

Classic Posters - Interview with Casey Burns by Michael Erlewine

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Michael Erlewine: WHEN and HOW did you get interested in art in general, and posters in particular?

Casey Burns: I've been drawing since I can remember, since I could hold a crayon, I suppose. Later on, I discovered comic books, and they continue to be an inspiration to me. When I was thirteen, I discovered the comics that are to this day my favorites: Will Eisner's 'The Spirit' (1940s and 50s) and the entire line of EC Comics from the 50s (Tales From the Crypt, Weird Science, Frontline Combat, etc). In the past couple of years, I have gotten all the hardcover reprints of these, and they continue to inspire me. These artists also pointed me in the direction of their influences: illustrators like Booth, NC Wyeth, Coll, etc.

I got turned onto poster art when I was fifteen. I started saving all the cool flyers that were made for shows at a club called Squashpile in Asheville, NC. Soon I was in my first band, and started making my own flyers. When I was sixteen I learned how to screen-print shirts, and when I got to college, I started screen-printing posters, taking cues from the few Frank Kozik posters I had seen. I found that making posters was the perfect hybrid between my two loves: art and music.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of art influenced you?

Casey Burns: As I said earlier, comic book artists were and are a major influence. As I got older, I discovered Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele, and was blown away by their figure

drawings, especially their women. I also started looking more at the nouveau posters of Alphonse Mucha and Toulouse Lautrec.

A few years ago, I befriended George Pratt, who had been one of my favorite comic artists and painters. He introduced me to the work of Jeffrey Jones, who has become a major influence on my ink drawings. George, himself, is also a heavy influence. George also introduced me to the work of Eduard Thony, a German artist who did a wealth of color illustrations for a weekly magazine called Simplicissimus. Very inspiring stuff.

Michael Erlewine: What concert-posters artists influenced you?

Casey Burns: Early on, Frank Kozik was an inspiration, if for no other reason than he was the only silkscreen poster artist I knew of. Later in my teens I discovered Victor Moscoso. Current influences would include Dan Grzeca, Nick Butcher, Dale Flattum, Ron Liberti, and Ocho Loco Press. My work may not show much similarity to theirs, but they definitely make me want to make better posters.

Michael Erlewine: What was your first concert-music poster (date, venue, bands)?

Casey Burns: First Xerox flyer was for my band Red No. 5, and our friends Xiola Blue, in September of 1992 at a teen center called The Hangar in Hendersonville, NC. First screen printed poster was for The Martians, Bughummer, and Cobra Kahn, January 28, 1996, at Local 506 in Chapel Hill NC.

Michael Erlewine: What are the main venues you have done posters for?

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Casey Burns:

Cat's Cradle (Carrboro, NC)

Go! Room 4 (Carrboro, NC)

The Ritz (now called Disco Rodeo),
(Raleigh, NC)

Michael Erlewine: What are the main bands you have done posters for?

Casey Burns: Too many to list. But I have done several for Guided by Voices, Lucinda Williams, Superchunk, and Tift Merritt.

Michael Erlewine: Please describe the media and size/formats you have most used?

Casey Burns: I've used xerox, screenprinting, and linoleum cuts, mostly. Paper varies from notebook paper to chipboard.

Michael Erlewine: What other poster artists have you collaborated with?

Casey Burns: George Pratt (not a poster artist, but he is an award winning illustrator and painter), Mike Martin (Engine House 13). And I'd love to collaborate with Dan Grzeca, Dale Flattum, and Ron Liberti.

Michael Erlewine: Who are your favorite current poster artists?

Casey Burns: Dan Grzeca, Dale Flattum (TOOTH), Ocho Loco Press, Ron Liberti, Nick Butcher.

Michael Erlewine: What are your favorite bands?

Casey Burns: Led Zeppelin, Wire, AC/DC, Fugazi, The Jesus Lizard, Harvey Milk, Sonic Youth, The Glands.

Michael Erlewine: You comments on artistic philosophy, world views, anything:

Casey Burns: For me, doing posters is a chance to make the streets look better. How cool is it when you stumble on a nice poster on the street? My philosophy is make it look good, and people will read the poster, and then go to the show.

I have some strange passion to make these posters, I suppose. It's a great way to get my artwork in front of people, and it's really flattering that so many people treat these posters as if they are works of art. I love the process. Not knowing exactly what the poster will look like until I lay down the last color. It's very satisfying.

Michael Erlewine: Please list any poster shows of your work (dates and place):

Casey Burns:

Paintings and posters on display on 1994 Lollapalooza tour

Product: 23 Screenprints by Casey Burns. Dr. Quang's Gallery, Chapel Hill, NC, May-June 1998.

Faces: Monotypes by Casey Burns. Open Eye Cafe, Carrboro, NC, December 2000 - January 2001.

Stuck Up: The Poster art of Casey Burns, Dale Flattum, and Ron Liberti. Design Box, Raleigh, NC, September - October 2003

Flatstock 2, 3, 4. Austin and Seattle. 2003-2004.

One of five speakers at AIGA sponsored "Seen and Heard" lecture at Flatstock/SXSW, Austin TX, March 18, 2004.