



## Artist Talk Archives: Aaron Draplin - September, 2014

### SPEAKERS

Audience Member, Aaron Draplin, Jon Richardson

---

J

Jon Richardson

You're listening to The Portland Art Museum Podcast. I'm Jon Richardson, this podcast's producer. On this episode, you'll be listening to an Artist Talk from September 2014 featuring Aaron Draplin, an acclaimed graphic designer and founder of Draplin Design Company. You have certainly seen Aaron's work but probably haven't realized it was his. Though he has worked with companies like Nike, Patagonia, and Target, his most recognizable work maybe his Field Notes brand of pocket-size notebooks. In this Artist Talk, Aaron discusses his work as it relates to Hilaire Hiler's "San Francisco Street". A link to the work can be found in this episode's description, as well as links to other relevant websites mentioned throughout the Artist Talk. Please note that Aaron does use some colorful language so this episode is listed as explicit. Otherwise, this is Aaron Draplin.

A

Aaron Draplin

Alright, so it's pretty surreal, right? We've got 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Hello 11, 12 to come to my mind there'd be 500 people here, or five. Right? So at least we're above five. Okay. Well, my name is Aaron James Draplin and I'm a graphic designer. I am 40 years old. I finally got a business license in the city of Portland. It took me 11 years, I didn't even know you had to have one. So the Draplin Design Company LLC is official here in town. And we're just across the river in the Olympic Mills building. We've been there six years. But I've been this sort of DDC since about 95. I guess. sort of contrast like big brands sometimes. And that's sort of a Robin Hood situation where you take as much money as you can. Here's a little

pro tip for when Nike calls you. Don't throw any numbers out, let them throw the number out. That's a little pro tip when the big And, you know, like I she said about the Obama administration. they can to us because we were working designers, we weren't cool what to say we weren't really known. We weren't concerned about millions a year or something, we were concerned about just making rent, that's a little different than sort of my colleagues in town. So that said, you know, to sort of give you an idea of what my world has looked like, Here is 666, logos made from everything from a buddy up to some big scary stuff. But it's all blessed in here. And basically, this is, you know, how I show my portfolio. And then how I sort of inspire younger kids to look at, you know, logos and making logos and stuff in one quick, concise way, right? There's a lot of energy here. From these last bunch of years, I mean, the fun part about this is I'd say probably 80% was just for the hell of it. But when it's up against something big, there's a perception. There's a weirdness of perception where sort of like, something that might be some big Nike piece next to my buddies logo, somebody, they both had the same weight. And that is a fun, subversive quality to what I sort of get to do, right? So I like the idea of people not like I did, I did a big Portland TEDx talk here. And I was backstage with some pretty impressive folks. One guy was the Grammy winner the rapper guy Macklemore. Another kid was just out of prison. It was a quite a range, but they were very serious about what they do. My chance to go to Portland front of all those 3000 people to basically say it was like just to say, you don't know who I am and you don't know really what I do. And I'm not concerned about that you shouldn't be concerned either. I got away with it. And thank you Portland for allowing that. You know, sort of like defiance of the odds in town. I didn't have to go tuck in your shirt and pretend like Nike shoes, which are great shoes sure great. I didn't have to go to some sort of job and, and pretend to like a piece of software that I don't even use or something. I've been able trade show and I'm one of the presenters there. We sell our stuff during the day. And then that night we tell our stories. I'm not freaked out about that at all. They know what they're getting. This is a little bit little weirder and random. I didn't know that they're going to be respectable people here. No one told me this. I apologize. Some of the other guys, no problem, but I just didn't really know. So to come and do this, like I'm really nervous for whatever reason to come to a museum makes me nervous. Because I'm only six inches away. To come here, it was the same thing. But the one thing that I think was my favorite, and for a couple different reasons was the Hilaire Hiler piece here. And that goes back to what I the 30s and the Depression. And we'll just say, I guess, pretty a pretty scary America. When you look into the WPA, the works, you know, administration, things from the government, when you look into that, we were just looking before my big research for this that people were paid 24 bucks a week to work for the government to make art for public places and stuff, right to keep people employed. And when you think about the stuff that they made this, this highly guy, yeah, he was making these murals in public places and you can still see them if you go do it, you know, a Google for his name. He was doing that for like regular Americans art for regular

Americans. Now that is something. When I saw WPA, I kind of knew that, like, that's something that's always been very fascinating to me that that was art. Word this the right way. for everyone. Right? It wasn't You didn't even really know what was art. You were driving in America. And you saw a poster to go to another part of America to either bring rural electrification, you know, to the middle of nowhere Appalachian. Or to tell you to go to Yellowstone, we used to make beautiful things for America, right? We used to make beautiful things. That were like these giant posters. Now they're in museums, and you see them, you know, so I don't really know what the story is, with this thing. What grabbed me, were the simple shapes. Was that sense of odd perspective and weird. Chaos? That is San Francisco. I mean, when you read a little San Francisco down there, you know, there is something about color, and variety. And and I don't know how to tie that into like going to one of the most diverse cities I've ever been to in my life. I don't know how you know. But it's 1936, you know, and what grabbed me was the flatness in the flatness, the idea of telling a story with really simple shapes. Now, when you go down to some of the big, I don't remember the name that was like pink and yellow giant. What's a big one? Yeah, I, okay, it's downstairs, and you look at this thing. And it's this gigantic, abstract, beautiful three color painting. without sounding too naive or even disrespectful. Sometimes I just can't sink my teeth into that stuff, because it just it's like, wasted space or something. But I understand you know, they did it because there was a reaction to the time and modern art. But there was just something about this little guy that idealize a pretty chaotic city. And I think in a lot of ways, that's what I do with my work. I'll take a small brand, boil it down to its four or five little forums. And that'll be a logo to tell you a story about how they act or how they sell or what they sell. Right? So there's just something about the flatness that grabbed me that did it. Like you could even get rid of The first level being just color, second level being these flat shapes. Third Level tertiary would be sort of like, three really even need any extra detail to me, right? But it's it's sort of it's sets it back in 1936. There's like when you go downstairs and you see these sort of in a feel very arbitrary one color to color. There's something about like, that speaks like as an American or something, to see this thing. I don't know. Like, that's, that's a different time from America. I know I'm reaching. But when I go back and look at like, we don't need to get into the sort of provenance of this, but we'll just say it was 10 bucks. Now America used to celebrate. My This is for the Bicentennial. So I was three and 76. Right. But I barely remember the singer, my dad telling me 10 stripes, which each stripe meant 20 years. Okay, you know, so 200 years of America. And when Bruce Blackburn made this, they made this logo from America, not just people, little museums, or someone who, who can afford stuff like to see things like that. This is for everyone to say, we've reached 200 years for America. So that's a different. What kind of what's our logo? Now? What's it mean? It's putting American flag, right? This used to be our logo, right? So this is something that like, like, I wish we still had WPA posters, saying things like, spend less, or help someone who needs help, or all the shit we're forgetting, you know, or, like, get in your car and drive somewhere. We used to say

that those beautiful yellow stones and Grand Canyon Suppose, you know, posters and stuff. But I wish we had a little more of this, like the government not talking to us in a form, or a downloadable clicking thing that you hate filling out, but more of a way to say all of us, you know, some sort of, I don't know to like, share more something we used to do that. And like this artifact, I mean, this was 10 bucks. I got this in Broomfield was it and Broomfield. And you know, I've got this guy tattooed on me, because that that's my favorite logo that we ever made as Americans. You know, it was from an era where things were really clean in the 70s. And very idealized, and yet 40 years later, still has an impact because of the geometry and stuff. And like, you know, I wrote it was a bit of a public. I don't know, it's like a, it just for the hell of it. To put them out. I wrote a letter to a congressman saying didn't get a reply. Why don't we reinstate this? So America has a good logo again, why do we throw that away? You know, this used to be on the space shuttle, right? When you went down to the big hangar at the you know, the Kennedy hangar, this was the logo, not just for 200 years, but for America. Right? And it's gone. That's really, that's very peculiar. You're to me, and sad in a way. So that said, I was raised by a Polish Pack rat father in a wonderful, you know, a sound Mom. Mom was a straight man dad was the funny one. Dad had a lot of quotes, one of his quotes is "I just want one of everything", right? So we would look for these things. And, and that has translated into my life and a lot of weird ways. The wanderlust that the WPA had in me as a young kid to go and leave, every Midwestern has to leave the Midwest. That's a sort of a rule somewhere, right? I did when I was 19. with six asshole buddies, we left all the way from Traverse City, Michigan, all the way down to bend oregon to be snowboarders, right? And along that way, you know, every state, you can breathe a little easier, because you're really like growing up fast. I was 19 years old, and the superhighway that's been my life from here to Michigan to see my mom and dad over the years. You know, it's one thing to jump on the plane and go home and get there efficiently. It's another thing to go. And go Junkin, right, so this wanderlust, that the WPA seen those big posters, I've never seen those posters, like, in an antique they're like, in like, institutions now. But, you know, the Kerouac idea of like the on the road, we just took our time going places, I'll just say, and in that taking time, you know, as a designer, as this kid live way out west, and taking, you know, spending the extra resources to just kind of zigzag around America, I've been looking at dead things for years. So this is these are

called, you know, memo books. And my dad, you know, always taught me like when you go to a garage sale, first things first, if you see a lot of color, it might mean one thing, baby clothes, that's when you get the hell out of there, right. But always look in the drawers and an estate sale, always pick things up and look at the logos or what's on the bottom of the box. Sometimes it's not the stuff in the box. It's the box, that's beautiful. You know, this is from 1940, this little dead box. And this is wag dog food or something. And this is the kind of stuff I used to well card around shit around town, right? Like, this is still a good box. It's 50 or 60 years old, but that was from an estate sale, 135th and whatever. And it wasn't the stuff that was in it, you know, but that's what my dad taught me. So going from here to, you know, to the Midwest and back and forth. I've been collecting these little things called memo books, right? So from the agricultural landscape of how you would say, trust Cargill they used to give these things away at the feed and seeds. Every little town had the feed the seed on its rail, you know the railway. They give these things away. And that's how the farmers you know to see this stuff and then to like, you know like say well where do you get your what's a new version? I know what you can get a Powells, I made my own right. So I made these things called Field Notes. And these are well, the four color creepy versions that we would see growing up. These are made out of wood, right that was from northern Wisconsin. These are made out of a sort of indestructible paper called you bow you can you can't rip it. But this idea of like, I always have this on me at all times. This is my life. This is what I owe what I'm what I you know what I'm owed on that first page, and then how I work out my day to day refresh. This is last two days of just making notes of my life. Right? Right. So I always if I don't have this For me, I feel very disorganized and freaked out Now listen, of course I've got my little I was here, you know checking my stock price every seven minutes and what my sister is doing. but this idea of like making things in America for now, okay, these things for you. I'm going to the same Boston and this thing and Boston's gonna be all made America stuff. But the first booth you walk up to wallets are going to be \$250 made by some numb nut with this cool little haircut, you know, and whatever. And that's great. But our field notes are 9.95 forever and ever and ever. Right? And it's not about trumping up i don't know i'm not really interested in going for the big dollars of course, it's awesome. Through graphic design. I got to pay off my house. I have a Volvo we are in Portland. I own a Volvo. I paid off my appendix, like all the shit that no one else can do. I have been able to like pull off with a life making design. Just regular things 9.95 but really have a home with the article guys up in this sort of elite stuff. Sure. But also do really well like a bookstore to college campus. And that's what I'm really interested in. Because we've been told by smarter ways people way smarter than us that you could sell these for \$40 because they look well design, I'd like to think they are for 40 bucks. And that means that you exclude all the people who would never pay 40 bucks, but

because the goal Nice, nice high fashion, Fred Siegels and all this kind of shit in LA or whatever. You actually make a little more, and we weren't interested in that. So that one's on the record. Okay. Okay, now, getting into this interesting. I'm just gonna keep asking because I'm all freaked out. Now, looking at this thing. This was a portrait that I made of myself in 1998. Pretty, pretty good, right? You know, but, you know, aside from this stuff, you know, the quality of like, reducing things down to really, really simple shapes is something I've always been. It's sometimes it's hard, you know. And that's where I, you know, I run into stuff like my second favorite thing was the Basquiat here, because it was playful, and there was color. And he it was odd, you know, but I've always been attracted to taking things and reducing them down. Right. So here's an American poster for Iowa. So what is there about seven shapes? Right? So the kinda you know, why this was interesting to me was to say, that is what I was to mean, if you who's been dialogue, right? Well, there's about six elements. There's sun horizon, right? Right. You know, when you flip it, and it goes blue, and it's winter in Iowa, right. But this as an art piece, or a poster or something, you know, I don't know how to explain it's like, I, the guy who commissioned me or something to make these. And basically, we just go in and he covers the paper, I make the art, we split it right down the middle, he puts it all over his poster set, my buddy Mitch. This was very, very different than what's kind of going on in the cool post you're seeing right now, right? But a movie posters on a rock and roll bands and stuff. And here comes this thing that's just about America, or just about the desolation of the Midwest, or my, you know, the beauty of the Midwest will say, and it freaked him out, he's from Sioux Falls, or she's sitting in Sioux City, Iowa, and put this on his site. And we sold in that community, we sold 14 of the 250 we made. So I'm telling you that but it was risky. You know, it's risky to make this kind of stuff, because there's other stuff that's fashionable. But when you go back, and you look at how we used to tell stories, like across America, things were made this way. How this is sort of come into what I do for a living now is like, here's my tribute to the space shuttle, I am sad, the space shuttle went away. I mean, I know that Richard Branson's building some new thing that's going to go or whatever it's going to be. But I had this as a kid, to get excited about America, you know. And it's like, why I made this is because in a very democratic NASA, which is really cool. They had these patch contests. So if you saw the link, you could submit, you know, Little Billy, who's five years old, submitted his version of the patch sheets and cram all the way up to, you know, some engineer who like on graph paper and all the pencils and stuff, his idea of a patch. And they kicked one. And it wasn't all that great, right? And it just hurt me because that was the last mission. And I wish I could have made a patch that afternoon feeling like stinging a little bit. I made a patch, right? So okay, if I had to make something that's design, or the masters of design taught me, that would reduce down to this big or work this big. Here's my best foot forward. Right. Right, right. So you know, I show these on my website. And, you know, really, it's a loose tribute to the space shuttle. But yet, when this thing started to hit, like I saw a lot of T shirts with this now to space freaks. And little kids, we had to make

kid sizes like a kid size t shirt is super hard to print on. You know, this is the stuff that I would rather roll the dice on in my life and celebrate. Well see now in Portland, Oregon, it's not very fashionable to like love America, right? You have to have a bunch of tattoos and Pumas and shit up your neck and daggers on your arm and shit and say, you know, I love America. I love I love Portland, Oregon. I love the Midwest. I love what it's allowed me to do. You know, the sense of possibility that I have living here is is pretty incredible. And there's been stuff along the way that we've lost that I'm just trying to sort of like, I don't know, bring back maybe I don't know. Now, looking at this and walking in here and looking at all the wonderful stuff and seeing this. I want to show you these new posters I've been working on called the thick line series. And who here remembers finish art from the from their mid 70s? Right, right. Like, okay, my mom and dad were working people, but they would spend what little they had extra on Danske. Remember the brand Danske. So it was expensive for 1980, or 77, or whatever it was. But there's beautiful, modern, simple, utilitarian sort of forms and stuff. We were around that growing up right. Now also remember, you know, a lot of macro a lot of boots. A lot of brownish colors, a lot of hair in this, I remember that terry cloth in the early 80s. But I remember you on some uncle's wall, these big giant stretched canvas things with six and seven colors. And when I wouldn't look back, when I see them now it's at that cool store in Hawthorne, that's all the vintage stuff in there. 800 bucks. Now, I've had a good run, and I could probably pony up to get it. But that's sucks because I'm one of the lucky ones. And what happens when fuck it? I made them for 30 bucks. So I decided I'm just gonna make these things and get them out in the world and just celebrate color and form and this is called foliage. This is called sun rays. My new one is called peaks. And I probably give out more than I should you know, but the idea is simple colors. Simple forms. Yeah. Yeah.

A

Audience Member

His ideas then.... ...And then and then...

A

Aaron Draplin

Yeah, I mean, like what, you know, like this one to me, you know, with all due respect to Mr. Hiler, you know, it didn't even need the extra little tiny stuff. It still would have told that story of chaos or darkness in this little, you know, this little corner. But you know, getting back, I want to make these things. So like, I'm one of this big poster show. And I want a family to come up to this thing and not be like, you guys even know about the Portland bizarre coming up in a couple months here. Incredible afternoon, people making soaps and leather stuff, and just all cool stuff made in Portland. Some of the stuff is really expensive, you know, you walk up on it, and it's beautiful. But who's going to spend 200 bucks on a laptop bag? Someone does. But I'm just not interested in that. I want to make



things that Yeah, you can walk up and say my kid would like that in his room, you know? Because, you know? I don't know, does that make sense? I'm just not interested in making stuff. Now the funny part about this is in the right hands, these can be 150 bucks apiece, because there are six colors screen print. Then it's beautiful, archival paper, and Baba Baba, and I sell them for 30 that costs to because Lee roll them up into the two because, you know, for the printing and stuff. I don't make much. But I love the idea of getting these things in the world. And adding color to something you know, like cheap for something not even cheap. Just affordable. Right? So anyway, I've been making these things and selling these things. Little projects I've been doing with the sort of thick line thing. If you guys are familiar with Sub Pop records, right, some pop records? Hell yes. I was commissioned. This was a tough project. We want a Sasquatch overlooking Seattle. All right. Okay. Right. So I made that. And there he is, you know, looking over Seattle. And it's really like the most expressive line in the simplest line gets really tricky after a while, like was a myopic, like, you're suddenly macro micro macro, you know. But, you know, it's a little fun spirit thing. You know, this is my buddy had a, there's a cancer benefit forum. And there's this cat, and where there's the Mount Hood. He's a K, and we love them. I don't know what these are for. He loves Devo the band there's a little Devo when we got our hands on as Americans it's hard to get like even heard of Marushka, you know these are these incredible screen prints a lot of phones and if you could just imagine a couple seagulls and white on this sort of cream thing and orange sun setting and that's it. That's enough, right? Well, when you find those other and Goodwill's and stuff now. So when Target calls, always let them throw the number out first pro tip because they said we were doing this project for the X Games and Aspen and it's all about going back to the mountains. logos are taking a beating, because you know, you can go to a place now and get them for 4.99 Has anyone heard of this service? \$4 a minute. How much was coffee this morning was probably four bucks, right? To get a logo for the company made for five bucks for like 15 minutes, right? And yet that thing, or big logos that we're making don't work at this size. And then there really weren't really thought out to work in the side of your man, you know, it was thought out to work about this big on your website in a million colors, because that's what we're forced to worry about. Right, right. So I get calls now to like, simplify things to like, take stuff out, which is very interesting to me, you know that like, I don't know, that's, it's like, we're supposed to be paid to make things a little more complex. But I try to make logos that are just really simple. And you know, I just continue to go back to 19. I don't know 77 or something. And the reason why they were that way is because we didn't have computers and stuff and they had to like paint these things, you know, like, everyone knows the Bell Telephone logo, and I'm not the one from like, 1893 or whatever. They know the Saul Bass, because that thing is it's just perfect. It's perfection. It works this big, it works on the side of anywhere in the world, and you know, it's Bell Telephone Company or whatever that is that corporate case study is still refreshing to me.



You know, that's a weird word corporate, but it's refreshing to me because the the principles of the design will never go out of fashion. You know, certain things just make sense. When you're making a logo for a little company or something I try to I try to exhibit that in my work. I get hired for just that, which is fun and weird. Okay, well, moving right along. So this idea of wanderlust if this is if he was I know what the story is behind this. What if he was commissioned to make this this this portrait of, of San Francisco? And I don't know where this home? I don't know if it hung it like, you know, in some civic building there something. Sorry. Well, when I go do my talks, and I go all over the nation, design schools, nerd conferences, these big creative, you know, blowouts and stuff. I try to make a poster for everywhere I go, right? Because usually, you want to put my face on the poster, which is just challenging anyway, I mean, if you get a real good look at it, right. And it's such a waste of paper, you know, but when I can, I'll make my own poster for somewhere. And what I'll do is, it's just a service spirit piece, you get the sort of shape of somewhere, let's see here, the shape of Montana, right. And then you pack and I call these things, I love posters. And you pack in everything I've ever loved about Montana. So dead logos from old license plates, rubbing something off the side of some, you know, and I was in the park, their old Yellowstone and saving that logo, you know, like, what's the city logo for buildings, it's incredible, you'd never see it's gone. It's been redesigned three or four times, and it sucks now. But that's the classic one that you can buy on eBay, awesome old sign or something. So I'll find this stuff, clean it up, pop it in here and make the state right. And everything's pretty regional. Like, you know, eastern Montana is a tricky place. But you know, there's a lot of stuff out there. But over here is all the juicy part parts of Montana, of course, but I'll make these things. And yeah, there, you know, 2530 bucks when I go when I go to these talks where I you know, when I went to Denver, I made one for Colorado, you know, there's the Colorado colors, everything cool about, you know, be it from bands that I grew up on, for my buddy George collecting who lives down in pagoda. But as a way to be like, I don't want to put my face in a poster that maybe a couple fans of the show are going to buy. I want to make something you could take home to your parents, right? Like my mom and dad would find this sort of like they're pretty cool liberal people. But they would find it sort of like, Oh, that's kind of cool. This is pretty gross, right? Every fluorescent color and get a sort of an homage to South Korea, which is I who loves South Dakota, I love South Dakota, you know. And if you go to South Dakota, you go to those weird trinket shops. Everything back in the day used to be these creepy wrestling colors. We don't really do that anymore, you know, which is just sad. I will, of course, love Iowa. And there's everything is I'm up to about 40 of the 50 states now. I saw these on my site. It was too big to bring here. But you ought to see it. Oh, it's incredible, right? Oh, but it's all my bait. My all my buddies are all my buddies bands are in it, you know, all the brands I've worked on or in my Oregon poster, all the guys who came to Oregon with the like stories kind of right. But I think the thing is, is like, I'm really interested in making stuff that sort of everyone could enjoy, or at least up a little more than only those who get it or

something or those who take the time to like, study why it's ironic or no, you can just walk up to this shit kind of say I'm from there. And that's a dead logo off that. They made that in Ohio or wherever, you know, whatever I've gone after. That's just my buddy Dana, challenging face. But the Bill Bryson's from there, you know, there's my little, you know, just you pack up the space. And in my travels, I've been taking photos of America for years. And it's not necessarily me, of course, the big landscape looking over Missouri or whatever, like the Mississippi, we're just in Miss Missouri, looking on the Mississippi River. But I've always been interested in the sign that says Be careful for floods, because always some prude incredible icon not made by a kick ass Madison Avenue designer, made by someone who works for like the Missouri Department of Transportation. That's American design, you know, so I've been taking photos that stuff for years. And now I just kind of slam in here and I don't even know if I'm allowed to, but it's all good fun. You know, it's all good. Like it go back into the 80s and look at like logos from affiliate TV stuff. You will find incredible shit within that seven, channel seven days. Okay. So let me see. All right. To make a T shirt for Oregon, that doesn't have like a trailblazer on or something I don't know. You can see here's a T shirt I made for Oregon. There's some big Oregon and the Sun and, you know, the diversity that we have here with, you know, the mountains in the forest and the water ocean. That's for the raindrop of Portland, you know, Or the space shuttle shirt which I have sold a mountain of these things to. Well, Space Shuttle enthusiasts of all ages. So anyhow, that's pretty much the pile of treasures I brought. I hope that was sort of interesting. Your comment was incredible. Who's got more comments we can fill up the time is this Draplin.com Draplin.com But that's what I do. This thing grabbed me for these sort of reasons of the work I make. Was that interesting. Yeah, come on, blow. I need to leave here feeling like you know, this one was because these these turkeys I'm going to see in Boston this weekend. No sweat. These guys will line them up. No sweat. Yes, sir. Yeah, I'll give you a poster. Sure.

A

Audience Member

I can recommend a book for you. If you haven't read it yet. Tells whole story of the WPA,

A

Aaron Draplin

which one

A

Audience Member

American expressionism. You know that book?

A

Aaron Draplin

no. I've got a lot of Lester Beale stuff.

A

Audience Member

This is the best story I've seen. It starts out by a guy who buys this warehouse and finds all these canvases that are rolled up. And the first thing is going to sell them as insulation for plumbing, many stresses there. They're all the stuff that's been thrown away but the WPA Yeah. And they said, Well, maybe I could get more money by selling peacemeal as art. And this is this basically tells the story of how how the WPA work was it was. artists were common people doing art for common people, and how that flash or was stepped on by the abstract expressionist movement. Know, the Clement Greenberg That was the story of how that period of history was basically wiped out, by the way.

A

Aaron Draplin

My right. Well, when you look at Lester Beal, and I wish I had something to show you. But really, it's three shapes. You know, it's a white, it's a crude little just simple, thick line washer with a little zz above it. It's basically the rural electrification administration, we're gonna bring electricity to where people couldn't even read in Appalachia. So these three pictograms or icons could tell them, you're going to get power lines, which means you can run a washing machine now, right? He made a poster series for that. That's what I did my half assed dissertation on in college was just the idea of like, three guys I work with every year, you know, the moment I sense they're going to trump that they're play that card me then I'll do this whole you know, you guys still in business this kind of shit to them just because it you know when you're working on Delta or Visa or Nike, of course they're going to be in business forever but in my life my buddies bands die, you know, or their food carts die their restaurants die It sucks to see it but they even for two years at someone got to do it. It's pretty cool. Yeah, I'll just kind of mess with those guys. Basically, making an argument for sincerity and art, that it really should be sincere to that countercultural and you're kind of saying that the portal, the boss has a bit of insincerity, and it's a little bit pony. With the kind of cliches and things sudden, do you think that look at this, it will inspire them, though? they'll change though they'll become more sincere? I don't think so. I don't know. But I mean, to answer that, because it's like, what I see at least amongst the ranks of the guys I work with, or whatever, there's tends to be mediocrity sometimes, and even the cool stuff that you feed to people to go buy it, right, right. Like, we make these things. And people buy them from neat knickknacks and art museum stores and stuff, right? But I start to see a sameness based on trend. And based on what's cool, right now, it's cool to everyone's make a maker, right? I'm making, I'm a maker, I make things that's great, you know that, that's great. I'm Me, too. I'm not gonna make a T shirt that says

make more or something, you know, I'm not gonna do that, you know, that's great. So I, you know, I, I would just the optimum reaction that I would love, people would walk up to and go, I haven't seen that in a while. But that's a new take all this other complexity? Well, that's cool. We put all the dead logos from Montana into a poster. I haven't seen that yet. And I have a lot of kids who ate me and say all you haven't done Michigan yet, we're going to do it. They don't take the time, you know, the 14 ounce up, you know, if you're gonna challenge the throne, you better you know, better put the time in. But I love that stuff. But I don't know about that, you know, I I want it in the simplest form. I want to make things, the fun stuff I showed you that people enjoy. It doesn't break the bank to own it. You know, like, I just got these no muscle movement jelly cup sets off of ebay for like 75 bucks. I got the whole unit. And it really simple shapes. Beautiful utilitarian design. And they're just great for holding pencils or something. Right? And I don't know what that costs. They were for sale at MoMA in 1977. I don't know what what they I don't know, if they were expensive. I know when I go to MoMA, the things that are in there, they're expensive to buy that cool stapler or some shit, right? I want to make those things like that's why I like Target. I like going to every fashionable to say it. And I like IKEA. Because a kid can go from a dorm room. Any any kid who's lucky to go to college can go outfit their dorm room for a couple hundred bucks. That is designed for everybody. That's really cool. Now that's not very fashionable to say here in Portland. Because you know, people I've had people come to the house and kind of Oh IKEA, huh? You know, like, yes. And yellow mustard. Yeah, yellow mustard, you know, some asshole stone grounding in the back with oils and shit. Right? That's Portland. But I like yellow mustard. Anyway. This is getting all hot, sweaty. Any questions? Let's go have some wine or no? Interesting, I'll ask you spoke it was an interesting sort of, would you buy a poster? If you buy a poster if you were interested in not afraid of the hard sell? Well, you know what I'm saying? Like, you know, I don't know. Well, thank you for coming.

A

### Audience Member

I appreciate the simplicity. And you're obviously that is important in this day with many much broken technologies. It's nice to see that there are people who can actually create things that I take it back the other.

A

### Aaron Draplin

So here you guys takes a while. I mean, we'll just sit here just in here we got 1, 2, 3, 4 just tear some of these things apart and play with them here. I'll just start with you. And as he tear him apart, and guys take all have a couple Field Notes here. You know, here's something. here's here's a space shuttle sticker for everybody skateboard, or whatever you want to go, sir. Right. There you go for passing. So you open them up. They got a

sticker for you. So like a sticker. All right, ma'am, join us. I,

of course.

A

Aaron Draplin

Give a couple more of these guys back there. All right, thanks for coming. We have a couple more here. We have a steno book. My mom was a stenographer at Chrysler back in the day, and she helped me do all the copy on the inside of this, and sort of deciphered all the little cool little things. Like who even knows this stenography is?

A

Audience Member

Can she do the shorthand?

A

Aaron Draplin

Still can. Mom is 69. Right. So she helped me with that. And that's a sort of an homage to my mom, right? Like writing stuff in a steno book. That's our style book. We just made these little arts and science books. So who needs you take these right, there you go. Who needs a nice steno book here for making notes? Come on. Someone put an arm up. There you are, sir. All right.

A

Audience Member

I saw your TED talk.

A

Aaron Draplin

Were you in the crowd?

A

Audience Member

Yeah, I was.

A

Aaron Draplin

I had to go first.

A

Audience Member

Yeah you did. You totally broke the ice.

A

Aaron Draplin

Did I? Was it fun?

A

Audience Member

It was very inspiring.

A

Aaron Draplin

Did you do you like what was your reaction? Why this is something? We're all friends here. What was your reaction when it when this walked out because I still think about it like it's freaky.

A

Audience Member

Well I did think you did a very good job of prefacing your talk with maybe...

A

Aaron Draplin

you could feel the like your voice go. And then you could feel the laugh come it's real weird. You know, 3000 people is a scary thing. You know, it's like, that was more of a declaration of like, nice to meet you. But I don't need to see ever again you know something like that. Yes sir.

A

Audience Member

Your experience in Portland -- I'm a native. One of the few. I'm just curious - How long have you been here?

A

Aaron Draplin

14 years.



A

Audience Member

Yeah, So you've seen a lot of big changes

A

Aaron Draplin

Sure,

A

Audience Member

but I'm sure that they the town and the feel has had impact on on your creative. Oh, yes. But what's happening now? I think it's really scary. Because there's more money coming in this town I've never seen before in my life. And I my theory, my feeling what I see three blocks away from my house, is this changing everything that I've known. You think that's gonna affect how you interpret what's going on?

A

Aaron Draplin

well, what I loved about this town when I came here was the idea that my car wouldn't get stolen here. Like in Detroit from you know, that's what you were battling when you're 18 in Detroit. You'll see some band here you could park number one, it was safe. You go see the band you're going to see and come back out your car is there you know, like, there's a there's a it's like a baby city to me. It's got everything a city should have been not words like San Francisco where it's like ominous or it's like hard to get into or it's like, like beats you up over the course of a day. And sometimes it's hard to get around, you know, in a big city, like LA just is exhausting. Here in 1993 we could park and walk downtown. And you could still do that here, you know,

A

Audience Member

What I'm saying is in five years, that may change.

A

Aaron Draplin

Well, I mean, I was able to buy a house here, I was able to start a business here. I was able, it allowed me to really do. There were enough examples around me of cool record stores and things to say if they could do it. I could do it. There wasn't a fear based kind of shit like back home, or you're afraid to do it. No, here it can. How can but that goes all the way back to like hippies being on the city council or something. We didn't have that where I was from, you know, that's why I stayed here. You know? No, and is telling me to vote for

Palin here, right? That's what happens when I go home and I can't it just I can't handle as much as that makes me freak out to stand just feel like come on. That's kind of what I love about it, too. You know that. Oh, man well thank you

A

### Audience Member

World's largest yard sale. What did you get?

A

### Aaron Draplin

oh geez well this is something like that. I mean we got this thing called the world's like Toledo highway 127 all the way to Gadson, Alabama You know, and it's just a battle so much because first of all, the only reason it's out in that field is because someone died. like, because you found it and so someone died you find in your backyard or when he was still looking something, you know, there's no science, so I mess with a lot of that. And then, like we went, I got this big thermo forum. Napa, you're with the Napa trucks that drive around the big, the big hat on the top right. I got one of those hats, and the guy in the field. I walked up to him and everything was really, really cheap. And my one buddies was like that's only five bucks. I gave him he has 10 I gave him 20 it freaked him out because I am really lucky to have that, but that hat is gonna be great. I'm gonna make it paint with my own colors, all the stuff I make, you know. he can have the profit that you know what I mean? Like I just do that a lot to where it's not gonna dicker but if you sense that some you know good old boys gonna kind of size me up because you know I have all my teeth or some shit or whatever the things are that I'll go to battle with them you know, science you have to have this much. Now there's a lot of ways you can mess with that. If you guys don't take the time I'll teach you a little trick. Okay. So when you go into your little and not antique malls are tricky because the science is really really, really big there but you walk in and there's a pile of stuff. And you have your space shuttle t shirt collector, you have to have it you walk in there it is. The first thing you never do is go well, how much he askin, you know, whatever. So, the stupid Sun t shirt, you gotta go. What are you asking on this Sun t shirt? Like, it's you got to shame them. And here's the rule. If they say 10 bucks, it's the 30% rule. You just say, I wouldn't pay more than three bucks for that. And then the guys pissed off, you know, you got them kind of weak. And you kind of go, No, you want three you want 10 for this. I'm only going to do three put it down and stomp away. Two steps away. The guys gonna say seven. Now you got them. You go back and you kind of say, I wouldn't pay seven. I only pay two or three bucks. Tell you what, how much in the space shuttle and that's what they say it's 50 cents and then you walk out Okay,



thank you.



Jon Richardson

Thank you for listening to The Portland Art Museum Podcast. If you enjoyed this Artist Talk, I encourage you to visit [youtube.com/PortlandArtMuseum](https://youtube.com/PortlandArtMuseum). If you're listening to this around the day comes out. The next Artist Talk takes place on May 16, and features artist and art educator Sharita Towne. The Artist Talks are one of the longest running public programs here at the Museum and I encourage you to check them out. We are a community-driven podcast and our episode themes are chosen by you, the audience. If you have an idea you'd like to explore with us fill out the form at [pam.to/podcastidea](https://pam.to/podcastidea), and we'll do our best to bring your idea to life. If you haven't already, feel free to subscribe to the podcast on your favorite podcast app. And if you have a moment we'd love it if you would rate and review should your preferred podcast app give you that option. I'd like to thank Aaron Draplin, Stephanie Parrish, the Museum's Associate Director of Programs, and you, the listener.