

Drawing on Experience

By Bryan Durren

The world needs new artists like I-75 needs more potholes.

If that sounds like a pessimistic statement, get the hell out now while there's still time.

This isn't one of those "find your personal illustrative voice" columns. You should probably do that, too, but I can't help you there. How the hell do I know what you want to say? My point here is not to be negative but to throw a sprin-

kle of realism into your diet, to see if it upsets your system. If you're still reading this, then you, like me, don't care if I-75 needs potholes [it doesn't] – you are going to be an artist whether the world wants you or not.

Once you have realistically assessed the situation and are foolhardy enough to continue, you must figure out a way to sell the world a product it doesn't need. This is not an impossible dream.

After all, the world didn't NEED the Big Mouth Billy Bass. Your artistic endeavors have to be more enlightening than that, and look at how successful that was! The key will be how you market yourself.

The way I see it, there are two ways to go. You can develop a singular, original style, and get editors and art directors to think your style is cooler than the illustrations they are currently using or better for selling their particular product. [If they don't use illustration, chances are, you're screwed, but don't worry, there are other avenues.] This is the slower of the two approaches. The best way for someone to "get hip" to your new style is to see it a bunch of times, whether it is in indie or local publications, or if you just email out links to your portfolio website [Don't have one? Get one.] Regardless, it will take a while for your style to take off or for your name to get known [see Part 4. And Part 3. And Part 2].

The other approach is to be a jack-of-all-trades guy [or gal, of course], which is the category I fall into. Some people pooh-pooh this way to go, but it has worked for me so far. I've never had one distinct style, and I like to experiment in different techniques. If you are looking for an honest-to-goodness JOB as an illustrator, this might be the better way to go because people will see that you bring a lot of different skills to the table rather than being a one-trick pony.

Part 2: Definitions.

Relax them. If you think you can only be a TRUE illustrator by earning 100% of your pay by doing always-fulfilling per-



Illustration by Anna Cangialosi: 248.709.0663

sonally expressive illustration work, then you either have very rich parents [whom you should be nice to because they're inevitably gonna have to support you for a while] OR you are an Illustration Snob. Throw away your beret or go into fine arts. You are studying to be a "Commercial Artist." Not every job is going to be your Mona Lisa,

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and it's perfectly OK to do some hacky art-stuff every now and then to pay the bills. We all do.

I know a lot of excellent illustrators who work other jobs to make ends meet. One day they hope to not have to supplement their income, but them's the breaks. At the end of the day, they are all still illustrators. I myself am in supplemental mode right now. I work full time as a graphic designer, teach at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, as well as do some freelancing

when it comes my way. And you know what? It ain't that bad. I like my job[s], and I use my illustration skills all the time, just not as often in that narrowly defined way.

Part 3: Attitude

This is a short section. Ask yourself this: with all the great artists out there, why would an art director want to work with one who's a pain in the ass? The answer: He wouldn't.

Part 4: Don't Give Up!

Now, I know this all sounds like some semi-sarcastic yammering, but when you're in school it's easy to delude yourself into thinking that upon graduation, you're going to set the art world on fire with your unique and insightful style. I must admit I haven't really seen that happen too many times [if ever]. You'll also hear, "The business of illustration is too hard, you can't survive, blah, blah." The bottom line is that you CAN survive doing artwork for a living. After all, I've done it for the past several years, and I'm not anything too special [though my mama says I'm very special]. Anytime someone will pay you to create something for them, that's a pretty cool thing. But then again, I think my rose-colored glasses have always been half full.

For more of Bryan Durren's words of wisdom, catch him in class at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit.

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