

SPRING 2020

LevinLand's **Illustrators**
the journal

JADE DRESSLER
Marketing Expert

DANA COLLINS
Designer/Illustrator

ALEXANDER BOSTIC
Modern Master

DONNA BARSTOW
Comic Artist

ANGEL ALVAREZ
Fun and games artist

Illustration by Alexander Bostic

Chuck Pyle
Classic Brilliance



DRESSLER

JADE



Interview by
Lon Levin



"I HAD A CONFIDENT CURATOR'S EYE AND I KNEW IT EVEN AT A VERY YOUNG AGE. I REMEMBER CLEARLY ONE DAY TEASING THE KIDS WE WERE PLAYING WITH THAT I COULD DRAW A PERFECT CIRCLE. WHICH I THEN EXECUTED PERFECTLY WITH A RED CRAYON."



When did you first think about art/design/marketing as something you wanted to do? Were you encouraged or discouraged by family, friends, teachers, mentors?

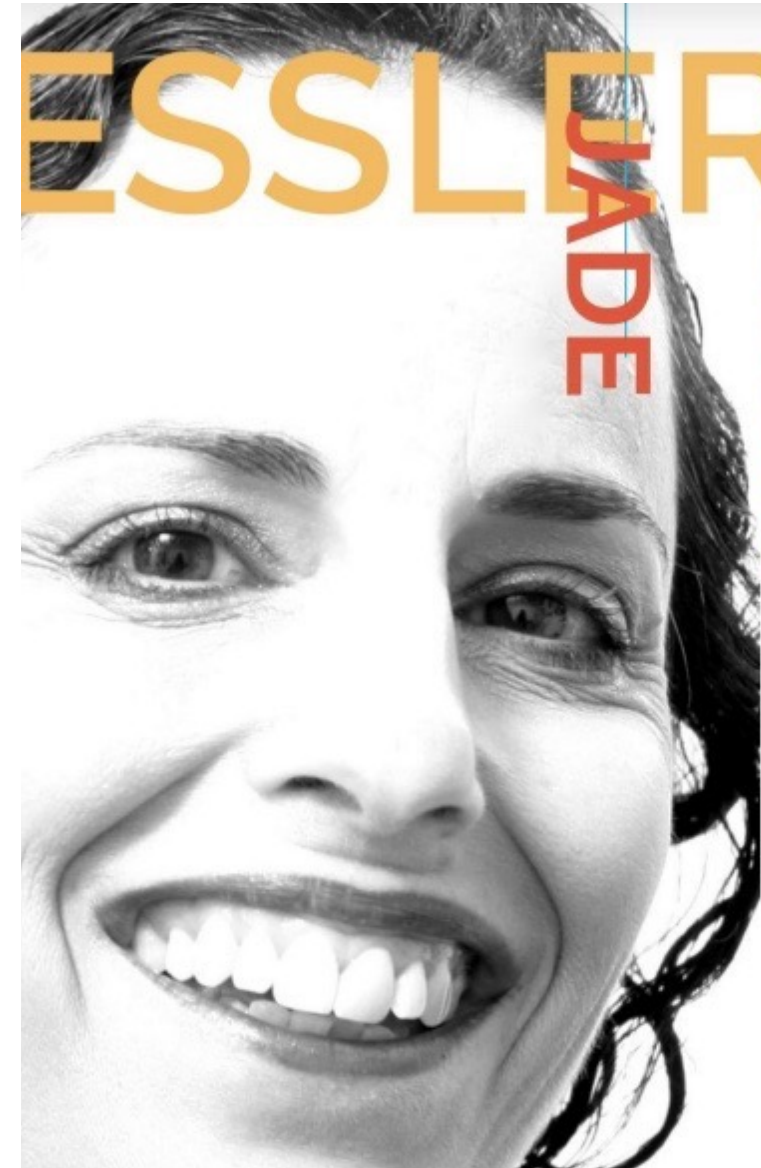
I was the type of kid born with imaginary, oversized, futuristic Hollywood sunglasses looking at the world as if every molecule was a crystal ball into the future. I was always confidently doing things a little different like in third grade, deciding to defiantly wear a brand-new crisp light blue Swiss dot pajama top as a blouse with my grey flannel pleated skirt as a precise outfit choice full of contrasting texture and meaning. (for me in any case) I vividly remember the thrill of sitting in class with a secret, that I was wearing a PJ top. At 15, I was instructing my needle-pointing Aunt to make a Warhol soup can on a lime green background for a pillow she wanted to make for my bedroom. My visual and style confidence was in the creation of art, no matter what form.



I always felt like a playful old soul, always creating, always inspiring, lovingly-teasing and suggesting to other kids what they should do with their art. (that's where the PR, brand consultant aspect comes from!) In high school pottery class I convinced a classmate to a challenge that, whatever the assignment was, we had to over-embellish and go a million miles beyond in the assignment. It was like the "Show-stopper" challenge on The Great British Baking Show reality show except with clay. My family were fiddlers who created outside of the lines. My Aunt Adele colored flowers on her plain white curtains with Crayola crayons for décor and I was mesmerized.

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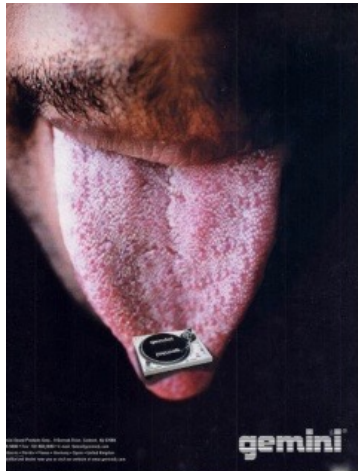


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(Continued)

My Dad would tinker in the garage to take a copper cooking pot lid and make it into a centerpiece of an antique fireplace grill. My mom wrote a silly poem with little drawings on every birthday or Xmas gift. I collaged the walls of our playroom with magazine images and drawings which became my studio in later years. I always think where your ancestors came from influences your life path, those that came from Romania and Russia give me my gypsy spirit and the side from Vienna gives me the focus of a meticulous crafts-person.

I was encouraged by family and teachers. I had many mentors. One, Frank Hyder, artist and teacher at Moore College of Art taught me the sacred art of non-doing, just looking at a simple object or scene and taking time to visually record it, versus feeling that lines, brush strokes or marks be made on canvas with the fierce passion of an abstract action painter. Slowing down has always been a teacher!

What kind of kid were you? Where did you grow up? What were your influences?

I was an alternative, nerdy, cool kid that grew up in the suburbs. As a toddler, my toy preferences were pouring over magazines. Saturday morning cartoons were shunned in favor of Soul Train, voraciously

consumed and studied, and of course, being a suburb of Philadelphia, the Gene London show, featuring an illustrator who drew pictures and then went into magical worlds.

I was also very influenced by a relic from my mother's youth. Her next-door neighbor growing up was a lawyer named Ilo Orleans, who illustrated a 365-day book with little rhymes for his kids. I was fascinated by the charm of it all, the simple, humorous illustrations & poems. Impressed and influenced by the idea that a man self-published his own book!

My influences as a teen were considered "alternative lifestyles" back then in the 70's, the African American and gay cultures. They seemed to know how to have more fun in life. I tell a story in my book about my first encounter with a gaggle of fantastically-dressed trans-people at a Gay Pride parade. Around color, the worlds of fashion, art and entertainment opened up. I wanted to be there! Then, when I was 16 I entered a national Levi's denim design contest and won an award. That set my path towards fashion and fashion illustration.

When I was 16 in 1976 I went to Europe for the first time. I was like a sponge in London, awed by the people on the streets, the punk rockers with huge, colored Mohawks contrasted with the proper banker types. I still have the ID magazines documenting the street style photography and describing the individuals photographed. It really was the first I saw the documentation of street style that is huge today on Instagram.

Capturing moments and sketching inspiring people and making little stories today, well there's where it all started for me!

How has the background you got at Moore College, Parsons Paris and in Siena played a part in your career?

I got a first year scholarship and majored in fashion illustration at Moore College of Art with fantastic teachers and mentors. Moore gave me life drawing, solid tools in illustration and my classes in the rich history of mythology influenced me greatly. Parsons Paris gave me precious access to the archives of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs at the Louvre and a new love of architecture. Siena, Italy was a month of richness in a precious medieval town, where drawing in pastels was luxurious and hours upon hours to sketch with pen and paper was so freeing.

While at Moore I also found my first freelance job, sketching garment trims for a manufacturer to share with clients.

You've worked in a couple different genres with your clients. How did that evolve and was that an asset for you or a problem getting those clients?

My first "real job" as a Visual Merchandiser at Macy's had me creating for a wide range of brands, from fashion to housewares, from kids clothing to cosmetics, etc. You'd go from installing your delicate, surrealist, sophisticated window design for Obsession perfume to creating a jungle for a summer shop for the Junior clothing department complete with a massive, illustrated cut-out Tarzan and Jane floating above. I was able to make my art and I liked the refreshing constant change of channels. Today, I think a certain type of client is turned on by the creative mix of our clients and work. In the late 80's visual merchandising at Macy's was like a reality

show between brands. I'm grateful that overall the company had very strong visual standards, yet each store's Visual Merchandising Director could invent fixtures, shops, and store windows. Creative concepts could get picked up to roll out to all stores. I was only in my 20's and was lucky to have designed a branded shop that rolled out to all stores. That level of standards and knowing that each genre was a chance to learn, I think that really enhanced my boldness in being able to see the creative possibilities in different genres!

Over the years I feel incredibly lucky to have worked with talented personalities, brands and non-profits that have gone on to do great and important creative things in the world. I like to say that I've creatively directed with all types of people from coaching Michael Phelps and Olympians for an ESPN Cold Pizza segment to directing video interviews with Karl Lagerfeld + Marc Jacobs backstage at Paris Fashion Week.

The history of how you arrived to where your agency is now is fascinating. Can you give us a brief overview of how that happened?

I designed jewelry and accessories in the 80's with my company called Jamp. We dressed the runways of Bill Blass, Oscar de la Renta and Mary McFadden, had major media coverage and sold to stores all over the world. It was a very conceptual collection, inspired by the micro

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to macro cosmic patterns in the Universe. I noticed when I spoke to the media about the collection, my exact words appeared in print. It made me realize the power of PR which I had never really thought about. I actually don't know if I even knew PR existed then!

After my jewelry design days I took corporate positions in the fashion and music fields. My title was Marketing Director, so I used the creative skills I knew and learned many new ones. The music business had 5 offices internationally and I directed their PR agency in London between raves at night and balancing the huge marketing budget in the morning.

While I was still managing teams of creative people, somehow PR seemed like the next level of messaging and creativity. I then left my corporate position and freelanced with PR agencies to really learn more. From celebrity events, to mass brands like Sunglass Hut and Speedo, I really enjoyed when a creative idea became real, like proposing a beach scene to the Today Show with a lifeguard touting sunglasses. The arc from my email idea pitch to the Today Show producer to the show actually creating a huge beach of sand in the middle of NYC was a kind of a thrill!

After freelancing and developing my own clients at a certain point I decided to have my own PR agency focusing on the clients I was fascinated by. Over the years we did a lot of creative work in addition to PR and so a few years ago I declared that overall we are a creative agency!

Our next focus is our artisan collaborative work via Slow Luxury creative co*labs and the launch



of our 9 Star Passport, a revolutionary way to design + live more creatively in our bodies, our spaces, our world. Based on a new take on ancient divinatory systems amped up dimensionally, the 9 Star Passport process reflects how we work with brands and physical spaces.

Your style is very unique. Did you work on developing a style or did that naturally come out of you?

I love drawing a free, expressive line! It is pure communion. We can't capture the glint of a star or the state of love, this is the closest thing. I am most inspired in nature for this reason. The eye sees ephemeral beauty, the pen is that gesture of love replicated. It is what naturally desires birth!

My style was and still is inspired by the glory years of fashion illustration, the 1970's and 80's. I poured religiously over the illustrations of Lorenzo Mattotti in Anna Piaggi's Vanity, an Italian concept magazine based on illustration vs. photography. Jean-Paul Goude's drawings and videos with Grace Jones ~ these influenced my abstract visions. My line was always

fluid and dramatic with a solid life drawing/Renaissance love for the human body like the masterful Antonio Lopez. The outsized expressions of Japanese anime fascinated me and still do. My illustrations for my coloring book Immortal Beloved, The World's First Goddess Perfume and Coloring Book, are done in a more intricate style with many details that I think were more influenced by my giants of illustration like Andy Warhol, Peter Max and Chris Ware. The comedic story-telling aspects were definitely inspired by Chris Ware's Acme Novelty Library. I think the art sits between Warhol's early frilly and fancy illustrations as fantasies to amuse and Peter Max's simple spiritual illustrations for an obscure how-to book on how to survive on wheatgrass called Survival into the 21st Century.

For the coloring book, which is also has written stories of 12 global goddesses, I wanted people to have a wild coloring orgy discovering cultural ideas, shapes and interactions that spark memory, connection or a release of held karmas. I always felt I had several styles, even now I feel

like my style is evolving and I'm less focused on perfection. "Perfection" is of the moment and sometimes what the brain says at first is a wrong turn, is actually one that expresses something, reveals something valuable. Today I am most inspired by something I see on the street, an interaction or emotion that strikes me as vibrant and very quickly out comes the simple and silly illustration (ala Ilo Orleans) I work with an everyday Bic pen on paper, I really like the simplicity and the effects are more endearing to me.

I notice the edgy quality to your work and the clients you serve. Is that intentional or did that evolve out of who you are?

The edge is where the boldest explorers go and that's what turns me on. Astrology is a window into the "edgy quality" as I am an Aries with Aquarius rising. My Aries sun sign translates to being a pioneer and the rising Aquarian aspect means I am wired to feel and see what the future is. I've always have been tuned into what people will be looking for.

How do you stay up to date on styles outside of your projects?

Instagram is an illustration networking event of the highest order! I like to see the work of other artists there, it's heavenly! I keep a visual digital and physical file of images that speak to me, especially from film. A genuine human moment on film is my holy grail. It's about developing your eye/heart to what makes it react and why that emotion is so human and so relatable.

What do you recommend to younger art director/brand designers who are just developing their portfolios?

Go to Europe, Asia, or the next town over. Get out of Dodge, get on the streets and let yourself be the free artist your soul desires! Pay attention to dropping your ideas and expectations. Drawing is a ritual and it is sacred. If you are not in that vibe your work will be stale.

Go to HR or the jobs center if you are in school, they are a source for freelance jobs to get your feet wet in a professional opportunity. Work to your passion. Whatever it is, draw that. It could be cars, emotional moments, or erotic fantasy scenes. The point is that your art will be at its best when you are true to what you love.

You do so many different types of branding, art and design. What is your favorite area to work in?

Video. Film. I really adore doing videos for clients. Creating the story, enlisting the talent and the editing ... orchestrating all those creative elements. It's really magical.

That said I am looking forward to working with animators who can take my work to the next level!

How has the computer affected your work? Does your agency work traditionally and digitally?

We work digitally and traditionally. I put together PDF sample drafts of the creative whether it is a website or a video shoot. Sometimes I sketch things to direct the creative but it's more effective to make a mock-up with digital images. In many ways I believe I came back to illustration because the simple non-digital act of drawing feels like a soothe and a defiant gesture to having my nose constantly in the machine!

What's going on in your head when you work on a piece/campaign? Your fears, anticipation, confidence, etc. How do you know something is finished?

What I've learned is that even the best-planned projects have their own organic way and timetable in coming together. Tough spots are asking for a re-look. I keep entertaining and giving space to my playful imagination until something comes up that just feels right. Sometimes the idea, tag line, concept comes instantly. Or even the finish of a creative project can come instantly. I trust that.

Your artwork for your portraits is great. Love the "Empire" piece. How did that end up as something you do a lot of?

Thank you! I love Empire too!

The funny thing is that I did about 24 of these celebrity portraits at the request of a large agent's talent scout to propose representation. It took me a while, as you might imagine, to decide who to draw and then finish all 24! The agency was interested in my work but their first offer was to sketch customers in a cosmetic counter at a department store. While I was honored, the opportunity wasn't really for me, and I actually declined the offer and thus they did not represent me. I can't explain exactly why that opportunity did not appeal to me, but most importantly, I trusted and followed my instinct.

What made you focus on luxury lifestyle and pop-culture brands?

That tag line occurred to me when my clients at one simultaneous moment included a Parisian luxury expert and XXL, the famous hip hop magazine. I realized these were two of my favorite expressions and celebrations of life and thus they became my favorite areas of focus.

I'm curious about how you choose what to work on. Is there a certain type of project or client you gravitate towards?

At the beginning of my agency, I would do bold outreach, like calling a 100-year old luxury hat maker brand in Vienna on a whim to see if they wanted to sell in the US (which they actually did with our help) These days most clients come by referral, and we are now working with the next generation, who now have their own businesses and join our client pool!



