave. It left a giant black hole in my soul.

So crime is out now, but I've been gambling since I was 15 years old and it fulfills the same thrill and brain chemicals as stealing. Every time I leave a casino with a huge win, I feel like I robbed the place.

I transferred all my energy, passion, and discipline for stealing, scams, and that type of shit into gambling. I said that I never want to lose at gambling again and basically wrote this book inside my head of strict rules to follow. I know it's not cool and I'm probably going to stop soon, but it has completely taken over my life right now. I'm in Vegas like four times a week.

It's 90 percent of my income now. It's like that adage, when you finally don't give a shit about the girl, that's when you get the girl. I couldn't give a fuck about the art world now and now they're running after me. I get off the plane in Vegas, they pick me up in a fucking RollsRoyce, and I get the biggest suite at the nicest hotel. I'm actually cut off from three of the nicest hotels in Vegas.

GR: Why?
DC: They won't let me play there anymore because I've won so much money. I told the lady I wish I had a tape recorder because no one would believe me. She said, "You have never given back to the casino in the last three years."

I don't care if I get the girl. I don't care if I don't get the money. I don't care if I don't get the job. I'm going to do shit my way.

GR: Are you willing to share your technique?
DC: I only play baccarat or blackjack. I'll give you some quick tips. It's a little bit of superstition and a little bit of common knowledge. Basically, the entire world is like a fucking mistake. Eighty or 90 percent of the world is unplanned pregnancies, right? Everyone is like, "Fuck! I was going to pull out!" It's plainly obvious that the world sucks at pulling out. It's the same thing with gambling. The world sucks at gambling, everyone's a sucker, and the house always wins. So what's my style of gambling? Stop right when you're about to come, and pull out. No one wants to do that. If you gamble, right when you sit down and start to play, there's always a small period when you're going to be up. Nobody wants to stop then. That's the fun part, when all the adrenaline is released. That's exactly when I say, "Thank you," grab my chips, and get up.

If you keep doing small plays with extreme discipline, then eat at the buffet or go to the pool, all the small victories will add up to a huge win at the end of the day. For me, 72 hours on the weekdays is usually plenty enough. That's just about the time when the devil arrives. It's money you didn't work for, you're leaving with Satan's money, and your moral compass is completely destroyed. When I was a thief, people used to say, "You don't care about anything because you just steal shit." I was like, "Maybe you're right." Now I don't steal anything.

I pay for everything, take care of personal relationships, and do all the things to get my life in order.

GR: After prison, you talked a lot about religion. Is that still important to you? Your becoming a born-again Christian became folklore.
DC: It's still an important thing to me. I talked to my pastor about this. The period right after you find God, you're on fire. I went to church every Sunday. I started teaching this autistic kid. I gave away everything that I owned. People I didn't know were stopping me in the middle of the street saying I had a weird glow around me. I was preaching to people and thinking, "What the fuck am I doing? I didn't ask for this." One of the worst things you can do is be a Christian because everyone hates you and starts calling you out.

Before I became a born-again Christian, I didn't believe that you'd go to hell if you didn't accept Jesus. Now that I am, I still don't believe that. I think if you're a human being and have any sort of common sense, whether you're an atheist or religious, it all comes down to advice from *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*: "Be excellent to each other." But I'm done preaching and done talking to people. If you ask me, I'll tell you, but I'm just trying to live by example, although I'm not living a good example right now.

I'll be honest with you. If I were on the path, I wouldn't be gambling or treating my body like shit. I started drinking, too, which sort of sucks. I won't lie. My Bible has collected dust over the past year.

I try to take it day by day. I just don't give a shit about all the stupid shit anymore, and it's not like in your early 20s when you say, "I don't give a shit!" but actually still give a shit. I really couldn't give a fuck. I don't check my e-mail anymore. I used to write two-page letters back to everyone. I just smile now and deflect all the hate and bullshit into the gutter.

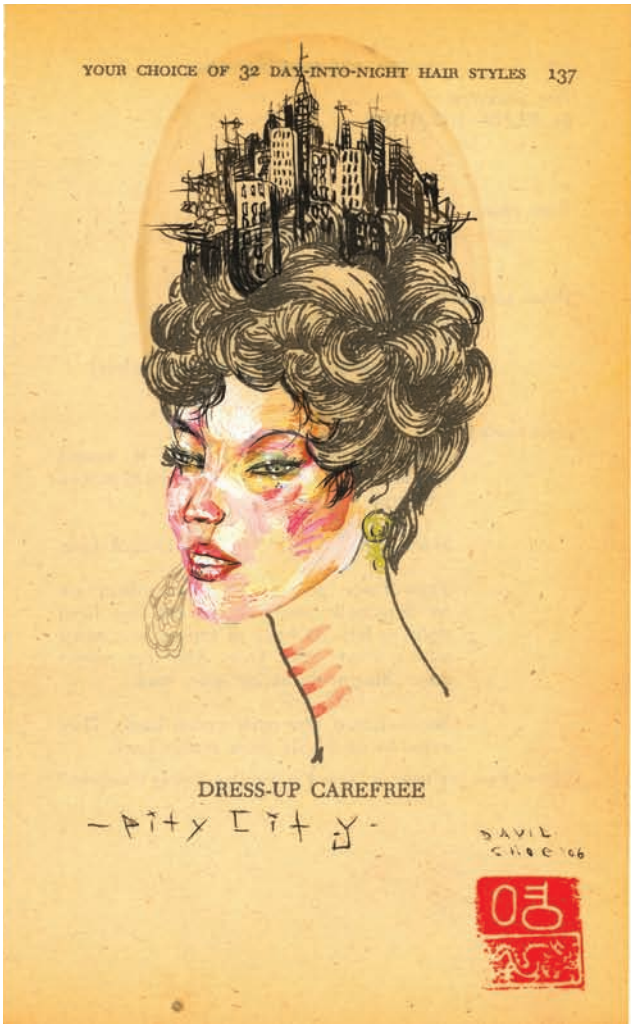
GR: How did you get tied up with Banksy's manager? It sounded far out when it happened, but I guess it isn't.
DC: He called me and said, "I love your shit. The people in the U.K. love your stuff." It's like I told you. The day I stopped giving a shit about finding someone to publish me, get into a gallery, and all that stuff…

GR: I guess that's the person who everyone wants as a manager now.
DC: He's a gangster, man. I don't know his background, but I don't think it's art. He came to L.A., rented a shitty warehouse in downtown, filled it with shit by Banksy, and sold it to Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt for millions. I don't care what anyone says, but that destroyed the art market. You can add an extra zero to everyone's prices now. People are selling things that they couldn't have sold before for shitloads of money.

GR: It seems like you spend all your money. Where does it all go?
DC: Where does the money go? You know me. I don't care about shit. I bought a '67 Lincoln Continental convertible. That's the dream car I always wanted, but I never thought I'd be able to afford one. I give some to God. I probably give 50 percent to my mom and dad. About 20 percent, I invest in my own shit. The rest, I do stupid shit with. My standard of living is so low and I don't want to be a landlord. I just end up doing shit I want to do, like travel and gamble.

GR: Tell me about the documentary that's taking nine years to make. What's happening? Is it still going on?
DC: Harry says it will be done by the end of this year, but who knows? He's maxed out like four credit cards already and he's going through relationship problems. He has to decide right now if he wants to be a good boyfriend or if he wants to be a good filmmaker. On top of that, we're doing all those hitchhiking shows. He's easily distracted.

GR: Is the hitchhiking show something you thought of?
DC: Me and Harry went to Africa after shooting the *Vice Guide to Travel* because of the article I wrote for you guys seven or eight years ago. We went to Africa, got all this footage, and they loved it. When we got back, they were like, "Dave, can we do another show? Something quick and cheap?" I was like, "I've hitchhiked my whole life. We could do that." This time we did Tijuana to Alaska. We ended the show at a place called the North Pole in Alaska with me and Harry sitting on Santa Claus's lap. When we sat on his lap I gave him a 12-pack of beer



It's not like in your early 20s when you say, "I don't give a shit!" but actually still give a shit. I really couldn't give a fuck.

and told him how disappointed I was that I didn't get all the toys over the years. That was a good ending for a show. We were at the rim of the Arctic Circle, and I was thinking, "How awesome was it for us to get a chance to do this?"

GR: What's the biggest triumph in your career?
DC: I guess Mylan. She's my triumph. She should have left me a long time ago, but we still hang out. I'm proud of the art I do and the stuff I make, but none of that stuff matters. You can't take any of that stuff with you. It's the personal relationships.

GR: What about your failures?
DC: If Japan didn't happen, I'd be dead right now. I was spinning out of control. Someone like me that goes unchecked like that is really dangerous. That had to have happened.

GR: A lot of artists seem to have started some kind of clothing company or bullshit like that.
DC: I don't know if I'm ready for that level of responsibility. I look back and see that I've done everything I can–knowingly or unknowingly–to build this life of complete irresponsibility. I pay my rent a year in advance. I don't have to do shit. I don't have to answer for anything. People have offered me my own T-shirt line and all these

products and I dabble in it here and there, but to become the David Choe brand, I'm like, I don't know if I want employees working under me and overlooking shit. And what some of these T-shirt companies make in a year, I make in five minutes at the blackjack table.

GR: Has the subject of your art changed? It can be a clean portrait or a deformed animal. I never know what it's going to be.
DC: I have ADD, OCD, and all these things so I get bored. I've never been that big of a Picasso fan, but I went to his museum in Barcelona where all the rooms are separated by the stages of his life. You're looking at all landscapes and portraits and shit. You look at the dates, and you're like, "Wait, he was like eight years old when he did these!" He was already bored. He knew he could do it and he was over that shit. Later in life, he's experimenting and doing all this shit. I'm not saying I'm Picasso–I don't think I am–but I know what I'm capable of and I'm going to sound cocky, but I know I can paint whatever I want.

GR: Your art prices have changed. Prints that were $300 are now in the thousands. It's a print, man!
DC: Exactly. I set the price at $300 and then eBay sets the price a $3,000. If someone's willing to buy a fucking print for three grand, it fucks up everything. Now I can't sell a drawing for $600. That has to be a couple thousand. The other thing is that I don't paint that much anymore. I used to pump shit out. Now I spend more time on more accomplished paintings that are a challenge to me. Like big ones. I give paintings like that to my friends and family for free. I'd rather do a mural that people see than one that hangs in some rich dude's house that no one's going to see except for his other rich friends.

GR: It seems like you have a good rapport with kids. You take more time than most people (not just artists) to talk to kids that come to your shows. Ten kids came from far away to a show in L.A. and told me that you looked too busy to talk to them. I introduced you to them, you put your arms out, and they gave you a hug. Artists don't do that.
DC: I partied with those kids until like four in the morning.

GR: That's very un-artist to do.
DC: I was that kid. We were painting a mural at this spot. Some kid flew out from L.A. for that. All these other kids drove out from shitty parts of Washington to see it. Some of these kids' heads are in the wrong place. They're like, "How do you be in *Juxtapoz*? How do you become famous?" I'm like, "Get the fuck out of here." But I know no one ever took that kind of time for me. Well, one guy did. I used to ride my bike to Melrose during that Hex-Slick period of graffiti. I always liked Hex's stuff and I'd be there all day watching him paint murals. He talked to me.

I love kids. I'm like a vampire. Even though I'm 31, I feel like so old sometimes. But if I'm around kids and they're not bitter, I suck all the youth out of them and get energized again. I'm like, oh yeah, that's what it's like to be young again and still care about shit. It's give and take.

I've built my career on self-publishing my own comics and books, and selling paintings out of my parent's garage and my minivan. Now people say shit like, "Why sell your paintings next to T-shirts and cheap toys at Giant Robot and Upper Playground, when you could show here or here?" And it's true. I don't need to do that. Over the last few years, I've gotten offers to show at the nicest galleries in S.F. and L.A. But I'm a loyal person and I'll never forget that Matt Revelli gave me my first art show ever at Upper Playground in S.F. when no one would touch me, and that you gave me my first show ever in L.A. for the opening of GR2. So even though I can show at nicer, more bourgie places, I couldn't give a fuck. If I'm gonna sell the paintings regardless, why give a cut to people I don't know and want to jump on the bandwagon? I already did all the hard work and you guys took the chances, so if I want to have a show in S.F. or L.A., it will be in the Lower Haight or Sawtelle. The fans and collectors will come. I just want to work with people I trust and are cool to be with, and not double-talking assholes. I'm built to last and I'm not going anywhere.

Lesson 2: Lunchbox Stories

Understanding Goal 2

Question: How do we negotiate our identities given the complex nature of structures and systems in place that inform our individual expressions?

Statement: Students understand that living in a connected world requires understanding the vast expressions of identities that are informed by the multiple nationalities a person can be tied to politically, culturally or through familial association.

Associated Performance(s) of Understanding:

A. (Initial exploration): Students investigate the writings of Eric Nakamura, Adrian Tomine, and David Choe.
B. (Guided discovery): Using the Asian American Lunchbox articles, students recognize the complexities of having a transnational identity.
C. (Culminating): Students create their own lunchbox using the Reformat* creative strategy to showcase their home culture and popular cultural influences.

Materials:

- Copies of the article "Asian-American Lunch Box," *Giant Robot* Issue #38, 2005
- Sketch paper
- #2 pencils or drawing pencils
- Homework/Extension handout

Anticipatory Set:
Have students read the *Giant Robot* "Asian-American Lunchbox" article.

* See Dr. Julia Marshall's "8 Creative Strategies," available at museumca.org under Educator Resources.

Lesson:

1. Referring to the *Giant Robot* "Asian American Lunchbox" article, ask students to take an inventory of what foods look familiar and what foods are new to them. Pose the questions: Are the Asian-American foods that are described in the article familiar? Why are they familiar? Do you or your family consume these foods? Do you or your family have historical ties to these foods?
2. Memory lane: In triads have students discuss the following questions: What was your most memorable lunchbox from elementary school? (A brown paper bag? Tin food holders? A plastic lunchbox with your favorite characters?) Describe the lunches you were packed as a kid or the lunches you ate at school or on the weekends. What was the perception that others had of you? What perception did you have of yourself?
3. Sketch: Students make a sketch of a typical lunch they consumed in elementary school. Ask them to include a label of each food with a description of what the food is, how it tasted and any memory they have attached to that food.
4. Have students share their sketches in their original triads.

Homework/Extension:

Research: Students gather data from family interviews, internet research and further reading of *Giant Robot* articles to address the following set of questions:

1) How do our foods connect us with multiple nation states?
2) When we consume a food that is representational of another country do we gain information about that county and its people?
3) What can we learn from others and about ourselves from the foods that we eat?
4) What social, political, and cultural stories can be revealed when we think about the foods we consume?

Ongoing Assessment:

Mimicking the style of *Giant Robot*'s "Asian-American Lunchbox" article, write a lunchtime story that communicates the ideas in the visual lunch box you created.

Asian-American Lunchbox

In the '70s, long before metal detectors were installed in elementary schools, the Golden Age of Saturday Morning Cartoons was also the Golden Age of Lunchboxes. Packing tin meant you were a cool kid. Not only were you spared from eating the cafeteria's Shit on a Shingle (diced turkey in grey liquid), you could also participate in lunchbox bowling while you flew the flag of your favorite TV show.

But that was just on the outside of the box. What you carried inside dictated whether you were a hero or a zero. If you pulled out a Coke can or a Snickers bar, you were studly. If you packed PBJ on Wonder, you were "normal." It was also kosher if you brought a left-over slice of pizza, some spaghetti, or even a matzoh cracker.

To be Asian-American often meant packing a seaweed-wrapped rice ball filled with a pickled plum, chicken chow mein in beat-up Tupperware, or a cold pork chop wrapped in foil. That meant being a freak *and* a geek egg-rolled into one. No one would trade even a rotten fuzzy apple for anything in your box.

If your parents ignored your pleas for "normal food," what were your options? (1) Go on a hunger strike. (2) Starve in solidarity with the victims of China's Cultural Revolution. (3) Spend your allowance money on food instead of robot toys. (4) Accept harassment from non-Asians as part of your daily routine.

It might have seemed like punishment at the time, but in retrospect, the embarrassing Asian-influenced lunches were far superior to the coveted all-American lunches. Kalbi, kim bap, and egg rolls or Oscar Mayer and Ding Dongs? The Asian-American lunches were better, even if you had to take shit from bullies (who probably eat at Benihana and Panda Express now).

Chinese-American Lunchbox

This lunchbox might have zhongzi ("Chinese tamales," according to Mom) and various soups as main portions. The less saucy, more oily dishes taste good cold.

Haw Flakes (under the napkin) - Like Chinese yo-yos or snaps, Haw Flakes are something that every kid brings back from Chinatown–probably because the disks of dried-up plum and sugar are dirt cheap.

Ha Gau - Because the skin of this dumpling is translucent and the shrimp inside is pink, this could be mistaken for just about any organ.

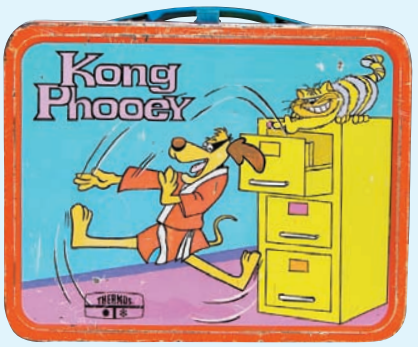
Siu Mai - Back in the '70s, dim sum was only for locals. If you brought some of these shriveled leftovers for lunch, kids would say, "There's pork in that cocoon?" The closest thing might be kreplach, but how many kids know what that is?

Chow Mein - For some reason, it's okay to mix up leftovers when you have Chinese food. This is probably because almost anything can go with chow mein. Fried chicken, tofu, and vegetables fit right in, and the noodles work cold, too.

Fruit - The only meeting place between lunchboxes of all people. It's almost like the universal languages of sports and old TV sitcoms.

Zhongzi - While everyone else pulls PBJs out of high-tech Ziploc bags, we unwrap sticky rice out of a gigantic bamboo leaf, which only calls more attention to the gnarly core of chestnuts, shriveled mushrooms, lop cheong (Chinese sausage), and salty egg yolks. "Do you eat the outside, too?"

Various Soups - Hot and sour, egg drop, or wintermelon soup sometimes gets packed in the Thermos! Unlike what most non-Asian kids got–alphabet or chicken-noodle–Chinese soups never come from cans.



Hong Kong Phooey

After the rise of Bruce Lee and the wave of martial-arts movies that followed, Hanna Barbera could have followed up the Chan Clan with the ultimate Asian-American hero. Instead, they chose a talking mutt. *Hong Kong Phooey* ran for 16 episodes from 1974 through 1976. Working undercover as a janitor in a police station, Penry would hear about a problem, jump into a filing cabinet, and emerge as a masked hero who would take off in his Phooeymobile. Voiced by jazzman Scatman Crothers, the canine would bring out his Hong Kong Phooey chop that he learned from a kung-fu book that he somehow carries in his gi. Although there are too many unanswered questions for the show to make sense, the cartoon was one of the many reasons why everyone thought Asian kids could know martial arts and be buffoons at the same time. There have been talks to make a movie that could only end up as a CG disaster like Ang Lee's *The Incredible Hulk*.

Lunchtime Stories

I remember the first time my dad packed me a Vietnamese pork chop. It was so embarrassing, I cried. They never packed me a pork chop again. But I recall having spring rolls with peanut sauce, cold egg rolls, Vietnamese sandwiches, soy bean milk, coconut juice, and banh chung (glutinous rice, pork meat, and green-bean paste wrapped in a square of bamboo leaves).
Ming Tran

Futomaki and that roll with spinach and whatever... Sometimes sushi. The other kids were really jealous. Who wants friggin' peanut butter and jelly for lunch?
Cate Park

I had stinky rice dishes that my classmates were weirded out by.
John Pham

I went to elementary school in the Midwest and my mom would give me rice and leftover Chinese dishes from dinner, like pork chops and onions, beef stew flavored with star anise, scrambled eggs with tomato, stir-fried bean sprouts, shredded chicken and snow peas–stuff like that. I would kill to have lunches like that now, but at the time I was a little kid who wanted to fit into white American society, and my lunches embarrassed me. The other kids at school would ask me questions about my food, and I got so self-conscious that I begged my mom to just buy me bologna sandwiches and chips so they wouldn't bug me and make me feel different.
Wei-En Chang

One day, my mom packed these fried dumplings in my brown bag, and they stunk up the entire cafeteria. The teacher came over and embarrassed me in front of the whole school. Yikes. Trauma.
Stacy Wu

Japanese-American Lunchbox

This lunchbox is a direct descendent of the bento box. Neatly packed with a balance of the four food groups, the meal is based around rice balls.

Fishcake - The trick to opening one of these without a knife is chewing through the plastic–or using the tab. The contents look like a fleshy pink wiener, but it's made out of fish! Inevitably, it inspires wee-wee jokes.

Croquette - "Koroke" is basically a McDonald's hash brown, except it's mashed, breaded, and deep fried. These rule and pretty much get a "pass" from the other kids.

Dried Seaweed - These seasoned seaweed sheets are more like snacks, and always elicit comments like, "Eww, seaweed!"

Green Leaf Thing - For some reason, Japanese moms like this decorative plastic. You don't eat it, and you don't take it back home. You just throw it away. I still don't get it.

Wonton Triangles - Even though it's sort of Chinese, triangle wontons are a Japanese-American favorite–especially at carnivals or parties. Too bad the word "wonton" can never sound cool.

Takuan - The bright yellow pickled daikon is deceptively stinky and more sweet than sour.

Rice Balls - Handmade rice balls could be plain or filled with pickled plum, fish, or other leftovers. Who would have thought they'd ever become trendy?

White Peach - Straight out of the Asian market, this delicate fruit is superior to the more common red delicious apples.

Fruit - Grapes are tasty. This might be the only thing in common with the other kids' lunches.

Yogurt Drink - You can easily down a five-pack of these sweet drinks. They look like bukkake, but luckily no one knows what that is in the lower grades.

Inari - If you call these rice balls wrapped in fried tofu sheets "footballs," it's cool. If you call them inari, you are screwed.

The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan

Basing *The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan* on the "Oriental detective" pulps and movies from the '20s through the '40s, this Hanna Barbera cartoon series oddly did the right thing during the "who cares about Asian Americans" era, and booked a mostly Asian-American cast to play Chinese-American characters. Keye Luke, who played blind Master Po on *Kung Fu,* provided the voice of Charlie Chan. Instead of depicting him as a dickless wonder, H.B. dressed the widowed detective like a pimp and portrayed him as the studly father of ten kids, which perhaps earned him the nickname, "Amazing." Sons Henry and Alan are voiced by Robert Ito, aka Sam from television's *Quincy,* and Brian Tochi, the only Asian-American teenage heartthrob from the '70s and an actor in *Revenge of the Nerds.* The remaining children were played by lesser voice actors, with the exception of mega-star Jodie Foster, who voiced Anne Chan in the second season. From 1972 to 1974, there were 16 episodes in which the sleuths basically did the same thing as *Scooby Doo*'s crew: finding lost gemstones, getting into trouble, and then solving a mystery by the show's end. Also, five of the kids formed a band called the Chan Clan, which rocked '70s bubblegum pop. I wish Asian Americans really did that. The Chan Clan is slated to be reborn in a feature film starring Lucy Liu as Chan's granddaughter.

When my brother and I went to an international school in the Philippines, my mom would pack our lunchboxes with rice balls filled with fish, pork, or dry shredded beef and egg. Other lunches included Spam and egg fried rice, porridge with pickled cucumbers, and egg sandwiches. For drinks, we'd get a Capri Sun or Yakult, and snacks consisted of Granny Goose corn chips or Haw Flakes. I had a lot of American and European classmates, and I was into trading for a PBJ and an apple. Did I take those meals for granted, or what?

Sharon Young

On field-trip days, my mom would make a box lunch for me consisting of omusubi, fried chicken strips coated with panko, strips cut from omelettes made with soy sauce, and dill pickles cut into thin pieces. The thing I remember most is how my mom would try to make it look special. Although she used American Tupperware, she'd organize the food in little compartments in a traditional way–very much like a Japanese bento box. I don't know where she got it, but she'd cut green paper (plastic?) sheets in ways to make it look like blades of grass and place it carefully to give it a nice aesthetic touch. In classic "Bamboo Kid" style (refer to "Go Straight to Hell" by the Clash), I'd drink a Coca-Cola with the meal. For dessert, if I was lucky, I'd have a box of Botan Ame (rice candy), with the little plastic cars. This was before they went cheap and went to stickers. Come to think of it, some American kid probably choked on the thing, and they got sued...

Mitch Mitchell

When I was at Japanese school, everyone brought "ethnic" lunches: little rice balls wrapped in zig-zag nori, pieces of carrot cut in the shape of Sakura flowers, perfectly char-grilled pieces of mackerel or salmon. Everyone but me. My mom would send me off with a spicy chicken sandwich from Jack in the Box and a Slim Jim, sometimes. For this, I was ostracized by the rest of the school. At American elementary school, I didn't take ethnic lunches, but one time, I made the mistake of taking dried squid and smelling up my desk area. The coolest thing at my elementary school was when this Indian girl came with tandoori chicken. We

continued on page 30

Hawaiian Lunchbox

This lunchbox, the heaviest of them all, is a mixture of many Asian foods and a calorie counter's nightmare. It will fill the stomach of tomorrow's sumo wrestler or any big local guy you see walking around.

Spam Musubi - A man, a plan, a can–Spam. The Wonder Meat is not supposed to be sitting on top of a ball of rice unless you're from Hawaii. There, it's the norm, and eating it in a sandwich is freakish.

Used Tofu Container Filled with Rice and Kimchee - If the tub isn't used to make sand castles at the beach, then it's used to store food. Kimchee and fried rice? Yes, it tastes good, and who cares if it stinks up a classroom after lunch?

Chicken Kebob - Usually loaded with sauce, this skewer of chicken or beef looks like poo but tastes great.

Egg Roll - For some reason, egg rolls are acceptable even though they're just a deep-fried mess of meat and vegetables. To little kids, they're the most exotic cuisine from China.

Pork Chop Wrapped in Foil - Pork chops work great for lunch, because they're a fatty-yet-dry meat that you can eat cold. Too bad it looks ridiculous to eat one off the bone like Fido would.

Kim Bap / Futomaki - They are practically the same, and haoles always wonder, "What's in there?" and "Can you eat the seaweed?"

Hawaiian Sun - If this brand were in every 7-11, the world would be a better place. Bringing this to school beats out Coca-Cola any day.

GR TRASH

Kung Fu

From 1972 to 1975, David Carradine starred in this TV series, whose concept was stolen from Bruce Lee. In the tradition of Mickey Rooney in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the white man plays an Asian character. Abandoned as a child, trained at the Shaolin temple, and wanted for murder in China for killing the Emperor's nephew while defending his master, Kwai Chang Caine flees to America, where he deals with hicks and spreads his selfless message of pointless roaming and not having sex. Looking back, this show would have changed the lives of every Asian American if Bruce Lee were the star. Aside from having high-quality martial arts and real philosophy, Bruce would be in TV re-runs, as well as co-star in the 1986 TV special with his son Brandon and make a cameo in the 1992 remake. Even if the show failed miserably, Bruce would still be signing autographs at comic book conventions at the very least.

continued from page 16

were all like, "Oh my god! Red chicken!" She became everyone's best friend after that.
Anne Ishii

I used to rock an old Transformers lunchbox (plastic, not metal). Every now and then, my mom would pack me rice with, well, just about anything. Sometimes corned beef, sometimes lumpia—rice just made it that much better. My aunt was an ESL teacher at my elementary school, so sometimes I'd end up having lunch with her and the other teachers. That was pretty cool. This was in Jersey City, which was already pretty ethnically diverse. The Indian, Korean, and Chinese teachers would bust out food and share it with us. I never remembered the names; I just remember it was good.

Did my food gross out anyone? Not really, it wasn't like I was eating balut, and also anything was better than the crap they served in the cafeteria.
Ryan Castro

I remember opening my lunchbox on my first day of school and finding my favorite lunch: chicken adobo, pancit, and rice. At that point, I was the shit. Every person always asked me if they could have some portion of my lunch, whether it was the adobo, one of the pan de sals, the pancit/pancit canton, apritada, and even the rice (which surprised me). I always washed the food down with freshly squeezed (by my lola, God bless her) calamansi juice, barley tea, or soya milk (my favorite). The thing that I (and other people who mooched off of my well-prepared lunch) really loved was the dessert—whether it was flan, turon, mung bean hopia, baboy (as in the root, not pork), or my personal favorite halo-halo.

The best part about bringing ethnic lunches is that I got to trade with my other Asian friends. I got to taste pho before it was popular, and discovered the wonders of mochi and sushi at an early age. It brought me together with people from other Asian cultures, like finding out siopao is liked by both Chinese and Filipino cultures. To this day, as a senior at San Dimas High School, I have never stopped bringing cultural lunches. I strive to help, aid, learn, and understand all cultures while keeping pride in my own. Sadly, many Filipinos do not share my enthusiasm—at least around here—wishing they were white and showing no pride in being Filipino or Asian or becoming a racist Filipino-nationalist bigot.
Bryan Ness Tamayao

Living in Nashville sucked balls when I was growing up. Once, I took rice wrapped with seaweed, and everyone said I was eating leeches! I took bulgogi, and they said I was eating poop. Kids can be so cruel. I conformed and gave in to purchasing school lunches—pizza and fries every day—which made me gain a whole lotta weight. Thanks, Nashville, for making me a husky kid.
Christina Kim

Growing up on Kauai, we could either bring lunch or buy a bento/box lunch for field trips. Bentos were ordered from a local plate-lunch place, and cost about $5. Of course, they came with a can of a Hawaiian Sun passion-orange juice or guava nectar. Usually, the options were teriyaki beef, chicken katsu, or sometimes fried mahi mahi. The lunches were presented on a disposable plastic tray with little compartments for all the accoutrements: sticky white rice upon which the meat lay, pickled cabbage salad (namasu) or macaroni salad, daikon, fish cake (kamaboko), fried Spam or a fried corn-beef hash patty (my personal favorite), and that weird jagged faux grass stuff for decoration. I don't think we were ever offered forks; it was chopsticks, a napkin, and a packet of "shoyu" held to the box with a rubber band. I always looked forward to this lunch, as I'm sure most of the kids did. It was fun having our own little sampler platters of salty goodness. Looking back, that was a lot of food for a 5th grader but, man, was it delicious!
Mylani Demas

As a kid, I took all kinds of crazy shit to school in my lunch. I was obsessed with Asian culture, and would take chopsticks on the days that I got to eat the school food so I could eat things like Jell-O and fish sticks with them. Maybe this doesn't seem so odd, but I'm a white girl who grew up in *very* white rural Pennsylvania. Thankfully, my parents let me get away with it. Besides the chopsticks, I would take other weird foods to school: haluski and kapusta (noodles and cabbage); pirogi (potato dumplings filled with mashed potatoes and cheese); halupki (cabbage rolls stuffed with ground meat and rice and covered in tomatoes and sauerkraut); bagel halves with butter and pepperoni slices; lettuce, cheese, and mustard sandwiches; peanut butter and honey sandwiches; and these crazy popcorn balls that my mom would make (she would dye them with food coloring, so it looked like I was chowing on some kind of nuclear snowball). I think they even tried to put kieska (blood sausage) in my lunch once, but that's where I drew the line.

Yeah, my ability to eat anything (except what other kids ate) pretty much grossed out everyone around me. Matter of fact, some of the other kinds had a rhyme for me: "Heather Feather tells the weather and eats leather, that's Heather..." I guess that pretty much sums it up. Thanks for making me relive my painful childhood. I'm gonna go suck down a sea cucumber now and follow it up with a durian.
Heather Yurko

I'm not Asian, so I didn't have cool things like rice noodles. But for some odd reason, my mom packed a random Asian lunch for me. That bitter green stuff with shrimp didn't gross out my friends, but it grossed me out. She'd give me that, crackers, and an '80s version of Yan Yan.
Kristina Santiago

I still remember when I started my job in the hospital, the "dinosaurs" (the ones who have been at work for some 20 or 50 odd years, and feel that they own the hospital) were heckling me about my lunch. They would ask me what kind of meat I was eating, and one of them even suggested it must be roadkill—what he drove over on the way to work. Just to gross them out, I would either meow or bark.
Valter Guevarra

I went to Lum Elementary in Alameda, where I remember trading homemade chocolate-chip cookies for a stack of Haw Flakes. That was my favorite. I liked the packaging and it seemed like eating some kind of money.
Gioia Fonda

Lesson 3: Lowbrow Art

Understanding Goal 1

Question: What makes something art?

Statement: Students analyze how *Giant Robot* is an intersection between highbrow and lowbrow art forms. Students evaluate the connections between mass-produced art, technology and art, and the democratization of art through an expanding ability to share one's work globally.

Associated Performance(s) of Understanding:

A. (Initial exploration): Students survey the range of art forms in *Giant Robot*, define and make value judgments on what appears to be low brow art and what appears to be high brow art. (Working definitions of lowbrow art, highbrow art)
B. (Guided discovery): Students make conclusions on how artists are cultural producers.
C. (Culminating): Students understand that they are drivers of culture through the array of concepts, ideas, values and material goods that they consume.

Materials:

- Images from *Giant Robot*
  - *Head Space Darth*, Luke Chueh
  - *Ode to California*, Kozyndan*
  - *Untitled, 2012–2014*, detail, Deth P. Sun
  - Three details from *Five Movements for Little Guys 2014*, Rob Sato
  - *May*, Shizu Saldamando
  - *Circadian Garden*, Amy Sol
  - *Bird Flu*, detail, David Choe
  - Objects from the collection of Eric Nakamura
- See, Think, Wonder Protocol
- "8 Creative Strategies," powerpoint by Dr. Julia Marshall*
- Copies of the article "Shooting Gallery," *Giant Robot* Issue #41, 2006
- Copies of the article "Chueh's Life, " *Giant Robot* Issue #68, 2010
- Oakland Local article on "lowbrow art"
- Craft paper: 7in x 36in strips of craft paper for accordion journals
- Butcher paper
- Markers

Anticipatory Set:

1. View the 9 images of the artworks from the *SuperAwesome: Art and Giant Robot* exhibition. Notice some images are details or smaller parts of larger artworks.
2. Introduce one image at a time.
3. Have students use the following protocol to examine the images:
    - See, Think, Wonder

Lesson: Students will critique contemporary artworks the exhibition asking the question, "What makes something art?"

1. Introduce the creative strategies that artists use.
2. Show the images again. As you introduce each image and artist, have students discuss in groups if an image shows one of the creative strategies and how.
3. Place butcher paper at each table group and have students write the question, "What makes something art?"
4. Allow students to discuss their thoughts on this, encouraging them to write down all thoughts (half formed to fully formed thoughts) on the butcher paper.
5. Introduce the idea of lowbrow art. Have students read and respond to the Oakland Local article and "Chueh's Life."
6. Compare and contrast lowbrow and highbrow art using a Venn diagram.
7. Returning to the butcher paper, have students code ideas that lean towards lowbrow art using cool colors.
8. Using warm colors, have students code ideas that lean towards highbrow art.
9. In dyads, allow students to view the thinking of other groups and respond to the comments by adding additional thinking using a Post-it note.
10. Class discussion: What demarcates lowbrow art? What are the markers of lowbrow art? What are your feelings about lowbrow art? What demarcates highbrow art? Why would the fine art world alienate lowbrow artists? What is the role of museums in the debate between lowbrow and highbrow art?

Ongoing Assessment:
Hand out 7 in. x 36 in. strips of craft paper. Have students create a fold every five inches to make an accordion journal.

Using the accordion journal, have students respond to the original questions:

1) What makes something art?
2) How do *Giant Robot* artists use the creative strategies?

* Available at museumca.org under Educator Resources.

Head Space Darth, Luke Chueh.

Ode to California, kozyndan.

Untitled, 2012–2014, detail, Deth P. Sun

Five Movements for Little Guys 2014, detail 1, Rob Sato

Five Movements for Little Guys 2014, detail 2, Rob Sato

Five Movements for Little Guys 2014, detail 3, Rob Sato

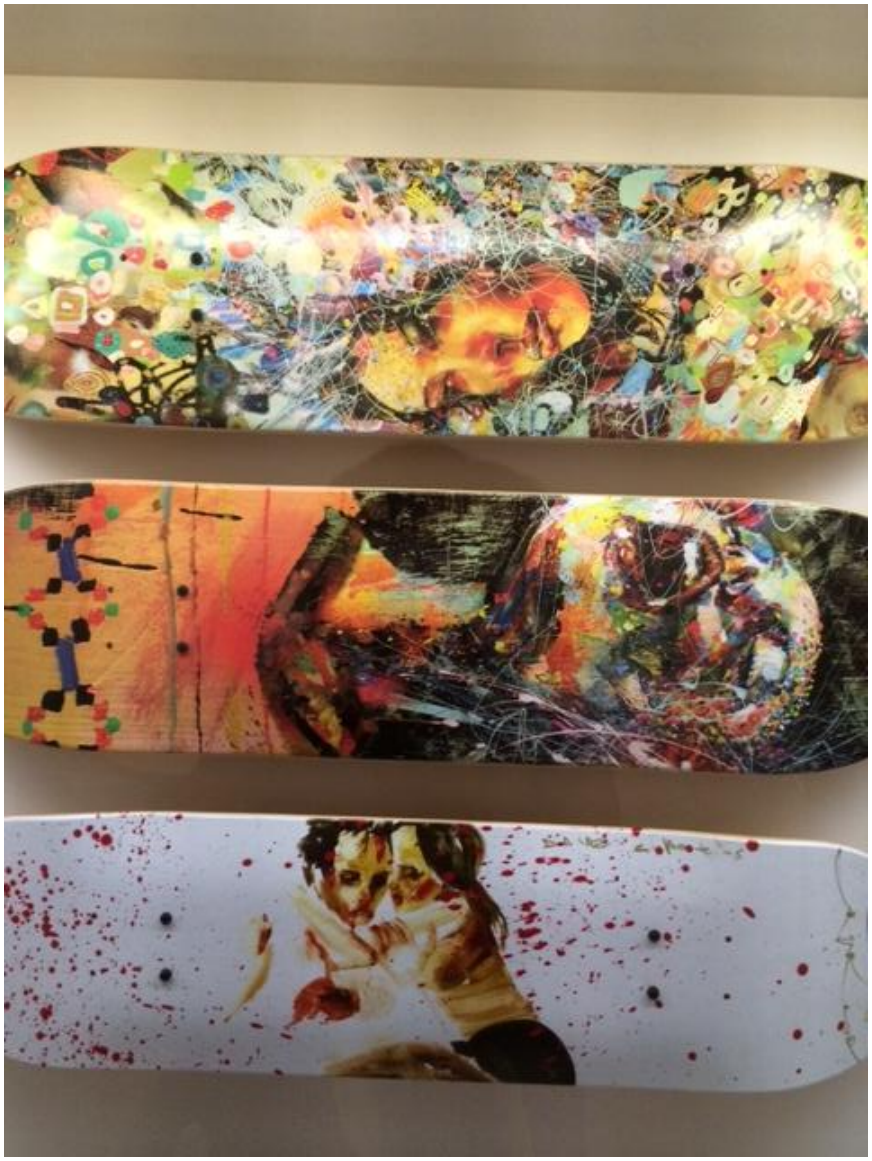
May, Shizu Saldamando

Circadian Garden, Amy Sol

Bird Flu, detail, David Choe

Objects from the collection of Erik Nakamura – robots

Objects from the collection of Erik Nakamura – skateboards



See, Think, Wonder

See, Think, Wonder developed by Harvard educators, is a routine for exploring works of art and other interesting things. Although the technique was developed to use with K–12 students, this approach empowers all students to exercise *critical thinking skills* to make sense of an image. It is always useful and interesting to discover the background information about a work, but some of the potential meaning of a work lies within our grasp. The Harvard approach encourages people to trust their own eyes, their personal knowledge and life experience, and their curiosity when pondering an interesting thing.

- **Seeing** is the first step. Take time to pay attention to what is visible to the eye and make an inventory of what you see. This step sounds obvious, perhaps, but in our fast-paced, over-stimulated environments, it is very easy to miss something obvious. This step reminds us that we have to make time to look before we can expect to understand and make meaning of what we see.
    - I see a red star.

- **Thinking** is the next step. Thinking means making sense of what we see based on reason, analysis, and inferences.
    - The colors used here, make me think that it's a polluted place.

- **Wondering** taps into the imaginative aspect of thinking. Great art work generally stirs the imagination and further questioning.
    - I wonder what's behind the machinery.

For more information, see Project Zero's page on Visual Thinking.

Shooting Gallery

words | **Eric Nakamura**
pics | **Ray Potes**

Taking photos since he was 16, Ray Potes has applied years of photography and zine-making skills to publish *Hamburger Eyes*. Magazines featuring camera work traditionally focus on high art, famous photographers, or the never-ending technical aspects of the craft. *Hamburger Eyes* turns that world upside down and celebrates the portfolios of rookie, indie, and up-and-coming camera addicts, many of whom can't get a break anywhere else. You may see the gore of a bloody street fight, grime on the set of a porno shoot, or simple, sparkling nature. The idea isn't f/stop, focus, or shutter speed; it's heart, guts, and vision.

Stepping into the San Francisco Mission District apartment/office of Ray and roommate/fellow *Burger* editor Stefan Simikich, you'll see photos and work-related paraphernalia everywhere. Their living space is aptly named "Brotannical Gardens" that lies in "Outer Gnarlem." In a tight run of a few thousand copies, this black-and-white publication serves as a strong backbone for the future of unpretentious photography.

GR: How did you choose photography as the main focus of the zine?
RP: I just got tired of writing and I was psyched on shooting photos. I was thinking about this the other day. When I moved to Hawaii, I started shooting a lot of photos to send to my friends back on the Mainland. It was a great way to communicate what I was doing in Hawaii, and they'd send me photos of what they were doing in California.

GR: I feel like there's this whole photojournalist-type of scene going on. Your stuff is pretty street. Do you feel like you are a part of that?
RP: I do see that happening a lot, and I think it's awesome. But I think it's just because of so much mainstream media perfect-ness showing you colors and things. I think that all this new stuff coming out is like backlash.

GR: A publication like yours stresses the indie side of photography.
RP: I think it's part of that aesthetic. A lot of people who have photos in our magazine love photography and just don't know where to put their photos. They have good stuff that I think should be out there, so I help them.

GR: Was getting work out there a problem for you?
RP: Definitely. When I was living in Hawaii a couple years ago, I was really pushing to be a photographer. I had cool business cards. I had a cool portfolio. I was going to different magazines and newspapers, sending a lot of my stuff out and trying to get work, but nobody was doing anything with it. At the same time, I was making *Hamburger Eyes* and people were feeling that. That was completely different from what I was trying to get paid to do. I feel pretty fortunate that I can keep that going.

GR: Was your style too rough or raw?
RP: I think it was just too random. I had a lot of photos of my friends and my block—a lot of photos of stuff I just find or see around. I didn't know if there was a place for that in regular magazines or publications. But obviously there is because I put the photos out myself. All these people have similar styles and tastes, so we have been able to keep the magazine going.

GR: What do you look for in submitted photos?
RP: This question keeps getting asked, and I don't know how to answer it. If we are doing a feature story or a portfolio or something, we'll do those first. But as far as mixing photos, I usually just start with a cover and keep going until I reach the end. I have a big pool of photos, and whatever jumps out I'll use as the next photo.

GR: Some people who buy *Hamburger Eyes* are real straightlace. They're like, "I want to show my friends this zine because they're photographers. They can't get their work anywhere, but this is also how you can do it."
RP: Even if the photos suck, people appreciate our effort. Zines are so personal, and I think that is what makes them powerful.

GR: What do you say to people who say, "I could've taken that picture, made a print, and done it myself." They don't say that about other art, but with photos they do.
RP: That's just something somebody's always going to say. It doesn't even bug me. It just means that they don't understand what we are trying to do. I don't have to explain myself to them. They just have to start taking photos to find out for themselves. If I had the chance to say something, I would say, "Okay, be better than me." You know what I mean?

GR: When you shoot something, is it like a blog or diary entry?
RP: It's all personal, but when I'm shooting I don't really think about what I'm going to do with the photos. I think it messes up a lot of people when they are shooting to do something with it. When it comes time to look at, edit, and sequence photos, whatever pops out, pops out. At this age or at this stage of the game, you should just shoot like crazy. Maybe when I'm 60 or 70, I'll start thinking about the importance of stuff, but for now I'm just going to keep shooting.

GR: If you go out to a bar or anywhere, you bring your camera, right?
RP: I always have a camera on me. Sometimes I shoot three rolls. Sometimes I don't shoot at all. It goes in spurts. I might not shoot anything for a week or two, but I might get a lot the week after that.

GR: Are you a manual camera guy?
RP: I have a semi-automatic camera. I use my Nikon 8008. It's got some minimal automatic stuff on it, but I still use it.

GR: What else do you use?
RP: I have a Yashica T4 for whatever. That's always on me if I don't have my other camera on me. I like the Nikon F5.

GR: What's that for?
RP: I used to use it for skateboarding pictures. Then I started getting all those weird jobs, like headshots and soccer and little league team photos. I used to work for *Transworld*

Skateboarding Magazine for like four years, too. I didn't shoot that much then because I was a bit intimidated by everyone I was working with. I worked at the darkroom there, processing all their black-and-white stuff. I was basically their personal one-hour photo lab. That's how I learned how to print really well and really fast, along with different styles of printing, like super contrast and stuff. I got to learn and experiment a lot, which was awesome.

GR: Is technique really important to you, or would you rather see a 12-year-old troublemaker just shoot away?
RP: Half the guys spend a lot of time in the darkroom, a lot of money on their gear and film, and a lot of energy on processing. Some of these other guys are just handing me stuff they didn't spend a lot of time on, but they lead these crazy lives and get inside crazy situations. I think it's a little bit of both, and I appreciate both sides. For my stuff, I like to be in the darkroom and print all nice. But there are guys who email me their photos. I think that's fine, too.

GR: Do you worry about a photo being good specifically because of shock value versus it being well composed? It seems like your magazine straddles that.
RP: I feel like we're teetering sometimes. When it goes one way, I try to balance it out the other way. Like, I'm trying to make the next issue kind of calm because the last few issues have been kind of nuts. But really, it's just whatever we get, you know? I'm pretty into not censoring or judging our photographers. It's all about appreciating what they do. Someone might randomly send me a photo of a run-over dog, versus the photographer who only shoots photos of run-over dogs. He's way into it, and that's what he does. I appreciate that.

GR: So you are more concerned with a body of work than a lucky shot.
RP: Yeah, definitely. A few issues ago, we'd just run whatever. Now that we're developing our nice little crew of photographers, it has become important to me.

GR: How much of the shock-value work do you really love and value?
RP: I really want to see it, but in the end, as an editor, I have to have a different viewpoint. I don't really think, "This is a shocking photo, so I'm going to put it in here." My friend went to Guatemala and saw some crazy stuff. I gave him eight pages for whatever he wanted, which happened to include two dead bodies and a girl with stitches in her face. That's just the life people are living down there. Boogie, too. He's from Serbia but lives in Brooklyn now. He gets into these crazy situations and loves shooting photos. I'm like, "Okay, Boogie. I'll give you eight pages." Turns out, he wants to do something on the projects with guns, tons of drugs, etc. I'm like, "My mom isn't going to be happy when she sees this," but that's what he wants to show, and I'm going to let him show it. It's not like, "Oh, I'm going to run this photo because Uzis are crazy!"

GR: Do you think it's harder then to take a photo that doesn't have a gun, dead people, stitches, or blood? Isn't it hard to compete against that crazy shit?
RP: Not really. It's about personal taste, too. I don't shoot that crazy stuff. My stuff's pretty mellow. It comes off in a certain way because I have a certain aesthetic or style. There's one guy who just shoots *National Geographic* landscape views—I would love to be him one day, you know? If your stuff is good, then it's good.

GR: Are there limitations to stuff that you shoot? Do you have self-ethical guidelines?
RP: Kind of. I have a hard time with other people's blood and stuff. I saw this old man lying at

the bottom of the stairs at the BART station. His head was all bloody, and I couldn't take a photo. Other guys would jump right into that. And we show fight photos in our magazine. I don't really get photos of that stuff. I'll be there watching, running, or getting out of the way, but not shooting.

GR: Are you worried that shock takes away from the photography itself? Like, the actual craft?
RP: Sometimes, I think of it as distracting. That one issue, we had Guatemala and crazy behind-the-scenes photos of a porno set. Those were smaller features. The big feature was underwater photos. This dude took his underwater camera to in Hawaii. We had photos of a shark and a giant manta ray, but nobody said anything about those epic photos. They only remembered the crazy porno and dead body photos.

GR: Are you interested in educating people about photography?
RP: It's interesting to me how some photos weigh more than others. I'm not trying to take responsibility for that, though. If that's what they want to remember from a particular issue, then they can have it. I guess I'm not trying to educate anybody. I'm just putting out what I'm into.

GR: So what's the craziest photo you've ever seen?
RP: I don't know. I see them all the time. The craziest photo I've seen today is this image of two kids. One has a terrible 50 Cent G-Unit tattoo. Another crazy photo was by Vic, who's in Guatemala again. He got prison photos there. The inmates have prison tattoos all over their bodies and heads.

GR: What about the prettiest photo?
RP: I've got these cool winter photos. Actually, one of the coolest photos I got today was a nighttime shot of a full moon out of an airplane window. It was pretty epic. It was sharp and came out awesome.

GR: Nastiest pictures?
RP: Behind the scenes at the porno shoot was pretty bad. There were nastier ones that we didn't run.

GR: What happened in those?
RP: [laughs] Let's just say they are bad.

Chueh's Life

words and portraits by **Eric Nakamura**
art courtesy of **Luke Chueh**

I create this thing that I call my "color wheel of doom."

Right:
Extension
(2007)

Since he started showing art in 2003, Luke Chueh has gone from painting small, simple portraits of single characters to making large, elaborate compositions. His signature style employs an instantly recognizable gradation background, and is often used as online avatars by fans. (Listeners of Fall Out Boy saw his art on the cover of the band's 2008 album, *Folie á Deux*.) With little pretension of being a popular or even "lowbrow" artist, the always-smiling 37-year-old resident of Monterey Park, CA, accepts whatever label people put on his work, and grows with it. As a result, he has earned a worldwide following of fans and collectors.

GR: So tell me how you started making art.
LC: I have been making art all my life, but I started doing it professionally in 2003 when I moved to Los Angeles and got involved in the underground art scene, Cannibal Flower art shows, and stuff. Eventually I developed a large-enough portfolio of work to put up a website, get the attention of galleries, and start showing through them. I've slowly worked my way up through the ranks.

Chueh rhymes with true.

GR: I remember seeing your work in 2003 or 2004, and thinking that there were echoes of Yoshitomo Nara in it. Was he an influence?
LC: Oh, absolutely. Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara–all those guys were incredibly influential on my work. I was especially inspired by Nara's sense of minimalism. I am self-taught, so there is no way I would be able to paint like Mark Ryden or Todd Schorr, and handle that kind of detail and environment. To see Nara do it with this great comic book kind of flair but with a fine arts sensibility was very inspirational to me.

GR: But how did you know what to do? You didn't go to art school, did you?
LC: No, I didn't go to art school, although I have this personal drive to buy as many history books and rent as many art history DVDs as I can. But I did study graphic design at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and I think my designer education has been influential on my painterly, artistic style. One of the things that was hammered into me was the idea that when you're designing advertisements you basically have a window of 2.3 seconds to sell your idea to the audience before they pass it up. And so a lot of my paintings have these sharp narratives that you should be able to catch while you're making your way through a group show. The idea of selling an idea in 2.3 seconds permeates my work, and has definitely worked for me.

GR: Five or six years ago, it seemed like anyone could be an artist. Now it's 2010, and not many have made it without having an art school background. It's like, wow, education actually matters, yet you're one of the very few to make it.
LC: I definitely try to educate myself as much as possible about what's going on out there as well as outside of the genre. You know, I rent those how-to-paint DVDs from Netflix all the time. Hopefully, I'll get something out of it because there's a lot going on and so many possibilities out there. If I don't open myself up to them then I'm just screwing myself.

I would hope that even artists who went to art school would try to keep that education process going. I mean, they're not going to teach you

Honey Bear (2007)

everything that you can possibly do in five years. You'd be a fool to think you got everything you need.

GR: I know you paint a lot of bears and rabbits. Or is it bears and cats?
LC: I paint cats once in a while, but mostly bears and rabbits.

GR: A lot of blood is part of a narrative, too. Your art didn't have that in the beginning, did it?
LC: No, it didn't, and at first I was kind of nervous because I couldn't imagine most people would want to put images of gory, bloody, mutilated characters on their walls. But I've been putting these kind of cute characters into horrific scenarios and taking it to that level, and I'm pleased that people have been able to accept and embrace it.

GR: Gloomy Bear is another example, right?
LC: Gloomy Bear was definitely a big influence on me. I love the story of the boy finding the little bear in a box, growing up with it, and then the tables turning, followed by the mauling. You always hurt the ones you love.

GR: From early on, a lot of people have used your art as Internet avatars. I think that sort of usage spreads out a lot further than you ever intended. How did it happen?
LC: I actually credit that as being instrumental to my success. I'm very grateful for people who have been able to find some sort of personal attachment to my work and then use it for their blogs or MySpace or Facebook pages. Then they go so far as to give me credit. As long as they're not making money off of me, then they can be my guest.

GR: How did that start though? Did you put the image out there so people could download it and use it an icon? Or did people just start doing it?
LK: I think they just grabbed it from my website. And even though I put a lock on my images, people have still been able to find a way around it. But I have no problem with that, and it has really worked out for me in the end.

I have been bootlegged by aspiring artists, too, and that's fine. I haven't really seen any bootlegs that make me go, "Wow, that guy is a much better painter than I am," and makes me feel small. Actually, I'm flattered by all these activities and the exposure. Any publicity is good publicity.

GR: So how did you turn the corner?
LC: After talking to a couple of galleries, I realized that the cold-call-and-portfolio thing does not work, so I have been kind of just playing it slow. I do let certain galleries know that I'm interested in showing my work with them, and kind of hope that my career and whatever kind of publicity that I'm able to garner will attract the attention of next-level galleries. They go to my website and contact me online. That's basically how I get in.

GR: I feel like there was a point where things just sped up for you. It's like you had this great exponential leap in the last year or so.
LC: The work evolved a little, and I think that the toys definitely played an important role in my general publicity. The toy thing has definitely been helpful for my career, but I definitely use the format warily because I don't want to be a toy artist.

GR: They're out there.
LC: They're out there and, don't get me wrong, I don't think there's anything wrong with them. But I'm much more interested in painting, and using the toys as a vehicle to help promote that. Recently, I had the release of the black-and-white

You know, I rent those how-to-paint DVDs from Netflix all the time.

rabbit toy, and we had people camping out at nine o'clock the night before. It was nuts. I don't think I will ever get those kind of lines for an art show.

GR: That's pretty cool. Has there been anything else?
LC: I've also had certain projects like Fall Out Boy's record. The funny thing is, I still haven't heard the album and still don't have a copy of it. I've never listened to their music before in my life. The only reason why I took the project was because their first run was going to be one million, and how could I dismiss the opportunity to have one million copies of my art distributed around the world?

I had artistic control and didn't have an art director going "We want this and this." Of course, I'm sure the editors wouldn't have been very happy if I had bears vomiting blood or shitting green goo on the cover. I took that and the audience into consideration, and it all worked out.

GR: One thing you don't do, or I haven't seen you do much of, is apparel.
LC: A lot of clothing companies contact me about putting my paintings on clothing, but I feel like that just cheapens the work. I have no problem with creating work strictly for apparel, though. The priority just isn't that high because, as I said about becoming a toy artist, there's also clothing guy.

GR: I think Nara stepped back from products and got back to painting for the same reason.
LC: Once again, they are wonderful tools to help promote the artist. I mean, I still have my old Nara and Murakami shirts but, at the same time, you have to remember what your priority is.

GR: I heard you paint fast. Is that true?
LC: I'm painting faster, but that's only through experience. I like to take a lot of time between steps, step away, and kind of look at a piece to see how it feels and make adjustments if need be. I juggle three or four paintings at the same time.

GR: I notice a lot of your paintings have a gradated background. You've been doing that for a little while.
LC: Yes. Actually, the gradation thing was inspired by Mark Rothko's color fields. In my eyes, one of the more important elements of my work is the color of the background. I create this thing that I call my "color wheel of doom," where I designate each color with a particular kind of scenario or feeling. Blue, obviously, would be depression. Green could suggest pestilence, but it could also suggest wealth. Red would be like blood, lust, or violence. Orange, being the most, from my understanding, popular color of the criminally insane–I kind of associate it with more insane scenarios. Meanwhile, purple and yellow are almost like wild colors, open to whatever. And then I use grays to suggest coldness or sterility. These colors are the foundation of a painting, and then I use a lot of dark-to-light gradation to suggest a sense of depth, direction, and environment.

GR: How often do you paint inanimate objects, like still lifes without a character or figure?
LC: I sketch a lot of inanimate objects to keep myself practicing. One thing I like to talk to other artists about is what kind of techniques they employ. One of the things that a lot of my friends who use oil paint do is take all these photographs of models or themselves or their body parts and incorporate them into their paintings. For certain particular paintings that I've done, I would actually do the same thing or download images from the web as source materials–just trying to expand on my abilities and toolkit. The more you have, the better you can be at communicating your ideas.

I'm open to trying anything. I've been having fun with denatured wood alcohol lately, and the way the alcohol breaks up the pigment into organic, amoeba-like blobs of color.

GR: You've been showing that stuff, too?
LC: It turns up here and there. Obviously, people are familiar with a certain body of work that I do. For a while, I was buying art and I realized that when people buy art–especially when they're new to it–most of them they want something that is typical of that particular artist. That puts the artist in a bit of a situation, because it locks them down into doing the same thing over and over again. That's something that I struggle with.

I've definitely been trying to find opportunities to try different things, but I don't want to divorce myself from what I've built up through the years because that's what people want. We'll see. I'm definitely going to switch things up in a big way.

GR: You mentioned that your art can be taken in by people instantly, and that it's something you struggle with. Is that struggle the actual work or is it having to live with being the "easy-to-get artist guy."
LC: It's definitely personal. I realize what I'm known for and want to grow beyond it. Don't get me wrong; it's a good place to be right now. But, at the same time, when it's no longer a good place to be, you don't want to still be there. I realize I have to keep moving, but the question is, How am I going to evolve? What direction can I go in without destroying what I already have?

But I've got plans. I'm definitely not going to be letting go of my core idea. My characters have always illustrated very emotional narratives. Now I'm trying to pull them away from that and use them as icons, with

Inferno (Ring 9) Sketch: Dante's Satan (2010)

PROJECT BLACK BOOK

NAME
Luke Chueh

OCCUPATION
Painter / Designer

BLOOD TYPE
?

BIRTHPLACE
Philadelphia

RESIDENCE
Monterey Park / Los Angeles

ASIAN ZODIAC
Ox

WESTERN ZODIAC
Pisces

MOVIE/TV SHOW
Requiem for a Dream / Anthony Bourdain No Reservations

BAND/MUSICAL ARTIST
The Flaming Lips, M83, Mogwai, Beck

WEBSITE/BLOG
www.lukechueh.com

T-SHIRT/ARTICLE OF CLOTHING
Black & Brown

FOOD
Yakitori, Din Tai Fung Pork Dumplings, Ramen Not Instant

COLLECTION
Luke Chueh Bootlegs

GAME/HOBBY/SPORT
XBox 360, Zombie Farm

TURNING POINT(S)
Moving to Los Angeles

PROUDEST MOMENT(S)
The night I sold my first two paintings, June 2003.

IF I COULD REDO SOMETHING IN LIFE IT WOULD BE
That's for me to know, and me to know only.

WHY I EXIST
To Help.

more of a contemporary art kind of sensibility. One of the themes I'm going to be working with is communication. In the series, I create the familiar outlines of my characters and fill them however, and experiment with that. We'll see how it goes.

I try to keep an eye on what is going om outside of this entire lowbrow genre. That's one of the things about the lowbrow, pop surrealism scene; it's very incestuous. The artists give the middle finger to the entire contemporary art scene, and I don't think it should be that way. I think that there is a lot of great stuff going on out there that's worth embracing.

GR: You don't hesitate to use the term "lowbrow," but one time you said it half-jokingly, like you were in a lowbrow kind of a show. Do you embrace the label? I know it's somewhat of a bad word for certain artists.

LC: I've grown to accept it. I could go on and on about Robert Williams and the '90s, and how the current crop of artists are very different from that entire hot rod, pin-striping thing. But, at the same time, it's still very illustration-based, and I think that illustration is indeed lowbrow, as opposed to the esoteric, abstract, and insane whatever-the-fuck's-going-on contemporary art. I have a feeling that, at the end of the day, I'm stuck with the lowbrow label, so I might as well come to terms with it.

GR: Is there anything Asian about your art?

LC: Yeah! I grew up reading a lot of manga and watching a lot of anime. Growing up Asian American in Fresno, CA... Let's just say it wasn't easy, and I have found ways of incorporating some of those experiences into my work. Actually, in my last show, I played around with that and did a painting called *Me Play Joke*, which is a panda standing in front of a Coke can, positioned to look like he has just finished urinating in it. I definitely have fun with that.

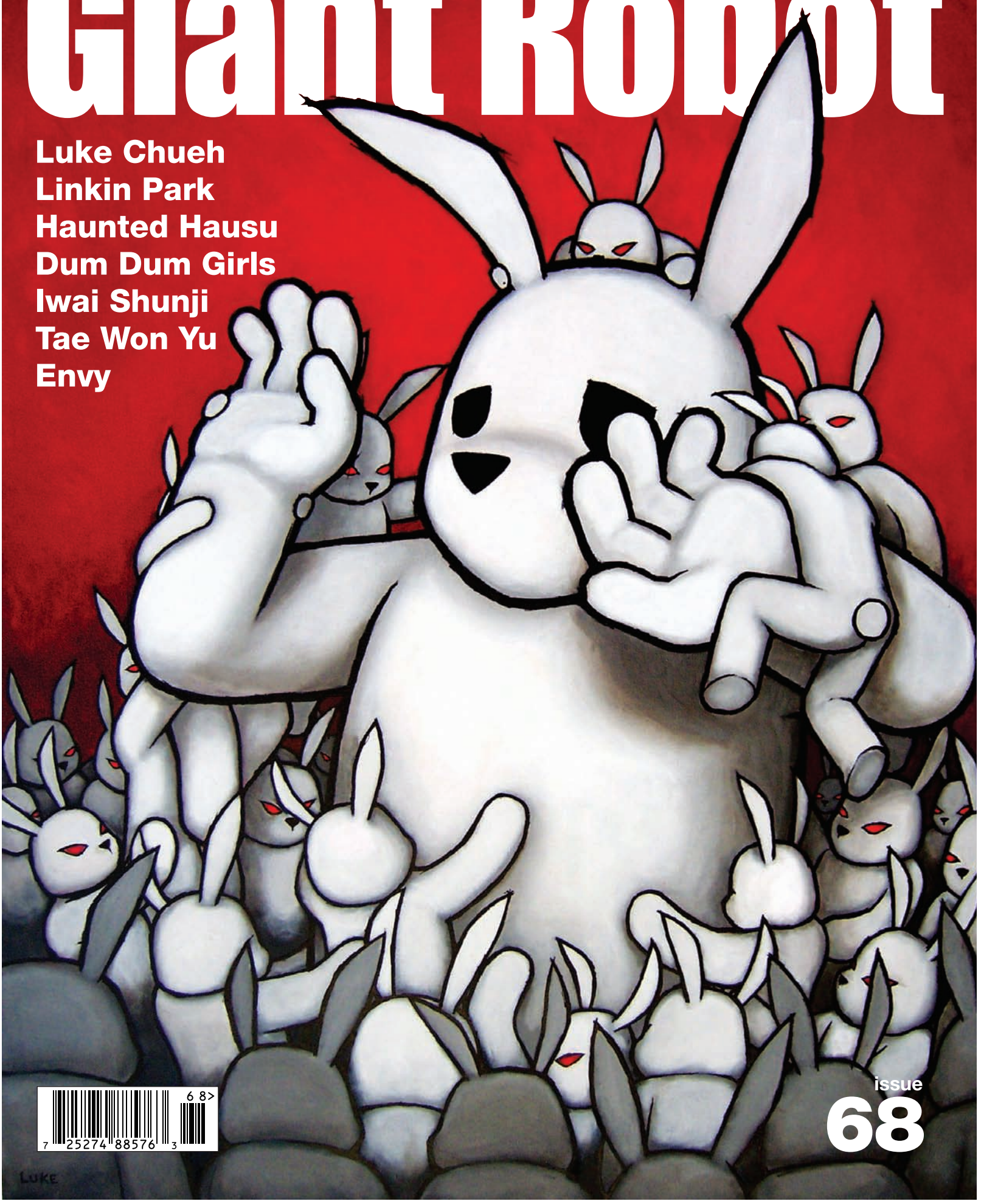
Being Asian American is unique. You have these two worlds that need satisfying: the Asian part, which usually is tied in with your parents and your family, and the American part, which has a lot to do with your social environment and friends. You have to find a way of balancing those two elements and, of course, that's something you explore in your magazine a lot. I find ways of dabbling with it in my work here and there, too.

Life n Times of Mecha Sad Bear (2009)

ASIAN POP CULTURE AND BEYOND DISPLAY THRU SPRING **4.99**/US **5.50**/CDN

Giant Robot

Luke Chueh
Linkin Park
Haunted Hausu
Dum Dum Girls
Iwai Shunji
Tae Won Yu
Envy



6 8>
7 25274 88576 3

issue
68

Lesson 4: Globalized and Mass Produced Art

Understanding Goal 1

Question: What makes something art?

Statement: Students analyze how *Giant Robot* is an intersection between highbrow and lowbrow art forms. Students evaluate the connections between mass-produced art, technology and art, and the democratization of art through an expanding ability to share one's work globally.

Associated Performance(s) of Understanding:

A. (Initial exploration): Students survey the range of art forms in *Giant Robot*, define and make value judgments on what appears to be low brow art and what appears to be high brow art. (Working definitions of lowbrow art, highbrow art)
B. (Guided discovery): Students make conclusions on how artists are cultural producers.
C. (Culminating): Students understand that they are drivers of culture through the array of concepts, ideas, values and material goods that they consume.

Materials:

- Masakatsu Sashie *Giant Robot* quote – included in **Anticipatory Set**
- Copies of the article "Balls of Confusion," *Giant Robot* Issue #59, 2009
- Index cards (one per student)
- 5x5 square of drawing paper
- 5x5 squares of printing paper (low quality is fine)

Anticipatory Set:

Read the following quote from Masakatsu Sashie's interview in *Giant Robot*:

> **GR: A lot of artists are merchandising their work these days. Do you like the fact that artists are making a ton of products?**
> MS: I think an artist making their own products is significant, and I am interested in doing that for two reasons. First, the merchandising and production are additional outlets of expression. Also, they are affordable pieces that a lot of people can enjoy. These are good results, unless the merchandising is abused.

Lesson:

This lesson will need frontloading of the concepts of democracy, technology, and mass production. If students do not have a solid understanding of these ideas, you will need to discuss, offer background information or a short lesson on these ideas in order for this lesson to have a greater impact on student understanding on what positions art to have a global presence and influence on culture.

1. Discussion: Have students write a short (anonymous) response to the following question on an index card: What are the intersections between democracy, technology, and mass-produced art?
2. Collect the index cards, shuffle and redistribute to students. Have students read aloud the card they received.
3. Open the discussion up for comments and emerging thoughts. Collect questions and thoughts visually on chart paper, white board or thinking wall.
4. Allow students to read through the "Balls of Confusion", the Masakatsu Sashie interview in *Giant Robot*.
5. Journal and 10 minute reflection. Based on the discussion and reading of the Masakatsu interview, write a brief reflection on the concepts of mass production, technology, and democracy and how they connect.
6. Create: a) Choose a depiction of popular culture that you are connected to or opposed to. What statement do you want to make about this idea? (E.g. If you choose Minecraft, what is it about the game that you want others to understand?) b) Draft ideas in accordion journals (i.e. Ronald McDonald from Masakatsu Sashie's work).
7. Design a simple image that represents the concept/item of pop culture you choose on a 5x5 square of drawing paper.
8. Mass produce: Mass produce your image by hand, photocopy or digitally, and figure out a way to share your work. Hand out, share on social media, paste in public areas, etc. It's beneficial to discuss with a partner the best strategy for sharing work.

Ongoing Assessment:

In small groups, have students evaluate their attempts to share mass produced work. Have students lay their images together in a quilt-like fashion.

1) Describe the thinking behind the image that was created.
2) Discuss how it felt to mass-produce a piece of artwork. What issues came up? Were problems solved?
3) Was technology used and how? Why and how did technology support the art making/production?
4) Did you create art? Did it still feel like art when your image was mass-produced? What changes did you experience?
5) How are your images and ideas connected to democracy? How does art support democracy?

Balls of Confusion

words and portrait | **Eric Nakamura** art | **Courtesy of Masakatsu Sashie**

In 2006, I served as a scout judge at Takashi Murakami's GEISAI art festival in Tokyo. The job entailed walking down every aisle to find the cream of over 1,000 exhibitors. One of my first stops was at a booth manned by the fashionable, quiet, and thin Masakatsu Sashie. He stood next to a couple of large paintings that caught my eye instantly with globe-like shapes embodying various elements of old and new popular culture from Japan. I made note of the artist and, by the end of my rounds, it was evident that he was among the best in show. He didn't win the grand prize but he did receive impressive marks from more than a few judges.

Fast-forward a few years, and the Kanazawa College of Art graduate has gone from being a mellow participant at art fairs to showing in exhibitions across the Pacific Ocean, including at the Giant Robot galleries and having major gallery representation at art fairs around the world. The Kanazawa resident's fans are mostly Americans who find him via word of mouth and the Internet, but the Japanese audience is slowly coming around.

GR: Why do you use spheres in your work?
MS: I don't use spheres in all of my work. But as for that particular series, I've always enjoyed painting spheres, and I think they affect people. I think the shape is ideal for composition and effective for symbolizing the world.

GR: How did you arrive at the shape?
MS: It's the shape of the Earth, and the items on the spheres usually fit in a theme.

GR: I think you mentioned that the themes come from your memories.

Asphalt (detail), 2008
Oil on canvas
44.1" x 76.4"

Toadstools, 2005
Oil on canvas
63.8" x 51.3"

My dream in childhood was to be an oil painter.

GR: Not all of my works are from my memories and their purpose isn't just to express my memories. However, I think that adding from my experience makes the art more realistic.

GR: I recall you mentioning that the sphere means one thing, but the world below it means another. Can you explain that?
MS: Because the theme is different in each work, it is not possible to generalize. But roughly speaking, the soil invents the world of the sphere.

GR: I think the subject matter of your works has transitioned from dark and broken-down to more colorful and alive. Can you talk about that?
MS: I brightened the colors because I didn't want the theme to seem so heavy. But I didn't change the actual subjects. If they seem different, it might be psychological.

GR: Will you ever use acrylics? Why is oil your favorite medium?
MS: I use acrylics when I feel it's necessary, but I feel oil is a better material in terms of coverage, color development, and drying

Peacemaker, 2008
Oil on canvas
18" x 15"

I think the shape is ideal for composition and effective for symbolizing the world.

time. And my dream in childhood was to be an oil painter.

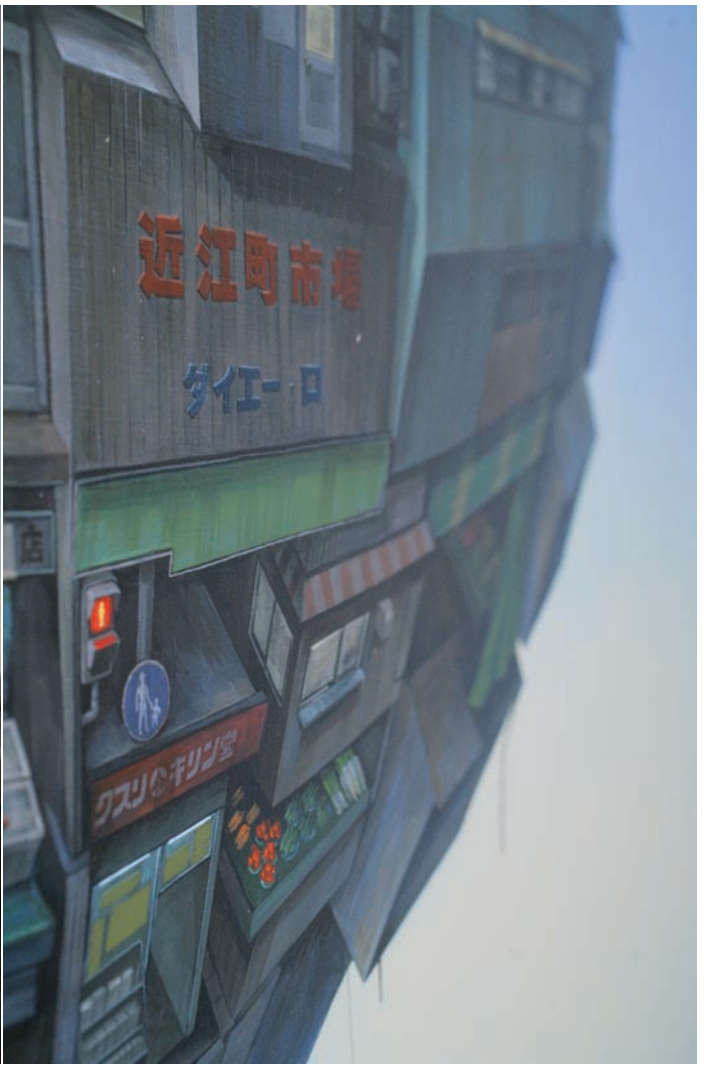
GR: Not many young artists in the United States use oils. Is Japan teaching the old-fashioned style?
MS: I think it's just because I studied oil painting.

GR: How important was your experience at art school?
MS: I don't know if it was important or not. It was very academic, and I don't remember learning much from professors. Only the process of preparing oil is still helpful now.

GR: Can you talk about the place of your work in the Japanese art world? The subject matter is nostalgic, yet it seems that most of your audience aren't Japanese!
MS: I'm almost unknown, I don't have much media exposure, and the Japanese art world is not as quick to react as its overseas counterparts. Not many people have an interest in art in Japan to begin with. But my number of collectors has surely increased, even though it is not a lot.

GR: Do you think the art world has changed in Japan? Galleries that didn't care about your work are now interested in it.
MS: Certainly. It seems like Japanese galleries have been attending art school graduation exhibitions and making contracts with students. Also there has been a movement of new galleries opening and existing galleries expanding for the past couple of years. Maybe it's due to the expansion of the market related to the sharp growth of the Chinese economy. It's true that the chances for young artists to be introduced overseas have improved, and there are more collectors and there are also more offers from galleries, but sometimes I feel like they think my work is a bargain or a way to make money. So it's important not only to make artwork, but to know how to manage it as well.

GR: What do you think of the changes in the current art market?
MS: It seems like the art market is trying to appeal to the world via pop culture and otaku subculture. Because it's so commercial, I'm afraid the quality of art is declining and is of lower quality. I think the next generation of artists will react to that.



Diorama, 2008
Oil on canvas
76.4" x 63.8"

Electric Mushroom, 2008
Oil on canvas
35.8" x 28.6"

GR: What's the most expensive piece you've sold so far? And where is it today?
MS: *Diorama*, which I painted in early 2008. I don't know who bought it, but maybe the gallery does.

GR: A lot of artists are merchandising their work these days. Do you like the fact that artists are making a ton of products?
MS: I think artists making their own products is significant, and I am interested in doing that for two reasons. First, the merchandising and production are additional outlets of expression. Also, they are affordable pieces that a lot of people can enjoy. These are good results, unless the merchandising is abused.

GR: What products have you made?
MS: I sold a resin model kit at a solo exhibition last year.

GR: Can you explain the relationship of Asian popular culture and your work?
MS: I like animation, comics, and toys. It's true that these things influenced me, but I am even more interested in their cultural foundation. Pop culture is a good barometer to measure the social situation of the people. If there's one thing that influenced me, it's *Mobile Suit Gundam*. I feel that the early '80s animation strongly expresses the theory of human evolution and the situation of the period.

National, 2008
Oil on canvas
44.1" x 65.7"

Next Stage, 2008
Oil on canvas
35.8" x 28.6"

Pop culture is a good barometer to measure the social situation of the people.

GR: Are there robot designs that you like more than others?
MS: I don't care for particular character designs, but I do like the character Zaku from *Gundam*. There's charm in the battle robot's mass-produced look, curvilinear shape, and unusual weapons.

GR: Takashi Murakami has had a big effect on young artists in Japan. What do you think of him and his work?
MS: It might be impolite that I say this, but I think Takashi Murakami is a clever man. He doesn't just play videogames; he learns how to win from playing them. As for his art, its value speaks for his achievements. And in my opinion, his body of work includes producing work through Hiropon Factory and GEISAI. Since I have taken part in GEISAI, I have taken part in his work.

GR: What's the future of your art? Are you contemplating any new directions?
MS: Of course, I'll do anything when I feel it's necessary. I'd like to make animation and I'm interested in product design, too. But for now, I really need to paint and am really enjoying it.

GR: If you stop painting spheres, what will you do next?
MS: I haven't decided. It'll be whatever shape I want to paint at that time–maybe a robot.

ASIAN POP CULTURE AND BEYOND DISPLAY THRU JUNE 4.99/US 5.50/CDN

Giant Robot

issue 59

KIYOSHI KUROSAWA • DEPARTURES • CHOCOLATE
TOKYO! TALES • SICHUAN SWEAT • SEVENTIES SMUT
CUTE BENTO • MAFIA MAN • MASAKATSU SASHIE

Lesson 5: Transnationality and Art Making

Understanding Goal 2

Question: How do we negotiate our identities given the complex nature of structures and systems in place that inform our individual expressions?

Statement: Students understand that living in a connected world requires understanding the vast expressions of identities that are informed by the multiple nationalities a person can be tied to politically, culturally or through familial association.

Associated Performance(s) of Understanding:

A. (Initial exploration): Students investigate the writings of Eric Nakamura, Adrian Tomine, and David Choe.
B. (Guided discovery): Using the Asian American Lunchbox articles, students recognize the complexities of having a transnational identity.
C. (Culminating): Students create their own lunchbox using the Reformat creative strategy to showcase their home culture and popular cultural influences.

Materials:

- Post-It Notes (approximately 15 per student)
- #2 Pencils
- Markers
- Any size drawing paper larger than 8 ½ x 11.

Anticipatory Set:

1. Watch the video with Eric Nakamura, Founder of *Giant Robot*.
2. Give students three minutes of think time to ponder the following questions: What are you influenced by? (The environment? Your home culture? Movies? Church? History? Music?) How do these references amalgamate to form the identity of you?
3. Using Post-it notes, draw at least 10 references from your life that contribute to your identity at this moment in time

Lesson:

1. Discuss in triads: What is the nature of negotiation? What is negotiation, and how and why do people negotiate? What is negotiation in service to?
2. Referring back to the Post-It Notes, have students identify political structures, cultural structures, family structures, social structures, and other structures that make up a system of influence on the self.
3. Using the following quote discuss the idea of Transnationality (whole group or small groups) and offer 5 minutes to write a quick reflection on the idea of transnationality.

   "Transnationality is more than the act of existing in two or more countries. It is a complex zone where economic resources, citizenship, nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, cultural commodification and education illustrate personal identity. The term "transnational" limits what the act of being transnational really means. It excludes the cultural, spiritual, ancestral, genetic, philosophical and technological experiences that really dominate what it feels like to be a transnational person."
   — Mariah Rankine-Landers

4. Using the Post-Its make a Post-It train. Write the following question on the starting post-it: *Where and how do people of transnational backgrounds have to negotiate their identities?* Each student should come up with one example to add to the train (e.g. hairstyles, foods they eat at school vs. at home, musical tastes, dance moves they learn from their culture vs. dance moves they learn in host or home county). If theirs is previously taken ask them to think with the person who had the same idea as them to come up with a new one.
5. For art teachers who want to go further:
   Thinking back to the structures and systems that inform students personal identities have them create an image using juxtaposition* or layering* to portray how they negotiate their own identities.
   (Medium Neutral Task: Can use drawing, clay, animation, etc.)

** Please refer back to the Creative Strategies ppt by Dr. Julia Marshall. Review with students what these two strategies mean before creating a meaning image that represents who they are.*

Ongoing assessment:

Have students address this question in their accordion journals:

- How do we negotiate our identities given the complex nature of structures and systems in place that inform our individual expressions?

Lesson 6: Items Inform Identity

Understanding Goal 2

Question: How do we negotiate our identities given the complex nature of structures and systems in place that inform our individual expressions?

Statement: Students understand that living in a connected world requires understanding the vast expressions of identities that are informed by the multiple nationalities a person can be tied to politically, culturally or through familial association.

Associated Performance(s) of Understanding:

A. (Initial exploration): Students investigate the writings of Eric Nakamura, Adrian Tomine, and David Choe.
B. (Guided discovery): Using the Asian American Lunchbox articles, students recognize the complexities of having a transnational identity.
C. (Culminating): Students create their own lunchbox using the Reformat creative strategy to showcase their home culture and popular cultural influences.

Materials:

- Small toy or article of clothing from childhood
- Objects from the collection of Eric Nakamura (See Lesson 3)
- Art medium tools (your choice)

Anticipatory Set:

Skateboards, toys, t-shirts. We all have nostalgia for the items we played with as children. These items unconsciously informed our understanding of the cultural context that we are participating in.

Discussion: Facilitator/teacher begins by sharing a personal toy, article of clothing or recreational device they played with as a child. Using the following set of questions share your object with the class. In groups, triads, or whole group have students go through the same set of questions to share their favorite childhood item.

- What is the object?
- How did you get the object?
- Was your desire for this object influenced by others?

- What emotion does this object stir for you? What emotions are tied to this object?
- How does this object represent a part of your identity?

Lesson:

1. Show objects from the collection of Eric Nakamura.
2. Briefly discuss how Eric expresses his identity through the various childhood objects.
3. Create a list: What are the current objects and items you are attached to? List 10–20 items.
4. Expand the list: Include in your list how these items reflect your identity. (Think about each item closely. How does your cell phone represent you? What does it say about you? Does it say that you are a connected, globalized individual? Does it signify your access to goods? What are the contents on your phone? Do you have apps that are mostly games? Would that define you as a gamer?)
5. Choose one item: Draft a sketch of one item from your list that you are most attached to.
6. Hack: Using the draft you created, think about how you can modify this item to represent that you are today. Would you add or take away an image or language? Would you dismantle parts and put in new ones? What must it contain to say something about who you are in this moment? Can you reformat it to be something else entirely? Does it have/need/or serve a new purpose?
7. Finalize: Recreate your modified "hacked" childhood object through the art form of your choice. (Teacher offers ways of representing object: draw, watercolor, clay, wire, animation, 3-D printing, etc.)

Ongoing Assessment:

Peer Review: Have students check for understanding using the following Understanding Goal to anchor the reflection process: How do we negotiate our identities given the complex nature of structures and systems in place that inform our individual expressions?

Lesson 7: Gender Perceptions in Art

Understanding Goal 3

Question: How does contemporary art address our perceptions of gender?

Statement: Students analyze objects from *SuperAwesome: Art and Giant Robot* through a gender lens and develop their own conclusions on how art informs and reflects gender identity.

Associated Performance(s) of Understanding:

A. (Initial exploration): Students consider the gender influences that can be surfaced in the *Giant Robot* selections.
B. (Guided discovery): Students recognize how art influences gender norms.
C. (Culminating): Students redesign/redraw a *Giant Robot* piece to address a perception in gender.

Materials:

- See, Think, Wonder Protocol (See Lesson 3)
- Two sets of images of artwork by the following artists:
    - Luke Chueh (See Lesson 3)
    - Kozyndan (See Lesson 3)
    - Shizu Saldamando (See Lesson 3)
    - Amy Sol (See Lesson 3)
    - James Jean – included in the article "James Jean: Comic Couture," *Giant Robot* Issue #54, 2008

Anticipatory Set:

Pose the following question to students and have them write for five minutes in their accordion journals:

- Where do you see evidence of gender identity in the *Giant Robot* articles and art pieces we've seen so far, and how do you feel about it?

Lesson:

1. See, Think, Wonder protocol: Look at the work of Luke Chueh, James Jean, Kozyndan, Shizu Saldamando, Amy Sol.
2. What speaks to you as representing gender?
3. Does anything stand out at gender neutral?
4. Does anything stand out as making a particular statement about gender? How?
5. Redesign a picture: Using one of the pieces from Luke Chueh, James Jean, Shizu Saldamando, and Amy Sol redesign/redraw to include your gender perspective. [Creative Strategy: Intervene]
    - Pick one of the images from the collection that is provided.
    - Cut out the representation that currently sits in the image you picked.
    - Make an outline of the shape on drawing paper.
    - Using the outline, redraw a figure that will fit into the shape that represents your gender perspective.
    - Using tape or glue, adhere your perspective back into the image.
    - Add any details to the photo that will enhance the message you want to convey.
    - Write a statement that communicates what you are trying to make apparent with the gender representation you choose to convey.
6. Share: Allow students to share their pieces with 1–2 minutes to share their thinking on why they chose to represent a certain gender and in what way?

Ongoing Assessment:

Journal reflection:

1) Did this lesson/activity stretch your understanding of the gender spectrum or gender bias?
2) What questions surfaced during your work?
3) What confirmations of your belief system solidified during this project?
4) What emerging thoughts did you have after viewing the work of your peers?

words and portraits | **Eric Nakamura**
art | **Courtesy of James Jean**

James Jean

Comic Couture

I think that people recognize authenticity or originality when they see it.

Step into the Rem Koolhaas-designed Prada stores in Soho or Beverly Hills and you will be greeted by enormous, 17' x 200' murals showcasing the work of James Jean. Prada has also produced a line of shoes, bags, and apparel using the 28-year-old artist's mysterious, dark, and fantastic artwork–but not his name. The fact that the exclusive clothing brand didn't promote the Los Angeles-based artist along with its products has become a common topic of conversation among art-minded folks. Was it because of his youth or soft-spoken demeanor? Or was it an oversight of his artistic merit?

While Jean remains a mystery to much of the couture scene, he is well known among comic book readers. His cover art for Vertigo Comics' *Fables* has earned him the Eisner Award for "Best Cover Artist" four years in a row, from 2004-2007. His work has been featured in other comics, books, ad campaigns, and snowboards, and fellow artist and friend David Choe often says, "He's the best painter in the world."

When I visit Jean's modernist residence in Santa Monica, it seems like the perfect place for him to live and work. The sight lines are nice and his art is spread around different rooms. The living room's big windows face a small backyard and let in perfect light for it to function as a painting studio–although he has to paint large pieces in the garage. The space above the garage is a drawing studio

Fables 74 drawing, Charcoal on Rives BFK, 20 x 30", 2008.

and print-packing location. Walking around the premises where he draws, paints, and otherwise runs his business, he tells me how art has taken him everywhere.

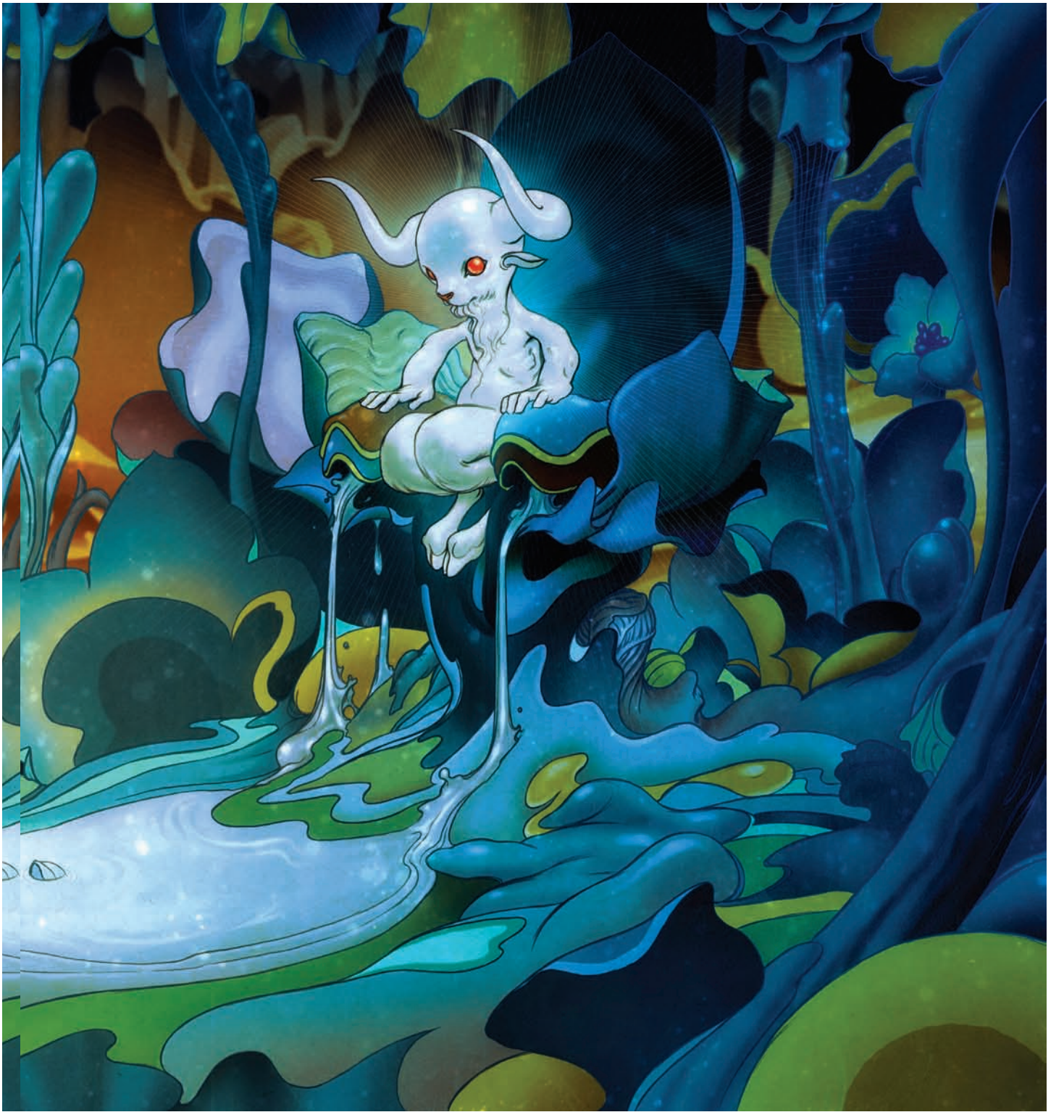
GR: You're from Taiwan?
JJ: I was born there, but moved to the U.S. when I was 3. So I am sort of an ABC.

GR: Did you teach yourself drawing from the beginning?
JJ: Totally. I was always drawn to photographs of big trucks, robots, and everything. I wanted to translate it all onto paper. My parents would bring home reams of dot-matrix paper with the holes on the sides, and since it would all fold out, I would do elaborate multi-panel drawings over the perforations. It was a very broad canvas.

GR: You were the king of drawing in your elementary and junior high, weren't you?
JJ: I guess. People were like, "James can draw that." It was nice.

GR: I was that kid in elementary school–the Asian kid who could draw. It's weird. I don't think a lot of the Asian kids keep that up. They're good at drawing and then they're like, "I'm going to be the guy who cleans pools" or something.
JJ: My parents wanted me to go to law school or be a doctor–the typical stuff–so I actually stopped drawing for a while. I always drew, but I didn't do it seriously for a long time. In high school, I was really into music. I played the piano, the trumpet…

GR: There is a James Jean who plays music, but it's not you.



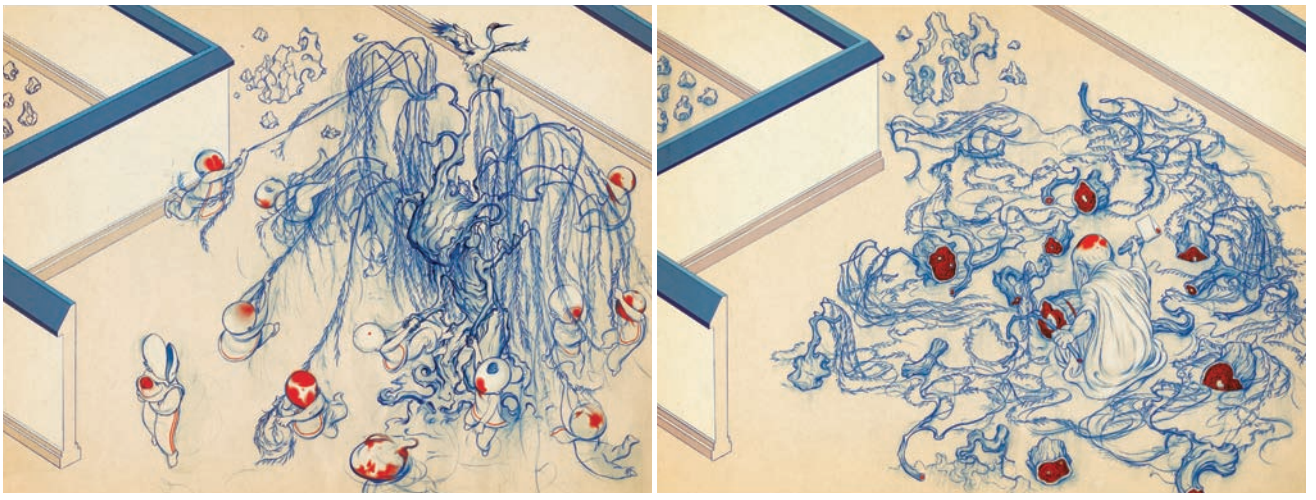
Faun Bloom (Trembled Blossoms style frame), Graphite and Digital, 2008.

JJ: It's kind of funny. That's some Christian rock band. At least I beat them on Google. So, yeah, I guess I took a chance and applied to art school. I wanted to do comics and the School of Visual Arts was the only one with a cartooning program, and that was the only school I applied to. My parents were not happy. This was the late '80s or early '90s. I think that was the beginning of Image.

GR; Yeah, with *Spawn* and *Cyberforce*. When Image Comics came out and challenged Marvel and DC, did that influence you at all?

JJ: Yeah, I had all those comics. I had *Youngblood*. I started a little bit before with Jim Lee on *The Uncanny X-Men* and *Wolverine*. My first comic was *Wolverine* 30. There was something so attractive about comic books–having all those drawings in a pamphlet, putting them in a bag, and all that. It's good to finally have a hobby when you're a kid and you're lost and don't know what to do. I guess it's almost like something forbidden with its violence and sex. You know, our parents didn't know anything about it.

I could draw. I had friends that would bully me and have me make dirty drawings for them when I was in middle school. When I was in the first grade, I drew a hermaphrodite and got in trouble. I drew it during lunch and the lunch monitor took it away and told me I had to talk with the teacher. It was mortifying. I just thought it was hilarious and didn't even know what a hermaphrodite was. I would just draw a naked lady and end up drawing a penis. Then the teacher started giving me a lecture like, "I understand that nudity is appreciated in sculpture and Michelangelo."



Willow 1-2, Mixed Media and Digital, 22 x 30", 2007.

GR: When did you come out to L.A.?
JJ: In 2002, I moved out here and got married.

GR: You were in New York before that, right?
JJ: Yeah, I went to school there from 1997 to 2001. During my last year there, I shared a loft with Yuko Shimizu. She's a pretty famous illustrator now. We saw the Twin Towers fall from our window. It was definitely an unforgettable watershed moment, and there was a torrid amount of change afterwards. I had an Internet job that ended. Around that time, developers were hanging so they had me on a retainer. For a while, that was my only source of income. Then I started doing covers for DC in October 2001. At that point, I was doing one cover a month.

Crayoneater, Mixed Media and Digital, 12.5 x 17", 2007.

GR: Covers aren't just a gig, but a serious endeavor, right?
JJ: I guess. At the time, my art school education had given me these delusions of grandeur. I thought I was going to be a painter doing cover illustrations for big publishing companies. But I couldn't get editorial work because all the paintings I did were too surreal and strange to be commercial.

Once I started doing comic book covers for Vertigo, everything started snowballing. It turns out a lot of art directors read comics, so I started to get more assignments. I got regular assignments, bigger advertising jobs, and covers–mostly through word of mouth. After about two years, I was pretty comfortable.

GR: Was it weird to start drawing the covers instead of the insides? Isn't the cover the most prestigious part?
JJ: I think it was good timing. They were going to do five issues of *Fables*, so they said, "Alright, how about you do the first five covers?"

I think they just wanted to take a chance. *The Sandman* had just ended, and they were looking for a fresh start. It was the editorial art director Mark Turello who recommended me for the job. He seemed to really like the work he saw on my website, and really pushed me for the gig. When *Fables* started to do well, they said, "Let's do another five covers." Vertigo puts out a lot of books, but they don't last. It's an achievement when a book lasts more than 10 issues or a year.

GR: Was it different working at Vertigo compared to DC's main titles or even Marvel?
JJ: *Fables* has nothing to do with superheroes or anything like that, and it was a technical challenge to depict characters in a real space when I was so used to being a painter, doing whatever I wanted, and playing graphically with things. Instead, I had to make sense and tell a story. It was really difficult. It was good for my chops, that's for sure.

GR: At the time, were you more into drawing something like The Thing?
JJ: No. I read comics by people like Chris Ware and Dave Cooper back then. Charles Burns and Daniel Clowes, too. I loved that stuff. I had no interest in superheroes, but then I ended up doing *Batgirl* covers. I felt like I did interesting stuff with those covers. I could render accurate attractive-looking anatomy, which was definitely not one of my strengths when I was in school. People loved my drawings and the flat color. Even now it's super popular.

GR: Do you think that your painterly style is getting more popular or making a comeback?
JJ: It's hard for me to say because I am not far enough removed to be objective. But I know there are a lot of people like Yuko Shimizu,

Fables Cover Collection Jacket Design, Mixed Media and Digital, 20 x 31", 2008.

I have seen my work influence a lot of people in a short amount of time. That's cool, but I feel like my work comes from a place of authenticity.

Tomer Hanuka, and Nathan Fox, even Istan Banyai, whose work has a comic book look. They have characters that occupy space defined by dark lines and flat color, whereas illustration before was Brad Holland-esque.

GR: It seems there are just so many people jumping in over time.
JJ: When I graduated, illustration was dead. Everyone was so depressed. Now everyone wants to be an illustrator. It's crazy. In the last five years, it exploded. I don't know why. Maybe it's the Internet. Everyone has a website, everyone is posting on Flickr, and everyone is blogging about their work and putting their work on MySpace. Drawing is a real fun endeavor, and now it is more accessible. When I was growing up, it was hard for me to find art that was interesting. My parents had a collection of Van Gogh books but I was not old enough to appreciate it.

GR: Do you think that a lot of illustrators are getting popular without chops, as you might say?
JJ: Oh yeah. There is so much biting out there, it is insane. I have seen my work influence a lot of people in a short amount of time. That's cool, but I feel like my work comes from a place of authenticity. In art school I was absorbing all these different influences and synthesizing them into something that was my own. Now I see people take what I've done and use it without knowing where it comes from. It's superficial.

GR: Where does your subject matter come from? If it's a fantasy world, you must include some of yourself in your paintings.
JJ: It references art history, memories from my childhood, gender issues, beauty, ideas of beauty, and the act of drawing and making art. I am drawn to creating windows into a self-contained world, and I try to exploit that. I love all sorts of painting and art, but I feel that my ideas about composition and carving a psychological space is rooted in stuff like Chinese scroll painting and lithography. I like to apply traditional skills and use them to do something interesting, beautiful, and maybe unsettling.

GR: Are you constantly looking at books and materials, or do you sketch off the top of your head?
JJ: It's a little of both. Sometimes I will wake up with an idea. Like I just woke up one day and I had the idea for *Crayon Eater*. It's a

big crayon drawing of a kid eating crayons. When I do large, dirty, narrative pieces, I look at these Chinese erotic books. I also have a book of erotic Japanese woodblock prints, too. You have to think that this was the fantasy or porn of the time.

GR: When did you start looking at things like that or scroll paintings?
JJ: I was always drawn to Asian influences. You know how Western paintings are all about atmosphere? There are no edges or the edges are soft. Chinese woodblock prints or scroll paintings have beautiful calligraphic lines. Maybe it's because of the writing, but who knows? I am drawn to line work.

GR: Do you paint and draw daily?
JJ: I am always swamped with stuff, and do something everyday. Right now, I'm designing my book for DC. They're collecting my covers, and I'm doing all the typography and design for it. I'm drawing every day. I was just in Iowa on my friend's film set drawing Ellen Page and Keith Carradine. I can show you the sketches.

GR: What movie is it?
JJ: It's called *Peacock*, starring Cillian Murphy with Susan Sarandon. My friend Michael Lander was making the movie so I came out for a week and I just hung out around the set for like 10, 12 hours a day, just drawing for myself. The production company wanted to use the drawings for promotion, and were like, "Hey, can you stay longer?" and paid for the rest of my stay.

GR: When you are doing sketches, do they become studies for paintings?
JJ: No, the sketches are of the moment. They exist only because I was there for that amount of time. I don't go back and work on them or anything.

Maze, Mixed Media on Paper, 29 x 41", 2008.

Succubus, Ink and Acrylic on Paper, 15 x 16", 2006.

GR: So how often do you have the freedom to go to a place and just draw for yourself?
JJ: I do it pretty often. Like whenever I go out to lunch, I'll draw my friends eating.

GR: I mean do you ever set out a day where you're like, "I'm going to go to the park and just draw. That's it." Do you ever make time for that kind of stuff?
JJ: Not unless I'm traveling. Usually I don't forcibly make time unless it's something special. There's this girl, Sasha Grey. She's an awfully good, um, porn star. I mentioned to Dave Choe that I'd always wanted to draw her, and he said, "Yeah, I might have a friend that knows her." So he called up the friend, and she was like, "I just worked with her last week." So we called her up and set up a date. She just came over and posed. She likes wearing stripes so I worked that in there.

GR: So what do you think about all the collaboration work that's going on? You recently worked with Prada.
JJ: I don't know if that was a true collaboration. Basically, I did two huge drawings for them that were really long, like scroll drawings. They were 11 or 12 feet long, and Prada turned them and another drawing I did into wallpaper for a fashion show. Then they took elements and collaged them onto clothes. People edited the drawings and put new stuff on them, but I think the spirit is there.

GR: What's it like working with a very high-end line? Was it like the whole Murakami thing?
JJ: I think it's totally different. Louis Vuitton hired him. He's famous. But Prada underestimated my fan base and the allure of the work I had done. Apparently, it is the most popular wallpaper they've ever had. I hear from the stores that people constantly come in and ask about the wallpaper. John Galliano was looking at it and people will come in wanting to take photos. People never wanted to do that for previous wallpaper installations.

GR: Do you think your work is a little dark for Prada?
JJ: I feel like Prada's always been dark. They kind of have this dark, hyper-modern sensibility . Even working with Rem Koolhaas–he's a little dark and unconventional. So I feel the aesthetics worked well together, as opposed to their other line, Miu Miu, which is more playful and girly.

GR: Have there been more fashion brands trying to hit you up?
JJ: Yeah, but I've declined them.

Poor Thing (Grenache), Charcoal and Digital Color, 22 x 36", 2007.

GR: So there's no interest in doing a true collaboration that actually uses your name from the conception, like, "What do you want to make?" Are there any brands left?
JJ: Well, there is. I'm in talks with The Grateful Palate about doing my own wine. I did these three triptychs, initially. It turned into this project with a Southern theme. Now they're basically letting me do whatever I want. We've brainstormed and it's really cool collaborating with them. They come up with great ideas.

GR: With products like wine or clothing, is it all about art or is it like an integrated business brand thing?
JJ: Actually, most of the stuff I've done is due to fortunate conjunctions of events. It's not like I have a business plan or anything, I'm just trying to do what interests me. People want me to do T-shirts and make all this stuff, but in the end I just want to draw and make pictures. I'm not that interested in making products, even though it's cool to do all that stuff and it's like being part of a club. It's like, "Oh, now you're accepted. You're a real artist because you've parlayed your work into all these different products."

GR: I think the bottom line is, are you making a living with your art and drawing?
JJ: I've done really well. I have a business manager and accountant that make investments for me and stuff. They do Mike Judge and a lot of entertainment people.

GR: Do they recommend career choices?
JJ: Oh, you mean like an agent? No, not at all. I've never had an agent and have never been interested. I've always handled my own business and negotiated my own contracts and rates. I make my own invoices, and I feel like I've done a good job with all that over the years. Sure, an agent can help you get your foot in the door, but it's a crime to give someone 30 percent to do stuff that is actually very easy to take care of yourself.

GR: But are there times when you have to be like the good guy and the bad guy at the same time?
JJ: Yeah, but it's worked out okay so far. I've been pretty stern and I've been forthright. And it's always worked out okay. As long as you respect the person that you're working with, just ask. If they want to work with you, they'll come back with a counter-offer or something.

GR: Your last name is Jean. What is that really? Is that C-H-I-E-N in Chinese?
JJ: Yeah, it is. "Jee-yen" is my Chinese name. So, J-E-A-N.

GR: Who made that spelling?
JJ: I think my dad did, or maybe someone on Ellis Island, I don't know.

GR: You didn't go "Oh, I'm just going to be James Jean."
JJ: Oh, hell no. I'm telling you, everything that's happened to me has been real fortunate. I didn't know my name was going to be easily memorable. I just grew up with it.

GR: How many people know you're Asian just from your name alone? It must be something like 10 percent.
JJ: Yeah, everyone thinks I'm a tall, old, white guy. The truth hurts. What can I say?

Wrapping it All Up: Final Assessment Activity

Giant Robot was started by Eric Nakamura to showcase the artwork and thinking of his friends through a zine format. For the culminating project of this unit, students are invited to create a zine that demonstrates their knowledge, feelings, and research about the overarching theme of *Giant Robot*: negotiated identity. A zine is an independently created and published personal maga*zine*. Students are invited to write informally and personally about their own identity. They should be encouraged to use journalistic formats such as editorials, feature articles, poetry, and cartoons. Since the topic of identity evokes strong emotional responses, the zine is a fitting outlet for this kind of writing and expression. A zine can be formatted in Microsoft Publisher, Print Shop, or Microsoft Word or done by hand.

Materials:

- Accordion journals that were kept to capture the thinking during the *Giant Robot* lessons.
- 8 ½ x 11 copy paper or the like
- Pens, ink, watercolor, pencils, markers
- Scrap paper for design
- Other: Students might consider using photos of themselves, copies of their previous work from the *Giant Robot* lessons.

Activity:

1. Zines should be designed to address all four Understanding Goals based on the lessons and ideas introduced.

Understanding Goal 1: What makes something art?
Understanding Goal 2: How do we negotiate our identities given the complex nature of structures and systems in place that inform our individual expressions?
Understanding Goal 3: How do contemporary artists use pop culture to tell their stories?
Understanding Goal 4: How do perceptions of gender become influenced by contemporary art?

2. Students should use their accordion journals to access thoughts, ideas, and sketches that they'd like to transfer or include in their zines.

3. Students have autonomy to design a layout that makes sense to them but also considers the reader of their zine.

4. A zine could include but is not limited to the following sections:

    1) Cover with catchy title
    2) Table of contents
    3) Description of Understanding Goals
    4) Letter to readers
    5) Interview or top 10's related to *Giant Robot* pieces
    6) *Giant Robot* art review
    7) Advertisement for the *Giant Robot* show
    8) Personal art submissions

5. For more information on how to make a zine:

WikiHow
http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Zine

Instructables.com
http://www.instructables.com/id/Guide-To-Zine-Making/

Rookie Mag
http://www.rookiemag.com/2012/05/how-to-make-a-zine/

Rubic to Assess Zine

4: STRONG	**3:** COMPETENT	**2:** DEVELOPING
CONTENT: Variety and relevance of writing, artwork and other visual elements		
▪ Zine is made up of a **wide** variety of **original** written and visual genres. ▪ Cutting edge visual and print media are **skillfully** created and integrated to reinforce overall impression and point of view and to **captivate** the audience. Significant, creative risks using creative strategies have been taken in zine.	▪ Zine is made up of a variety of **original** written and visual genres. ▪ Appropriate visual and print media are **competently** created and integrated to reinforce overall impression and point of view and to **engage** the audience. Some creative strategies have been used.	▪ The **minimum** number and variety of written and visual texts is met ▪ Visual and print media are **adequately** integrated to interest the audience. ▪ A creative strategy was attempted.
THEME: Clarity and consistency among the different parts of the zine		
▪ Zine follows a **clear, meaningful and reflectional** theme on identity**.** Every piece is related. ▪ Author's opinions, views or interests are **unique, strong** and **supported with a variety of sources**. ▪ Title of zine is **original** & captures the essence of the chosen theme	▪ Zine follows a **clear** and **interesting** theme on identity, and many pieces are related. ▪ Author's opinions, views or interests are **evident** and **supported with a variety of sources**. ▪ Title of zine is **clearly related** to the chosen theme.	▪ Zine partially follows a theme, and some pieces are related. ▪ Author's opinions, views or interests are **evident** and **somewhat supported with sources**. ▪ Title of zine is **related** to the chosen theme around identity.
PUBLISHING & DESIGN: Quality and practicality of the finished product		
▪ Tools and text features, such as organizational patterns of texts, page layouts, font styles & sizes are used **expertly** and **captivatingly** to convey ideas and information in a **professional-looking** zine. ▪ Multiple copies of the zine could be **easily** and **inexpensively** published	▪ Tools and text features, such as organizational patterns of texts, page layouts, font styles & sizes are used **competently** and **interestingly** to convey ideas and information ▪ Multiple copies of the zine could feasibly be published	▪ Tools and text features are used **minimally** to convey ideas and information. ▪ Some copies of the zine could feasibly be published
WRITING CONVENTIONS: The mechanical correctness of the written piece		
▪ Spelling correct even on more difficult words ▪ Accurate and creative use of punctuation and capitalization ▪ Grammar and usage contribute to clarity and style	▪ Spelling generally correct on basic words ▪ Routine punctuation and capitalization ▪ Grammar errors infrequent	▪ Spelling errors on easy words ▪ Errors on basic punctuation and capitalization ▪ Some usage and grammar errors

Biographies

SuperAwesome: Art and Giant Robot, Teaching for Understanding Unit Creator

Mariah Rankine-Landers is a former Kindergarten and First Grade Teacher of 10 years. Mariah holds a BA in Anthropology from UC Santa Cruz, a teaching credential from CSUS, and a MA in Equity and Social Justice in Education from SFSU. She now works for Alameda County Office of Education as a Professional Learning Expert and Director of the Integrated Learning Specialist Program that prepares K–12 teachers, teaching artists, and administrators to effectively plan and deliver deep, meaningful, and engaging student learning across all subject areas through arts integration, performance-based assessments, and collaborative curriculum design. In addition, Mariah does educational consulting with organizations in the Bay Area. She is a resident and adoring fan of Oakland and its communities. She always wants to learn more about everything, especially the arts!

Creative Strategies PowerPoint Developer

Julia Marshall, Ed.D. is Chair of Art Education at San Francisco State University. She holds an Ed.D. from the University of San Francisco and an MFA in sculpture from the University of Wisconsin. Julia taught for many years as an artist in the schools in the Bay Area where she specialized in art integration for elementary, middle, and high school. In addition to her academic publications, Marshall has written integrated arts curricula based on concepts and practices in contemporary art for The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco), KQED (San Francisco Public Television) and The Nelson Gallery at The University of California at Davis. In addition to her work in the Integrated Learning Specialist Program, she works with SLANT, (Science, Literacy and Art Community Partners), a collaboration of the California Academy of Science, the deYoung Museum, the San Francisco Unified School District, and the Alameda County Office of Education. She has just been appointed to the Blueprint for Creative Schools Task Force of the California Department of Education.

Giant Robot Artist Biographies

Ako Castuera was born at home in a commune to non-hippy parents. Her bony fingers are constantly busy with projects in mud, paint, and string. She has a great interest in the place stories take up in the mind, and has worked as a writer and storyboard artist on the television show "Adventure Time". Ako pursues the unseen by creating things that can be seen. The sculptures, paintings and objects she makes are physical points for trajectories of thought and exploration. Her home is in Los Angeles, California.

Adrian Tomine was born in 1974 in Sacramento, California. He began self-publishing his comic book series *Optic Nerve* when he was sixteen, and in 1994 he received an offer to publish from Drawn & Quarterly. His comics have been anthologized in publications such as *McSweeney's*, *Best American Comics*, and *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, and his graphic novel *Shortcomings* was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the year. Since 1999, Tomine has been a regular contributor to the New Yorker. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife and daughter.

Amy Sol spent her childhood years in Korea then moved to Las Vegas, NV where she currently lives and works. Though the style of her work is greatly influenced by a combination of manga, folk-art, vintage illustration and modern design, she remains a self-taught artist. She has dedicated many years of her life mixing pigments and mediums to achieve a unique color palette of subtly muted tones. The artist works intuitively from the beginning to end of each piece, with the intent that each painting's theme or message can be interpreted subjectively. Within these delicate works, you may often find whimsical landscapes populated with exotic plants, animal and females... Amongst the expressions of each character are notions of peaceful reflection and a sense of companionship.

Andrew Hem's introspective, otherworldly paintings explore realities one step away from our everyday waking life. What if our thoughts flickered across the surface of our skin like ephemeral silent movies? What if spirits walked among us, trying to find their path? What if there were no racism, and even the most

outlandish people were accepted? What if the children of Andrew's native land had been allowed to live in peace and thrive?

Born during his parents' flight from Cambodia in the wake of the Khmer Rouge genocide, Andrew grew up poised in the balance between two cultures — the animistic society of his Khmer ancestors, and the dynamic urban arts of the tough Los Angeles neighborhood where his family eventually came to rest. Fascinated by graffiti at an early age, he honed his skills with graphics and composition on the walls of the city before following a passion for figure drawing to a degree in illustration from Art Center College of Design. Working in gouache, oil and acrylic, he weaves atmospheric, richly textured narratives in a vivid palette of twilight blues enlivened by swaths of deep red and splashes of golden light. His haunting impressions of culture and landscape evoke the life of the spirit through the visionary manifestation of memories and dreams.

David Choe sculpts and paints in oils, acrylics, crayon and mixed media. His credibility as an 'artist', albeit one inclined to utilize public spaces every so often, is hardly in doubt. Influences flow through comic book culture to gothic art, impressionism and the surreal. The content of Choe's work is equally complex and in contrast to the slick, succinct, populist messages of some of his contemporaries.

Artist Statement
Every Wednesday when I used to live in Oakland I would go to the comic book store and look at all the new shit coming out. I still remember picking up new issues and going home right after, sketching, drawing and painting—never sleeping, always working and always pushing. I remember running down streets with two cans of paint and creating entire worlds on abandoned walls and windows. You have a pass to be reckless when you're young. I'm not saying everything I did was right but everything I've ever done has brought me to where I am now. To take a scrawl on a wall or a sketch on a piece of paper and turn it into something else—everything takes hard work. And always, no matter what you're doing or where you are, someone else is working harder than you. Don't sleep, don't look back, try harder, work harder and make everything you do or have done worth it for someone to look at. An idea doesn't mean anything if it isn't executed. Do—don't try.

Deth P. Sun
My name is Deth P. Sun and I'm a painter/illustrator currently residing in beautiful Berkeley, California. Originally I'm from San Diego, California, I studied for two years at San Francisco State University, until I transferred to the California College of Arts and Crafts, where I received my BFA in 2002 in Painting and Drawing.

I exhibit my work about ten to twelve times a year, usually in group shows, but sometimes I take up a solo exhibition. My work has shown throughout the U.S. and abroad (Los Angeles, San Francisco, Austin, Seattle, Detroit, Portland, New York) for the past few years and I've done illustrations or have contributed stuff to (among other things): Chronicle Books, Giant Robot, Tiny Showcase, Urban Outfitters, Fantagraphics, Poketo, Park Life, The Exploratorium, The Howard Hugh's Medical Institute, The LA Weekly, and Nylon Magazine.

Eric Nakamura graduated UCLA in East Asian Studies in 1993. Nakamura founded Giant Robot as a zine in 1994 and grew the publication until late 2010 / early 2011. Giant Robct magazine reached a multi racial audience interested Asian popular culture and became known as the premier magazine in the field. Nakamura built on the success of *Giant Robot* with stores and galleries in Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco, and has curated nearly 300 exhibitions. Currently, Nakamura works owns Giant Robot store and GR2 Gallery in Los Angeles and continues to offer pop culture goods and holds art exhibitions.

James Jean was born in Taiwan in 1979, raised in New Jersey, and graduated from New York City's School of Visual Arts. His critically acclaimed illustration and fine art career has led him to create covers for DC Comics, collaborate with Prada, and to exhibit his work worldwide.

Artist Statement
Using pictorial conventions from such varied sources as Japanese Woodblock prints, Northern Renaissance paintings and etchings, Chinese scroll paintings, Shanghai advertising posters, comics, anatomical charts, and vintage printed ephemera, I am attempting to create a narrative of the subconscious through images, to evoke a sense of fantasy and universal mythology.

KOZYNDAN is a Los Angeles-based team of artist/illustrators known for their digitally painted pencil drawings of contemporary urban cityscapes and surreal

interior spaces. Comprised of husband and wife Dan and Kozue Kitchens, kozyndan creates both fine art and commercial projects, and has been showcased internationally to much critical acclaim.

The duo met in a painting class in college in the late 1990s. They began collaborating, and the result has been a series of personal works that often reflect their affection—and repulsion—for the rampant urban sprawl and technological overload that characterize everyday city life. Their detailed drawings portray realistic urban panoramas, which on closer inspection reveal often absurd scenarios. In one, for example, elderly Chinese women, armed only with dim-sum, stave off an aerial attack on San Francisco's Chinatown, while in another, marauding day-glo bunnies take on Manhattan. According to Dan, the pair's work portrays their "unease with and love of the modern world."

Koznydan's other work includes magazine illustrations and album covers for Usher, Weezer, The Postal Service, John Mayer, and Daedelus. They've also done commercial projects for Puma, Discovery Channel, RES Fest, Electronic Arts, Converse, Nike, Wieden+Kennedy and Puma, and they've produced an array of products featuring their artwork, including posters, books, toys, sculptures, and t-shirts. The couple has also exhibited work in galleries and museums from Los Angeles to Toronto, London, New Zealand and Australia. Physically residing in Los Angeles, and mentally in one another's subconscious, kozyndan are youngish husband-and-wife illustrators / artists who work collaboratively on nearly every project they do. They create CD covers (for Weezer, The Postal Service, Daedelus, John Mayer, Lyrics Born, etc.) and magazine illustrations (Tokion, COLORS, Relax, Official U.S. Playstation Magazine, Mass Appeal, Giant Robot, and Metro.pop), as well doing work for the likes of RES Fest, Electronic Arts, Nike, ,Wieden + Kennedy and Puma. They spend much of their time though on their own projects, selling prints of their personal pieces, among other things, online and in select stores around the world. They released their first book, Urban Myths—a collection of their work from their first year and a half, published by Giant Robot.

In a world of increasing chaos they strive to make art that will bring a little smile to someone's face and make people forget, if only momentarily, the world outside. They make complex works that will have you discovering little details you never saw before months after you purchase a print. The images are grounded firmly in the real world but things are slightly askew—salmon swim up a street, robots shop, apples protest vegetarianism, Chinese

grandmas lob dumplings at happy SARS viruses, and cartoon animals engage in every manner of lovely sex acts.

Basically, kozyndan give you good things.

Luke Chueh was born in Philadelphia, but raised in Fresno, CA. Chueh (pronounced CHU) studied graphic design at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo where he earned a BS in Art & Design (Graphic Design concentration). He was employed by the Ernie Ball Company, working in-house as designer/illustrator where he created several award winning designs and was featured in the design annuals of Communication Arts and Print Magazine. Meanwhile, he also created, produced, wrote, designed, edited and published "E.X.P.", a 'zine dedicated to the "Intelligent Dance Music (IDM)" genre.

In 2003, Chueh moved to Los Angeles to further pursue a career in design. However, a lack of employment opportunities left him resorting to painting as a way to keep busy (a hobby he picked up while attending Cal Poly). He got his start when the Los Angeles underground art show, Cannibal Flower, invited him to show at their monthly events. Since then Chueh has quickly worked his way up the ranks of the LA art scene, establishing himself as an artist not to be ignored. Employing minimal color schemes, simple animal characters, and a seemingly endless list of ill-fated situations, Chueh stylistically balances cute with brute, walking the fine line between comedy and tragedy. Chueh's work has been featured in galleries around the world, and some of his paintings have also been reinterpreted into vinyl toys.

Masakatsu Sashie was born in and currently resides in Kanazawa, Japan a city well known for rich traditional arts and crafts and a unique culture due to the city's difficult geographical accessibility. Sashie received his MFA from the Kanazawa College of Art in 2000. Sashie has exhibited throughout Asia and the United States and his work is included in private and corporate collections internationally.

Sashie's home, Kanazawa is a miniature, condensed version of the larger, more populous cities in Japan. With a lifelong interest in model making and having grown up in a virtual diorama Sashie's intricately detailed oil paintings depict a world where the common objects of modern industrialization often

take on oppressive forms. These haunting vistas are often dominated by an orb, a substantial figure, made of an amalgam of the remnants of human existence. The contrast between the detail and complexity of the orb and the surrounding environment impresses upon the viewer the co-existence of small microcosms within the larger outer world. Without showing preference to either world, Masakatsu Sashie paints two opposite worlds as equals with the intent of drawing the viewer into the space and having them reflect on society and its values.

Hamburger Eyes

BORN
February 14, 2001
San Diego, CA

Hamburger Eyes began as a small xeroxed zine, turned into a magazine, and has now evolved into a publisher. With a headquarters fully equipped for producing zines, magazines, and books, they are able to produce seemingly hundreds of titles a year. Their facility also houses a professional darkroom for printing editions of silver gelatin black and white prints and full color chromegenic prints.

THE MAGAZINE
When opening Hamburger Eyes Photo Magazine you enter a pictorial history of both the unseen and iconic moments of everyday life. It is organized in such a way that it has become many things to many people. As a photo journal, we share our travels and experiences. As a photo diary, we share our accomplishments and heartaches. And as a photo album, we share our families and friends and reach people on a level they have been familiar with since their first birthday party. We have contributions from photographers of all levels. Inspired by the traditions that began with National Geographic and Life Magazine, we hope to revitalize the sensation of photography as a craft as well as a tool to record and document.

View back issues here:
http://www.hamburgereyes.com/back-issues/

THE PUBLICATIONS
Hamburger Eyes, over the years, has been collecting printing and binding

equipment. They could now produce their own books, zines, and magazines without the dependence on advertising dollars or the pressures of offset print shop minimums. They are able to put out more photos more often.

View a full list of publications here:
http://www.hamburgereyes.com/publications/

Purchase available publications here:
http://www.store.hamburgereyes.com

THE EXHIBITIONS
Hamburger Eyes has exhibited photos in bookstores, galleries, and museums worldwide. Often these events are to celebrate new releases, new photographers, or collaboration projects. Please contact us if interested in exhibiting our work in your space.

Rob Sato was born and raised in Sacramento and received his BFA from the California College of Arts and Crafts. Now based in Los Angeles, he produces rich and detailed imagery, which mixes stark horror with quiet beauty and humor.

Sato intends for his paintings inhabit a place between observed and imagined worlds. His work has been exhibited across California.

Sean Chao is originally from Taipei, Taiwan, and immigrated to the states in the year 2000.

In 2007, he graduated from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, CA with a BFA in Illustration. Currently living and working in Los Angeles, he sculpts and paints worlds filled of curiosity and amusement. The body of his works often gives a narrative story that stand as odd little moments frozen in time, where imagination and personal history intertwine and are delicately constructed with a gamut of mixed media.

Shizu Saldamando is a Los Angeles-based artist who was born and raised in San Francisco's Mission district. She has exhibited her drawing, painting, sculpture and video work both locally and internationally. She received her B.A.

from UCLA's School of Arts and Architecture and her Masters degree in art from California Institute of the Arts. She has worked as general staff for such organizations as Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Self-Help Graphics & Art in East Los Angeles, and Slanguage Studio in Wilmington, CA. She is the recipient of the California Community Foundation's Fellowship for emerging artists and one of the co-founders of the artist-run cooperative Monte Vista Projects in Los Angeles. She currently teaches drawing to continuation high school students in Los Angeles, and is learning to tattoo.

Artist Statement

Visual codes are re-interpreted and remixed with new generations by re contextualizing seemingly outdated fashion, music and language. This remix within subculture is often in contrast and a response to mainstream marketing and cocptation. I am interested in capturing specific fleeting social moments within local backyard parties, independent music shows, and the like, but I also am considering the pervasive and problematic context of binary subjectivity (good vs. evil) by depicting personal moments of reflection and contemplation that resist this marginalizing categorization. I view portraiture as a means to reclaim self image and subjectivity not only in response to mainstream media's flattening and one dimensional gaze, but also as a proactive process in that enables and gives agency. I use a mix of materials within the process such as wood, bed sheets, color pencil, washi paper and ball point pen, to give nod to the varying contexts and situations I depict. My overall objective is to create images with unconventional materials, honoring people and moments that resist categorization and question the existing archetypal and hierarchical norms.