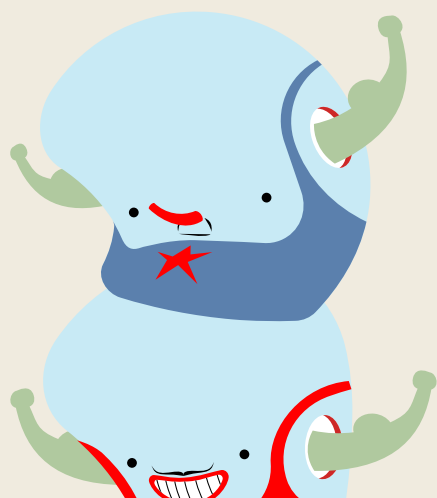
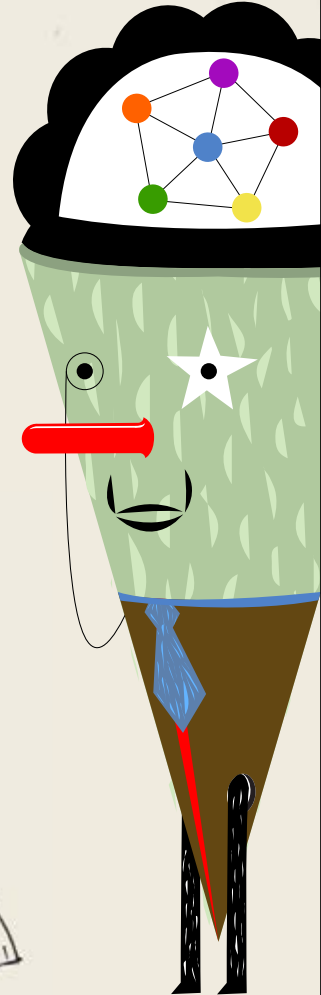
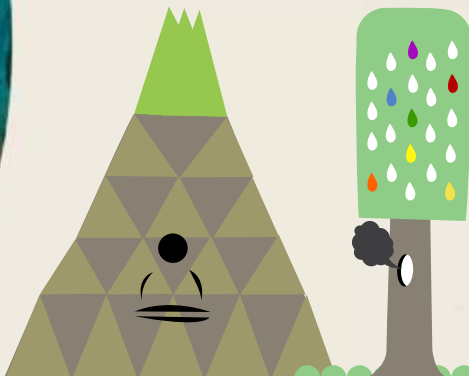


# SID LEE COLLECTIVE

*The Sid Lee creative incubator and its projects*





# SID LEE COLLECTIVE

*The Sid Lee creative incubator and its projects. / Another **SID LEE** fanzine*

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Hello, we're  
Sid Lee  
Collective



Frédéric Gauthier,  
director and curator,  
Sid Lee Collective

To embed our clients' BRANDS, PRODUCTS, spaces and services with greater meaning and resonance, Montreal-based marketing firm SID LEE has assembled ONE OF THE



Our 250 talented artisans WORK for a global array of TOP-TIER CLIENTS from our Montreal and Amsterdam ateliers.



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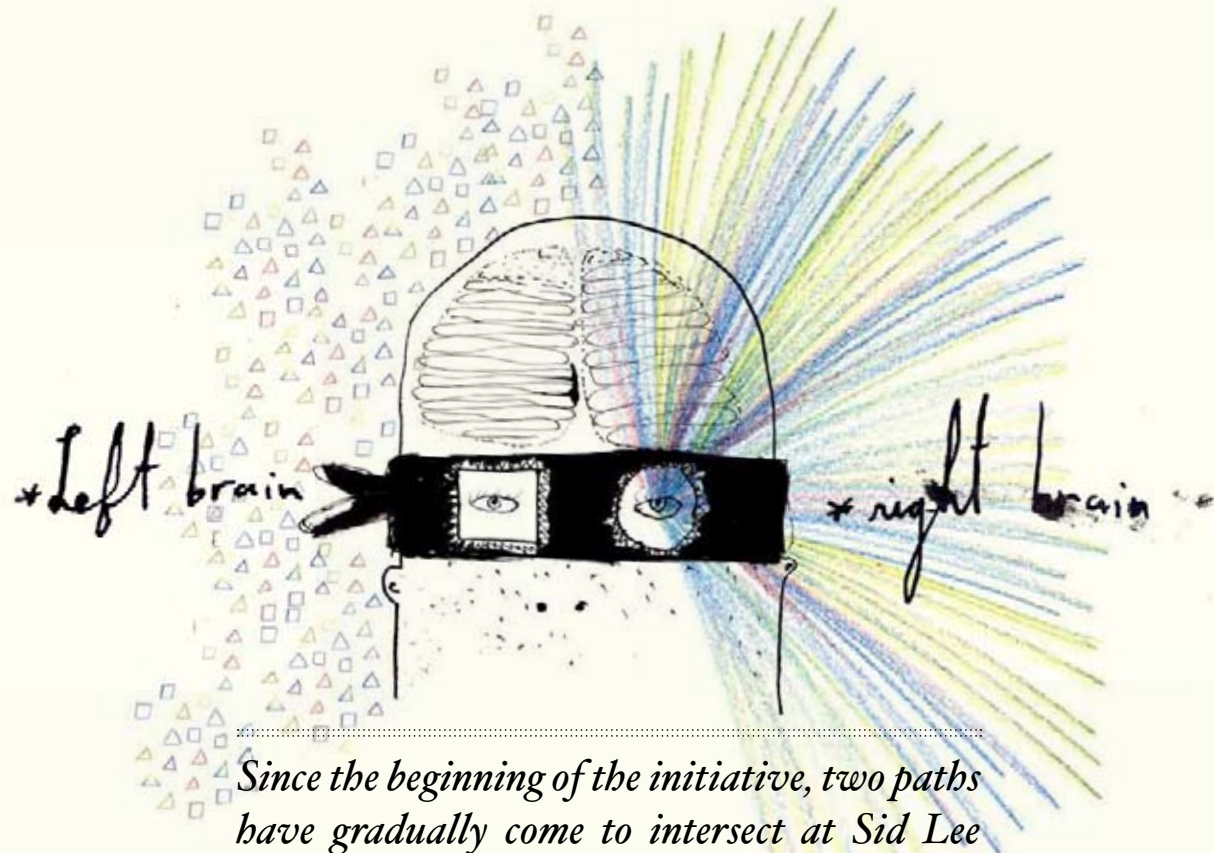
*Think of Sid Lee Collective as an incubator that allows our team to push the boundaries of creativity even further, by initiating cultural and commercial projects in the fields of the visual arts, industrial design, music, publishing and more. The predecessor of this incubator was an in-house project called After Hours, through which employees could submit personal projects to a committee and, if accepted, receive a bursary.*



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*As the term “collective” suggests, accepted projects can draw in designers and creative directors from the wide range of staff at Sid Lee, to push the idea to the finish line and give it exposure. Sid Lee’s infrastructure allows these ideas to materialize amid the company’s daily activities—a win-win situation for everyone!*

*Sid Lee Collective also owns and operates a Creativity Emporium in Amsterdam. Open to the public, the space caters to creative minds with its store, gallery and café/bar.*



*Since the beginning of the initiative, two paths have gradually come to intersect at Sid Lee Collective. One is artistic, allowing the creators to pursue their flights of fancy through publications, installations and exhibitions throughout Montreal and on to New York City, Amsterdam and farther still.*

*The other path, which has grown stronger in the last year, is commercial. It includes the development of furniture, kitchenware and T-shirts, for starters, which will find their way to the shelves of the new Sid Lee Collective boutique in Amsterdam. The purpose of this busy activity is to ultimately give birth to a distinct Sid Lee Collective brand, versatile enough to incorporate fashion and furnishings, music and videos.*

*Is your curiosity piqued? Read on, and we'll tell you what the Sid Lee Collective has done — and what we've got lined up next!*

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

# Art WHILE YOU WAIT

**Alvaro Pérez del Solar**  
AT SID LEE COLLECTIVE GALLERY

Even a short wait in the reception area of most businesses can be a trying experience. It's hard to relieve tedium with magazines that seem as though they were purposefully written to be as boring as possible, and only a botanist can stare at a potted fern for longer than a few seconds.

This isn't the case at Sid Lee's Montreal headquarters. Along the wall of the hallway facing the reception desk is what's called the Sid Lee Collective Gallery, and its rotating exhibitions by artists from inside and outside Sid Lee would put many a full-scale art gallery to shame.

The notorious Roadsworth, a clandestine Canadian street artist whose clever, guerrilla-style alterations of public spaces—walls, sidewalks, civil structures—are in the tradition of the U.K.'s celebrated Banksy, had his works on display at the Sid Lee Collective Gallery.

More recently, it's the paintings of Alvaro Pérez del Solar, an art director at Sid Lee, that have filled the walls. Hailing from Lima, Peru, Montreal-based Pérez del Solar draws on the folk art and magic realism of his Latino roots and weaves that together with a very current and global graffiti sensibility, and a knack for lively, vivid compositions. His works will also hang at the Sid Lee Collective gallery in Amsterdam in November 2008.

"My work explores the dark side of the human experience with a characteristically surreal sense of humour," says Pérez del Solar, "creating worlds that are often disturbing—but delightfully so. Body parts are sliced off with childlike abandon, vibrant colours fly in the face of mortality, and terror, never tamed, is unbridled to the point of something resembling joy."

The title of Pérez del Solar's exhibition at Sid Lee Collective Gallery is *Lindas Pesadillas*. "The name translates to 'pretty nightmares,'" he explains. "The work, therefore, represents that constant juxtaposition of beauty and terror, joy and hideousness. 'O death, where is thy sting?' In my exhibition, death is far more likely to ask you to dance." ■







# THE CONCEPT

## THE SID LEE COLLECTIVE SCOOTER

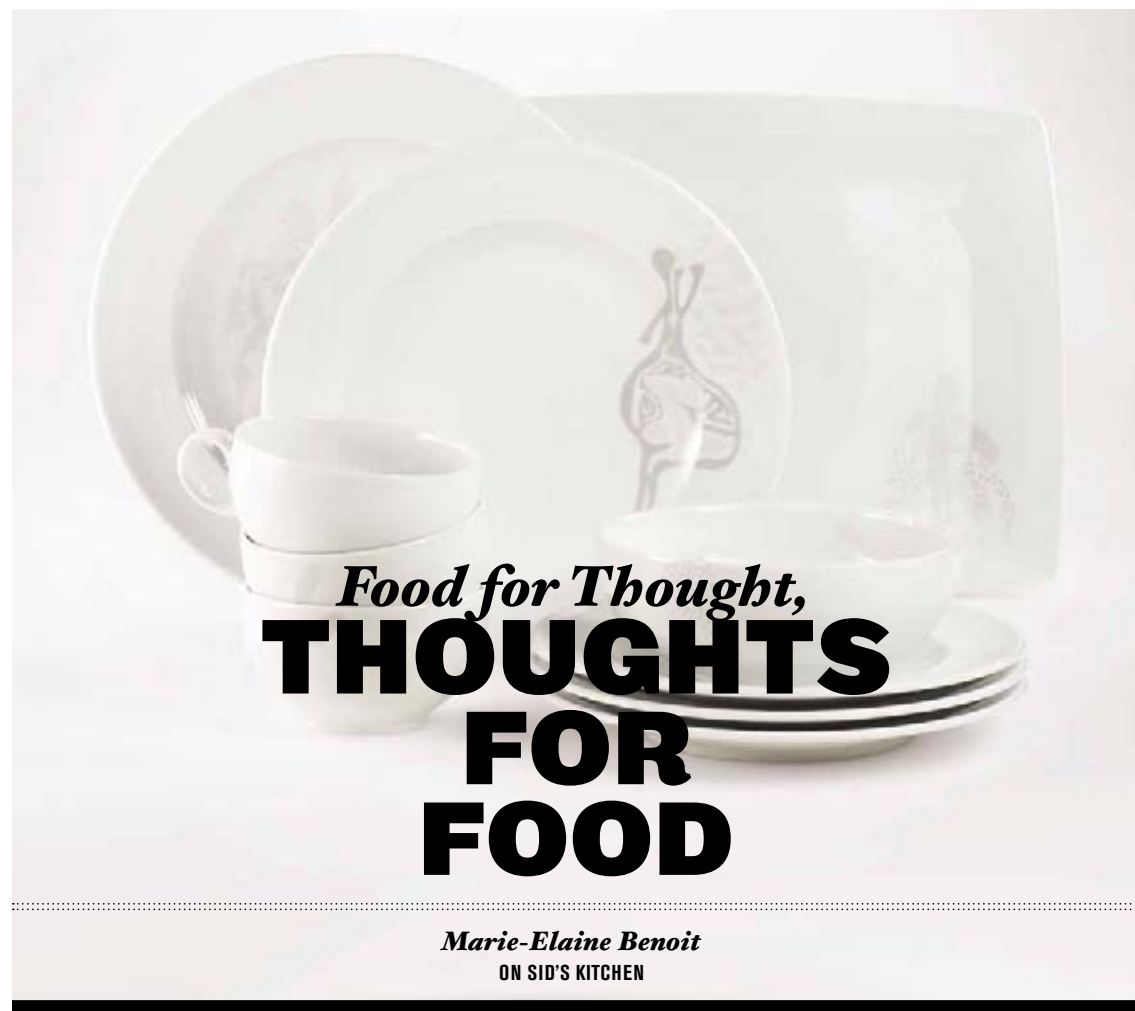
Hugely popular amongst scooter aficionados, the MP3 is an engineering marvel. Design-wise, it could use a little help.

What if a gang of creatives had their way with it?

This project is the fruit of a collaboration between Sid Lee Collective, the R&D department, and the über-creative Sid Lee team. Hand in hand, a group of artisans from our Montreal office set out to reinvent the MP3.

The end product: *Cyclop.*





*Food for Thought,*  
**THOUGHTS  
FOR  
FOOD**

**Marie-Elaine Benoit**  
ON SID'S KITCHEN

Perhaps you remember those special bowls and dishes from your childhood, the ones your mom used to dupe you into eating unwelcome dinner choices. Maybe they had a clown or a bunny rabbit printed at the bottom—eat all the pureed squash and you'll see the bunny! A dirty trick, but an effective one, time and time again.

Hopefully you're enjoying your dinners more today, but it's still fun to find a surprise hidden underneath. In the case of the Sid's Kitchen line of tableware, you'll uncover a little food for thought.

"I cook with wine, sometimes I even add it to food," says one piece, borrowing a bon mot from old-time American comedian W.C. Fields, renowned for his fondness for alcohol.

Other pieces quote celebrated American writers like Mark Twain ("Part of the secret to success in life is to eat what you like and let the food fight it out inside") and Ambrose Bierce ("Good to eat and wholesome to digest, as a worm to a toad, a toad to a snake, a snake to a pig, a pig to a man, a man to a worm").

"We decided to design a collection of dishes—plates, bowls, coffee cups," says Sid Lee's Marie-Élaine Benoit, a key player in the creation of the Sid's Kitchen lines.

"We brainstormed about everything we could put on them, and settled on quotes, illustrated quotes on nutrition and food."

Benoit, a native of Granby, Quebec, who's been with Sid Lee since 2002, isn't the type to leave the type plain. "When I was young, I was always drawing typefaces and logos in my notebooks for school."

That explains why the dishes use handcrafted typefaces and graphics, playfully knitted together. "The quotes were chosen for being visually inspirational, for telling a story about food or digestion. The idea at first was to invite a lot of illustrators to draw the different quotes and collections, but finally we only did two different collections."

Benoit herself handles one group, using a subtle grey-on-grey scheme, while the other, more colourful line was crafted by Valerie Picard.

"The dishes are made in Portugal, good porcelain—high-class dishes," says Benoit. "They're dishes you can use every day, but on special days too."

The final test came when Benoit dined off the dishes herself. "I tried it," she says, "and I liked it!" ■





# Pillow TALK



Eva Van den Bulcke's  
SCHLOF

**"YOU COULD EVEN HAVE PEOPLE WHO ARE POLITICALLY OPPOSED AND PUT THEM IN THE SAME BED, BECAUSE WE'RE EQUAL IN OUR SLEEP."**

It's perhaps unsurprising that an art project on the theme of sleep should have sprung from a bout of insomnia, from which Eva Van Den Bulcke suffered several years ago. "Whenever I was sleeping with friends or boyfriends or whatever, I would always watch them because I couldn't sleep," says Belgian-born Van Den Bulcke, who's been with the Sid Lee team for a decade and a partner for three.

"I envied them because they could sleep, but on the other hand, it was interesting to look at them without them knowing. They had no expressions. I thought that was kind of pure, I felt I could see them as they really were for once."

A photographer since her early teens ("by 13, I had my own darkroom and spent all my time in there," she recalls), Van Den Bulcke recognized what inherently fascinating, honest and cooperative subjects sleeping people might be. She gradually established a pattern for portrait shots, many of which were of complete strangers—an etiquette for an intimate, even invasive process.

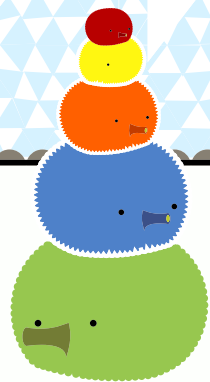
"They would know I was coming several days before, I would have a key or they would leave their door unlocked. I would arrive when the sun was rising, go into their room very quietly, open the curtains to have natural lighting, and then—well, some people sleep very deeply and others are very anxious in their sleep, they wake up very easily."

Straddling her subjects, Van Den Bulcke would snap a few shots before her subjects opened their eyes—in some cases, it was their first meeting. While pondering possible presentations of her portraits—oversize prints on blankets, hung vertically, perhaps—Van Den Bulcke ran a few tests on pillowcases. The bulkiness gave the images an artificial depth—"a trompe l'oeil effect"—and she realized she'd found her medium.

"It's not like art that you only see in a gallery. It becomes an object you can play with, an everyday object. The funny part is the part I like, because art can be too serious."

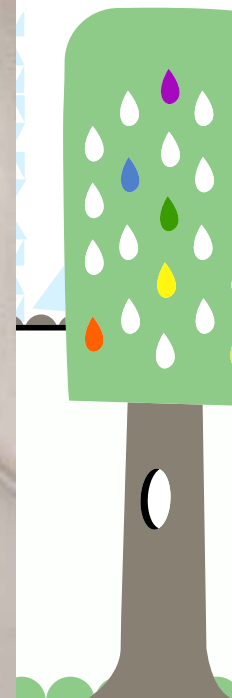
The series of pillowcase portraits was christened *Schlof*, and a store-window exhibition on Boulevard St-Laurent in Montreal spun out into on-the-spot commissions. While the industrial turnover and faked sleep of her subjects were hardly ideal, she's proud of the funds she raised for Dans La Rue, a Montreal organization for homeless youth. Installations in New York City and Quebec City followed.

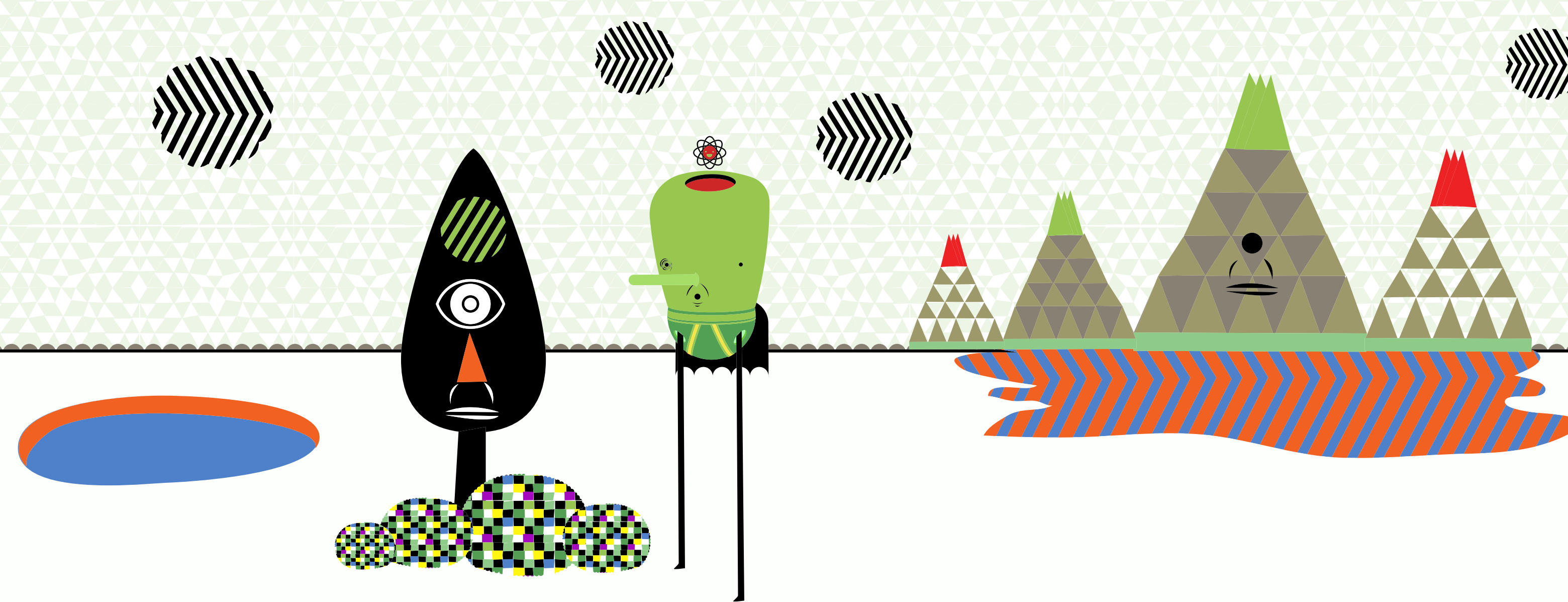
Van Den Bulcke hasn't put *Schlof* to bed quite yet. The idea of taking the process abroad appeals to her. "You could even have people who are politically opposed and put them in the same bed, because we're equal in our sleep." ■



*Website of*  
**OUTTA-SIGHT  
INSIGHTS**

*Jacques Languirand and Kristian Manchester*  
ON GLOBOLOGOS.COM





“Interesting, useful and amusing—in any order.” That’s what renowned Montrealer Jacques Languirand requires each of his many creative efforts to be, whether on stage, on air, on film, on paper or now, in the case of the *globologos.com* website on which he collaborated with Sid Lee, online.

Reclining amid the lush greenery on the rooftop patio of his Westmount home/archive/studio, Languirand is too humble when he calls himself “a jack-of-all-trades, master of none.”

This playwright, professor, essayist, broadcaster, actor and explorer of ideas, is a recipient of the Order of Canada. He took to radio at 18 while “in exile” in Paris in 1949, and since then has made his mark as a maverick intellect across the spectrum of print, broadcast and performance media in Quebec and Canada, among other things with his projects at

the Expo 67 World Fair in Montreal.

Since 1971, Languirand has hosted his radio show, *Par 4 chemins*, on Radio-Canada. Formerly a nightly fixture on French-language radio, it’s now a weekly, four-hour Sunday broadcast. Supplemented with musical moments, it’s an unhurried hike through a landscape of ideas, from the social to the ecological and on to the spiritual. *Par 4 chemins* has such a firm following that it’s earned, yes, a Guinness record for the longest-running show by one host on one station.

“It’s become something—not a phenomenon, but something a bit out of the ordinary,” muses Languirand. “The idea is to be useful and agreeable. I use the show as a platform to pass along lots and lots of information. I have many older listeners, of my generation, but my target is really the young people.”

Among that target demographic, Languirand attracted the attention of the Sid Lee team’s Kristian Manchester, who proposed a highly interactive website drawing based on Languirand’s writings, themes and ideas.

“I liked their approach, I found it very interesting, and I was flattered,” recalls Languirand. “It would be a good way to reach young people. I left [the Sid Lee team] complete liberty. They were the ones who chose the themes. For me, it was very stimulating and helpful, leading me to be more rigorous with my show—I said to myself, if these people need this information, I have to work hard on it.

“I don’t intervene much in the concepts they bring out. I react, but I don’t interfere, because it’s their concept, their project.”

“I’ve been in communications for

13 years and I did about eight years of purely Web stuff,” says Manchester. “I saw all kinds of experimental sites that unfortunately were often based on cool graphics, nice visuals, and a small idea—no substance. So the goal was to grab good substance and make a nice, experiential site which had that candy-coated approach where you want to dive in and have what Jacques calls an ‘initiatory voyage,’ where you get lost and learn stuff.

“We want to trick the consumer. People see it and say, wow, that’s just a great Flash site, but all of a sudden, they’re confronted with these thought-provoking texts.

“Nobody would ever hear of this project seeing the light of day, as there’s no economic value or purpose, no payoff other than just giving content back to the Web. That’s why I’m so happy about



Sid Lee Collective having the vision to back me up on this.”

The initial challenge was distilling Languirand’s wide-ranging and expansive ideas to their essence, and dividing them into a series of themes of human experience, each defined by a single word—Action, Hope, Chronos, Adaptation, Consumption, Destiny and 14 more.

The name “Globologos” means “a world of ideas and meaning,” and the meaning of each word is taken very seriously. “A lot of people just grab a word, take the first level of meaning and use that to sell something,” says Manchester.

Not so with Globologos. “Each word could have a 10-page document attached, but we wanted it to be concise, for the Web format. That was a challenge for Jean-François Alain, who did all

the condensation of the texts.”

“Of course we’re not covering the subjects entirely,” says Languirand, “but the major things are there, and they can be useful—tools to think!”

“And all the hyperlinks are there,” adds Manchester, referring to the “further reading” links each theme includes.

The next step was a structure that made exploring the themes fun. That quite literally evolved from the idea, relating of each topic to a cute micro-organism, creating a playful cartoon landscape of neat characters representing the themes. The critters and their world were crafted by Spanish artist/designer Martin Allais, and an evocative yet unobtrusive soundscape was added by Simon Williams.

The completed realm of Globologos wasn’t the final product, but really just the beginning. Interesting artworks

were submitted for most themes, examples being the fascinating subculture photos of Louis-Thomas Pelletier’s hilarious short film for “Self-Indulgence” and Julien Vallée’s confounding, delightful animated clip for “Insanity.”

Some themes, however, offer only a “submit artwork” link, and it’s there that the real purpose of globologos.com becomes clear. It’s not their website, it’s theirs and yours and everyone’s.

“We kind of want it to be another form of Wikipedia,” says Manchester, “where people can contribute to the themes, send artwork and new links, and build up this community-based thing. What we need now is a way to communicate that, to get it out in the open.”

A good start in that respect are public, in-the-flesh events. “We created this evening at the SAT (Société des Arts Technologiques, in Montreal).

All the local directors and a couple of artists got together—it was very organic and fresh. We’d like to have it be part of a couple of different festivals. We’re trying to export this little group and see how other, international artists can graft themselves to it. It’s one of those things where you’ve planted it, you hope it grows and adds up, and we’re already seeing that.

“I don’t want to give the impression that we have all the knowledge, that we know about everything,” says Languirand. “We know about some things here and there, but please, if you have something to say, say it. Express yourself!” ■

# Lives on MARS

Martin Villeneuve's  
MARS ET AVRIL



The two volumes of the Mars et Avril books written—and, one is tempted to add, directed—by Montrealer Martin Villeneuve seem scientifically engineered to create headaches for librarians and bookstores. On which shelf does one rack a hybrid, a chimera, a clever mingling of theatrical script, comic book, romantic photo-novel, philosophical treatise, graphic design exercise and science fiction novel about the conquest of Mars?

“At first, to be frank, I didn’t know what medium would best serve the story that I was writing,” says Villeneuve, who was barely out of his teens when, almost a decade ago, the seeds of the first Mars et Avril book, ultimately launched in 2002, were sown. A student of both cinema and graphic design, he sought something in between—and beyond.

“Once I wrote a first draft,” Villeneuve says, “I asked myself, okay, is it going to be a comic book, a film, a novel? At one point, I said, man, it could be a combination of all those. The perfect medium would be a book, because with books, you can control your elements in a creative way without dealing with a big machine, as with cinema or theatre. Just as a practical fact, as a 20-year-old, I wasn’t able to aim for such things.”

Which isn’t to say that Villeneuve didn’t aim high, almost absurdly so, in selecting the talent he’d work with. Rather than round up a few college friends as his “actors,” he sought out several genuine cultural icons of Quebec.

“I had Jacques Languirand in mind as the main character, and I was naïve enough to approach him,” Villeneuve says. Intrigued, the noted broadcaster and thinker accepted the lead role of

Jacob Obus, an aging musician beloved for his romantic tunes but, paradoxically, a man who has never known the love of a woman.

In addition, Villeneuve netted actress Marie-Josée Croze (who’d appeared in Atom Egoyan’s *Ararat* and Spielberg’s *Munich*) and actor/musician Paul Ahmarani, the star of Philippe Falardeau’s 2000 film *La Moitié gauche du frigo*. The second Mars et Avril book, *À la poursuite du fantôme* (released in 2006 alongside a new edition of the first volume) upped the ante with the inclusion of no less than Robert Lepage, internationally renowned for his groundbreaking theatre work.

While he wasn’t worried about inflated egos, Villeneuve did recognize the creative potency of his participants as something he couldn’t simply ignore or suppress.

“I tried to stay open to the individuals I was working with, as much as possible, because these people are universes in themselves. They’re strong personalities, and I played with that in the writing.”

“The best gift someone can give you is their time,” Villeneuve continues, “so that time must be well used. When Robert Lepage came in, he was in transit between London and Singapore, so he spent a ‘white night’ with us—a *nuit blanche*. He didn’t sleep for 32 hours or so because of the project. He’s used to that kind of schedule. From what I’ve heard, he’s not the kind of guy who sleeps a lot, but at the same time, what kind of generosity drives these people to give up their time? That really touches me.”

The actors weren’t the only angels on Villeneuve’s shoulder. A crisis less than 24 hours before his photo shoot

with his actors—a one-time opportunity—nearly doomed *Mars et Avril* in its infancy.

“It was the day after the Prix Jutras [Quebec film industry awards], and Croze and Ahmarani had both won awards. I was looking at the TV, thinking, man, are these people even going to show up? I was staring to freak out. Then I got a call from the photographer. He said, ‘I won’t be there tomorrow. I won’t make a fool of myself in front of two people who just won the Jutras.’

Luckily, an old friend was at Villeneuve’s place, and suggested her ex-boyfriend Yanick Macdonald, who Villeneuve had never met. They left a message and he set to calling two dozen other potential photographers. No dice. “The whole thing was hanging by a spider’s thread. I was literally crying. Suddenly, around midnight, the phone rings.”

It was Macdonald, who incidentally had just been told by his girlfriend that he was soon to be a father. He gave Villeneuve just five minutes to pitch the project—and was sold.

“It came as a surprise,” says Villeneuve, “how positively it was received. I was overwhelmed. We didn’t have that many copies going around, but it got good reviews. People were generally enthusiastic about it.”

Enthusiastic enough to prod Villeneuve toward a second book. The first had an open ending, but Villeneuve hadn’t considered a continuation, and certainly not under the same circumstances. “It wasn’t a small student project anymore. I’d invested so much money and energy of my own in the five years it took to make the first one, I didn’t see myself doing it alone again.”

He wouldn’t have to, not with a new publisher, Montreal’s La Pastèque, in his corner. “They keep things simple and elegant, and make editorial choices that are very strong. You have a book from La Pastèque in your hands, you know it’s from La Pastèque.”

La Pastèque’s Martin Brault and Frédéric Gauthier—the latter now the director of Sid Lee Collective—could provide the production quality Villeneuve sought, but not the funding. That’s where Sid Lee stepped in.

Villeneuve had been an art director with the firm since 2002, and now hinted he might have to leave to pursue *Mars et Avril*. Rather than see him out the door, though, Sid Lee agreed to fund the project through the firm’s After Hours grants (the predecessor to the Sid Lee Collective).

Sid Lee’s Roxana Zegan (whose Sit! series is profiled elsewhere in this magazine) was tasked with the graphic design, and Macdonald returned to outdo himself in the photo department.

“When Robert Lepage read the text for the second book, he asked me if I’d ever thought about making a movie of it,” says Villeneuve, but the truth was, he hadn’t. However, he was soon talked into the idea. Once funding for the scripting stage was secured, there was no going back.

Shooting begins in earnest in the spring of 2009, but pre-production is already well underway. Despite the scope of the undertaking, Villeneuve isn’t letting it go to his head. “We’re going to make it in a handcrafted, independent way,” he says, “just like the books were.” ■





# CHALK & AWE

*Nate Williams*

*Team Macho*

*ShoboShobo*

ON BLACKBOARD

“A lot of boards for a short amount of time.” That’s how Grogore Kibishi of Paris-based art group ShoboShobo summarizes the experience of participating in Sid Lee Collective’s ongoing Blackboard project. ShoboShobo’s collective style, a raw and rather childlike aesthetic packed with energy and off-the-cuff ideas, is well suited to the task that Sid Lee Collective has laid before them.

A number of wall spaces in Sid Lee’s Montreal headquarters, some as high as two floors, have been painted with special black chalkboard paint, and international artists are brought in for a week or so to fill them. Their improvised efforts remain for a few months, then are erased to free the walls up for the next artists.

Hailing from Seattle, WA, and based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, illustrator Nate Williams is the one who inaugurated the blackboards with his drawings, playful figures and forms that draw on classic ’50s and ’60s kiddie-books and album art. He says the experience was “very strange and very cool.

“At first I thought it was strange that they would fly me halfway across the world to draw on chalkboards, but once I was there, I realized that it wasn’t just about drawing on chalkboards. It was about sharing perspectives and motivating each other creatively—creating a memorable experience for everyone involved.”

Lauchie Reid, of the Toronto, Canada, collective Team Macho, may not have flown as far but was still initially dazed by the idea, calling it “a

bit surreal” and “a bit hard to wrap our heads around.”

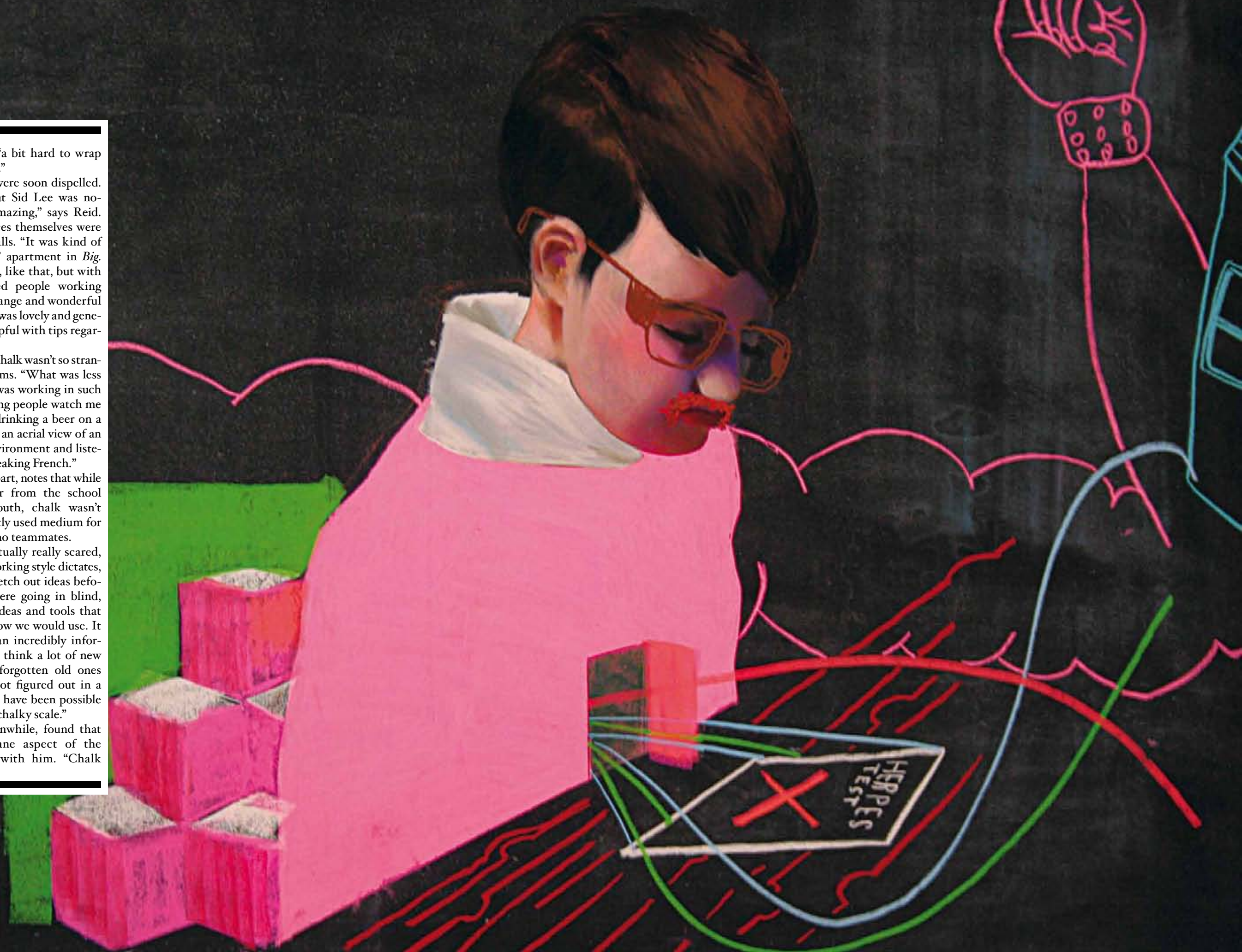
Any doubts were soon dispelled. “Our reception at Sid Lee was nothing short of amazing,” says Reid. The Sid Lee offices themselves were inspiring, he recalls. “It was kind of like Tom Hanks’ apartment in *Big*. Remember? Well, like that, but with a couple hundred people working really hard on strange and wonderful things. Everyone was lovely and generous, and very helpful with tips regarding hot dogs.”

“Working in chalk wasn’t so strange,” recalls Williams. “What was less common for me was working in such a huge scale, having people watch me while I worked, drinking a beer on a ladder, looking at an aerial view of an agency’s work environment and listening to people speaking French.”

Reid, for his part, notes that while certainly familiar from the school days of their youth, chalk wasn’t exactly a frequently used medium for him and his Macho teammates.

“We were actually really scared, because, as our working style dictates, we can’t really sketch out ideas beforehand. So we were going in blind, with no certain ideas and tools that we had no idea how we would use. It ended up being an incredibly informative process. I think a lot of new approaches and forgotten old ones showed up and got figured out in a way that may not have been possible on a smaller, less chalky scale.”

Kibishi, meanwhile, found that one very mundane aspect of the materials stuck with him. “Chalk





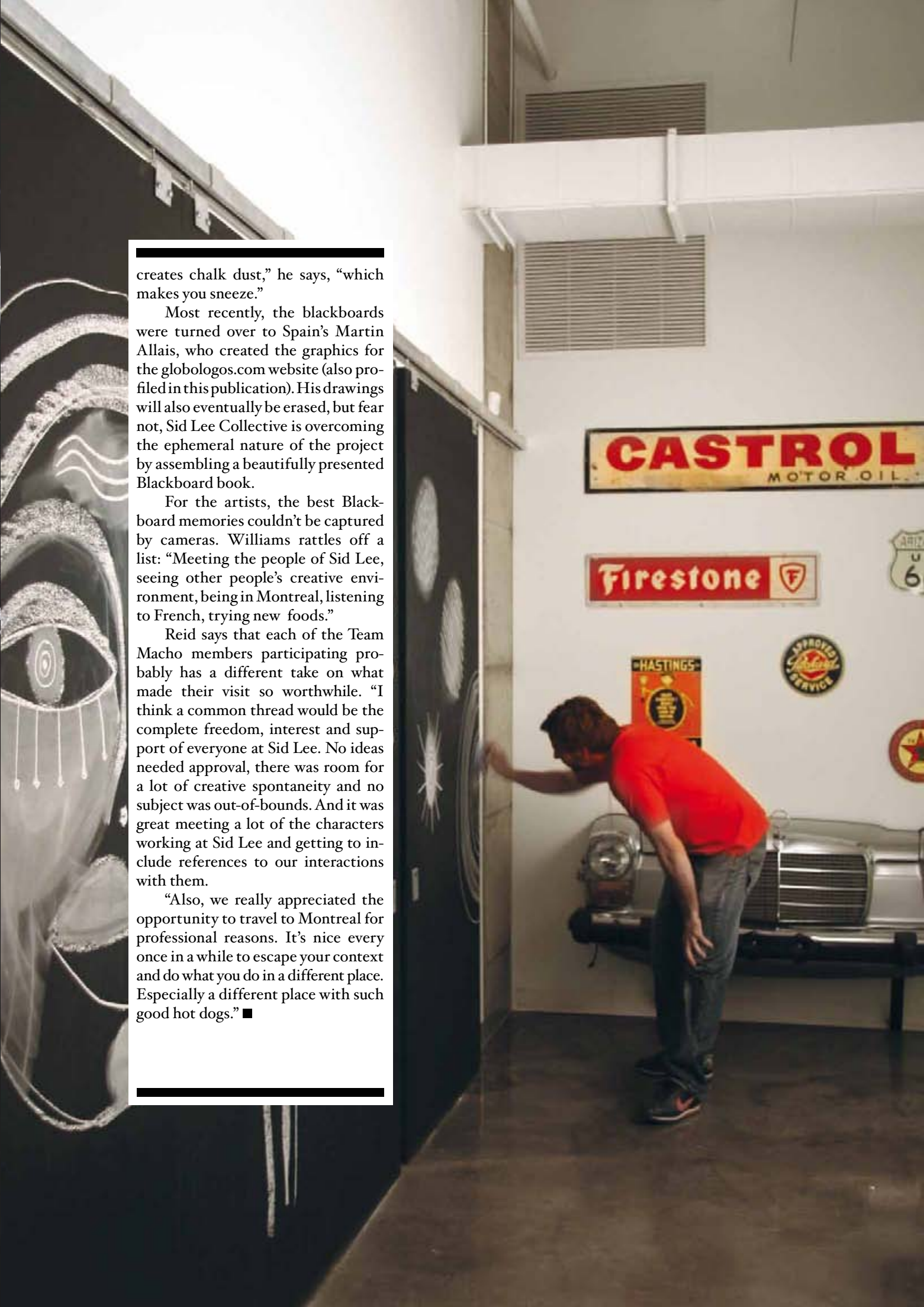
creates chalk dust,” he says, “which makes you sneeze.”

Most recently, the blackboards were turned over to Spain’s Martin Allais, who created the graphics for the globologos.com website (also profiled in this publication). His drawings will also eventually be erased, but fear not, Sid Lee Collective is overcoming the ephemeral nature of the project by assembling a beautifully presented Blackboard book.

For the artists, the best Blackboard memories couldn’t be captured by cameras. Williams rattles off a list: “Meeting the people of Sid Lee, seeing other people’s creative environment, being in Montreal, listening to French, trying new foods.”

Reid says that each of the Team Macho members participating probably has a different take on what made their visit so worthwhile. “I think a common thread would be the complete freedom, interest and support of everyone at Sid Lee. No ideas needed approval, there was room for a lot of creative spontaneity and no subject was out-of-bounds. And it was great meeting a lot of the characters working at Sid Lee and getting to include references to our interactions with them.

“Also, we really appreciated the opportunity to travel to Montreal for professional reasons. It’s nice every once in a while to escape your context and do what you do in a different place. Especially a different place with such good hot dogs.” ■



# Seat CONCEITS

Roxana Zegan's  
SIT! BY SID



## “THIS IS REALLY FUN BECAUSE I’D ALWAYS DREAMED OF HAVING MY UNDIES EXPOSED IN A GALLERY IN NEW YORK CITY!”

“Some people were offended, some just found it funny, some found it inspiring,” Roxana Zegan recalls of the debut of the Sit! by Sid furniture line that she designed, at the CITE Gallery during the ICFF (International Contemporary Furniture Fair) in New York City. “It’s boring when stuff is plain,” she continues, but as the reactions she mentioned can attest, the backless settees of Sit! had people sitting up and taking note.

“It was my first attempt at a furniture series,” says Zegan. Born in Romania to an Italian-Russian mom and a German-Polish pop, she’s been a Montrealer since age 13 and an art director at Sid Lee for four years now.

“I’ve always had a very sarcastic and witty sense of humour,” she says, which explains her penchant for clever contrasts and juxtaposition.

“Taking this furniture that’s very clean, nice and geometric, and printing something on it that’s completely funny and outrageous. There’s a tendency in design, this over-pure, over-designed, over-simplified stuff. I’m against it. I’m making fun of minimalism.”

And a lot more besides—or maybe behinds? The most immediately attention-grabbing Sit! pieces are covered in references to the human posterior, something that sprang to life when Sid Lee’s Montreal headquarters were being whipped into shape. “The first mandate that I had was to design

a new couch for the bistro, where we always lounge, sit around and take our little breaks. The first draft was just one big, white couch, and the only thing written on it was, ‘Get your ass back to work.’

“Starting from that point, I thought, there are so many funny expressions, such an interesting vocabulary revolving around the theme of the ass. Some are insults, some are just funny, but there’s a whole universe of expression and cultural presentations—there must be something to do with that. So it’s a bit of an encyclopedia of everything around that subject.”

Other pieces take a similar approach to the idea of the chair (“One of the most iconic objects in design—everybody has an interpretation or a drawing or an idea about the chair, and this is mine”). Others still appear to be stained. “They’re playing with the idea of having these really white spots, these sterile environments, and coming with these big drips of colour. It’s about putting a smile on people’s faces and having them interact with the furniture.

“The other little series that I really had fun doing was about the lost object. It’s basically cushions that are white on the outside, but when you turn them around, it’s a collection of the usual objects that you’d lose in your couch—your keys, your remote control, your undies.

“This is really fun because I’d always dreamed of having my undies exposed in a gallery in New York City!” ■





# Sound DECISIONS

**Turbo Recordings' Thomas Sontag**  
ON SID [LOVES] TURBO

"It's a small, independent, mainly electronic record label," says Thomas Sontag of Montreal's Turbo Recordings, co-founded a decade ago by his brother, the globetrotting star DJ/producer Tiga, and Mark Dillon, who's now with Montreal's Neon party crew. "We're very independent-minded and I'd say pretty idiosyncratic in our tastes."

Turbo's got good taste, however idiosyncratic. Since establishing themselves with the Montreal Mix Sessions discs, Turbo and its offshoots Fabergé and White Leather have pushed the witty electro-cool of Tiga, synth-funk revisionists Chromeo, upscale house producer Fred Everything, Swedish tech-house titan Jesper Dahlback and French Touch icon Philippe Zdar—among many others, mostly in the vinyl format.

"We don't really stick to one formula," Sontag continues, "which can often be a disadvantage. It's difficult to rack it and identify what it is. But I'm proud of that diversity and eclecticism, and it's nice to work in an environment where the only pressure is self-imposed, and the decisions are all our own."

As 2007 rolled around, Sid Lee, recognizing Turbo's sky-high standards of quality and relevance, reached out to the label. On one hand, the hook-up would offer an audio reflection of Sid Lee's sensibility.

"I think it's ultimately much more interesting for them to be doing something a little risky, something truly edgy," Sontag observes, "and not just stuffing another *Buddha Bar* down people's throats. I respect that move on their part. They value what

we do, and they haven't interfered in any way with the musical selections."

On the other hand, Sid Lee Collective offered Turbo a chance to pursue projects that would break away a bit from its distinctively stark and minimal design aesthetic established by the label's original graphic designer, Benno Russell (who went on to craft the unmistakable branding for American Apparel).

The Sid [LOVES] Turbo link led to a compilation CD, a Valentine's party/photo exhibition with Paris artist Sweetlight, a video for Tiga and, most importantly, the podcasts found at [sidlovesturbo.com](http://sidlovesturbo.com). Programmed and hosted by different talents from Turbo and its extensive spread of like-minded friends, the podcasts are graced by eye-popping visuals indicating the number of each episode, created by the Sid Lee Collective. Each episode now tallies thousands of downloads.

"As soon as I was on board at Turbo, I suggested that we do a podcast together," Sontag says. "Anytime there's anyone who'll push you to different crowds that you wouldn't otherwise reach, especially in the realm of advertising and marketing, it's a very helpful association."

A helpful hook-up, and a durable one. "The audience is growing," says Sontag, "and we've reached that critical mass where we have a nice archive and a good roster of artists who've done podcasts. We want it to grow—where it goes from here, I can't really speculate on, but I have no doubt that we'll be doing more projects in the future." ■

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# Parallel UNIVERSES

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Jean-François Bouchard's  
SECRET SOCIETIES

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There's an immediately disorienting quality to the photos in Jean-François Bouchard's series and exhibition *Secret Societies*. On the one hand, there's an intense and vivid realism to them—even more so when presented vastly oversized, their subjects life-size or larger.

On the other hand, the images couldn't possibly be real, could they? These figures, whose appearance, garb and behaviour seem utterly outlandish, like some strange cinematic hybrid of B-movie cool, operatic fantasy and softcore sleaze, come to life and run amok.

The inhabitants of *Secret Societies* are real enough. Bouchard has been among them, and who knows, some of them might live right next door to you.

"Nowadays, because of how communications and transportation technology have evolved, people can get together to share very peculiar interests," Bouchard, the president of Sid Lee, observes. He's long been intrigued by gatherings of diverse crowds for reasons that might seem bizarre, even shocking to the general public—and their potential for an intrepid photographer.

It was at a tattoo convention that the true picture became clear to Bouchard. "I realized people had traveled from all over the world to gather for this thing. Some of them knew each other, but from two ends of the world.

I could see people doing high fives—I thought of that as a tribe.

"I started going to strange events, and noticed that over and over again. Once, I went to Las Vegas, to a porn convention, and I realized that some people there—not people from the industry, but consumers, fans, however you call them—actually knew each other and would plan their holidays to visit these conventions. They formed a tribe, albeit a very peculiar one."

The medievalists, fetishists, porn and tattoo aficionados Bouchard captures on film constitute extended tribes. So do the pilgrims to events like Burning Man in the Nevada desert, or Mexico's Day of the Dead. "Of course there are locals that do this," says Bouchard, "but also people from all over the world who keep coming back."

They're just not tribes in the traditional anthropological sense, dictated by blood, faith or patches of land. They transcend boundaries of race, language, creed and class. And they are growing.

Which isn't to say their doors are wide open. Bouchard called the series "Secret Societies" for a reason. "Some of these groups are quite easy to penetrate. Others are quite opaque. They're hard to get access to with a camera."

Some of these "tribespersons" are escaping the burdens of their ordinary lives, and har-






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## “I IMMERSED MYSELF IN THOSE GROUPS, AND I FELT THE VIEWERS HAD TO IMMERSE THEMSELVES TOO.”

dly want the outside world intruding on their sacred turf. Others, conversely, are exposing their true selves to the world. Such exhibitionism isn't always in Bouchard's favour. "You try to photograph people in their natural state, and all they're doing is trying to show off for the camera."

The bottom line is that trust has to be earned, and that means insinuating yourself into the community. No, Bouchard didn't get full sleeves of ink to put the tattoo fans at ease, but...

"Sometimes it's pretty close to that," he says. "The medievalist people—if you don't dress like them, they don't admit you to the site. I had no choice. You have to walk the walk. If you don't, people don't respect you. You're a tourist, and they don't want to be photographed."

A fan of classic photojournalism, Bouchard was adamant about sticking to black and white. "In that sense, my work is old school," he says, "but the subject, and how I approach it, is more progressive. Colours would distract from what I want to show."

Bouchard also intentionally avoids explaining the specific whos, whats and wheres of his pictures, amplifying the enigmatic nature of the images, which can be seen online at [www.societessecret.es.ca](http://www.societessecret.es.ca). "When you look at them as a whole, you

realize that a secret, or parallel world exists."

In February, 2008, Bouchard presented his work at Montreal's noted Fonderie Darling gallery, a spacious converted foundry. "The whole place was transformed. It was quite beautiful. Everything had been thought of, the musical soundtrack and all, to set the mood."

Most importantly, the photos themselves were towering oversized prints, inescapable in their scope. "I immersed myself in those groups, and I felt the viewers had to immerse themselves too."

The closing night fell on Saturday, February 28—the date of the Montreal High Lights Festival's Nuit Blanche all-nighter across Montreal. The show had two-block line-ups until dawn crept near. "My idea was to make it even more mysterious by having people visit the exhibition in the dark, with red flashlights."

Taking the exhibit to galleries in Europe is just the beginning of Bouchard's plans for *Secret Societies*. He has some interesting ideas about presentation—they'll remain for now, appropriately enough, secret. And there are certainly more strange groups to investigate. Bouchard says, "I don't think I'm ever going to photograph anything but this." ■

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# Fleeting SEATING

THE SLIGHTLY UNCOMFORTABLE CHAIR COLLECTION  
by *Louis-Thomas Pelletier and Gabrielle Saint-Pierre*





### WALLET FACTOR

“The seat is angled right to left, so if you carry your wallet in your back pocket, it will equalize you. You’ll be stable. Your comfort depends on the thickness of your wallet.”  
- *Louis-Thomas*



### SUGAR FIX

“There’s one leg shorter than the other ones, so you can fix it with a few packets of sugar.”  
- *Gabrielle*



### GOTTAGO

“The back of the chair is at a bad angle, so you’re always on your toes, as if you’re about to leave. The perfect excuse—you’re already in a position to go, so it helps you make the move.”  
- *Louis-Thomas*



### SPACE INVADER

“It basically invades your private space—you don’t want a chair to go there.”  
- *Louis-Thomas*



### ROCKOCO

“It’s like a rocking chair but in the inverse way. It’s fun because it doesn’t stay. You have to put it up to use it, and then you have to keep it stable. Just looking at it down on the floor, you know it won’t be comfortable.”  
- *Gabrielle*



### TALKING HEAD

“It’s very, very low so there’s only your head at the table.”  
- *Louis-Thomas*

"Meetings are too long," says Louis-Thomas Pelletier, a Rimouski-born Montrealer who's worked with Sid Lee for eight years, handling such contracts as Loto-Québec and Société des Alcools du Québec.

"I became a creative director a few years ago and I realized that increasingly, I was spending a lot of time in meetings. Eventually, I thought, we should find a way to make them shorter. We waste a lot of time in meetings. That's obvious to anyone who's ever worked at an agency. We would gain a lot of productivity if we had shorter meetings."

That got Pelletier to thinking about the direction of office furniture was taking—increasingly soft and pneumatic chairs that one could easily fall asleep in ("Sometimes I have, actually," says Pelletier).

"I remember when I was a kid, there was a rumour—I don't know if it was true—that at McDonalds, the benches were made so that you wouldn't spend too much time there."

From that thought came the idea for the *Slightly Uncomfortable Chair Collection*. "It's an evolution of that, but with an artistic twist."

Pelletier's idea was convincing enough that his superiors at Sid Lee suggested he bring it to fruition with the help of Quebec City-born Gabrielle Saint-Pierre, a new designer at the company who, like Pelletier, has a knack for making the best of physical spaces. A key factor for the SUCC was that the chairs should be uncomfortable but not ugly.

"We started working and came up with many models that

would be very funny," recalls Pelletier, "but then when we met with the people at Sid Lee Collective, they insisted—and it made sense—that they also be something very artful, something that would be worthy of design magazines. Not only this weird idea, but something formally beautiful."

"We had a choice for the design," says Saint-Pierre, "to go more aesthetic or more conceptual. We chose to go conceptual, that's why the chairs are so slick and archetypal. Really, really simple. I asked to have that slick finish, a classy element to contrast with the uncomfortable aspect."

"We wanted them to look like they're a family," Pelletier points out. "We didn't want to make one chair and then another, and you wouldn't see the link

between the two (other than that they're both uncomfortable). We wanted the chairs in the collection to look mostly the same, but with slight differences."

"They're nice alone," concludes Saint-Pierre, "but nicer with their family."

The trick was generating mild irritation, not outright torture. "I like the fact that sometimes the discomfort is physical, like with the Rococo, rocking side to side," says Pelletier, "and sometimes it's psychological, like the Talking Head, which makes you the dwarf at the table."

"That's the concept—slightly uncomfortable. Just a bit," says Saint-Pierre. "At first, you're not that bad, but after five minutes, it's really uncomfortable."

"A meeting should be just as long as you can sit on those chairs," adds Pelletier.

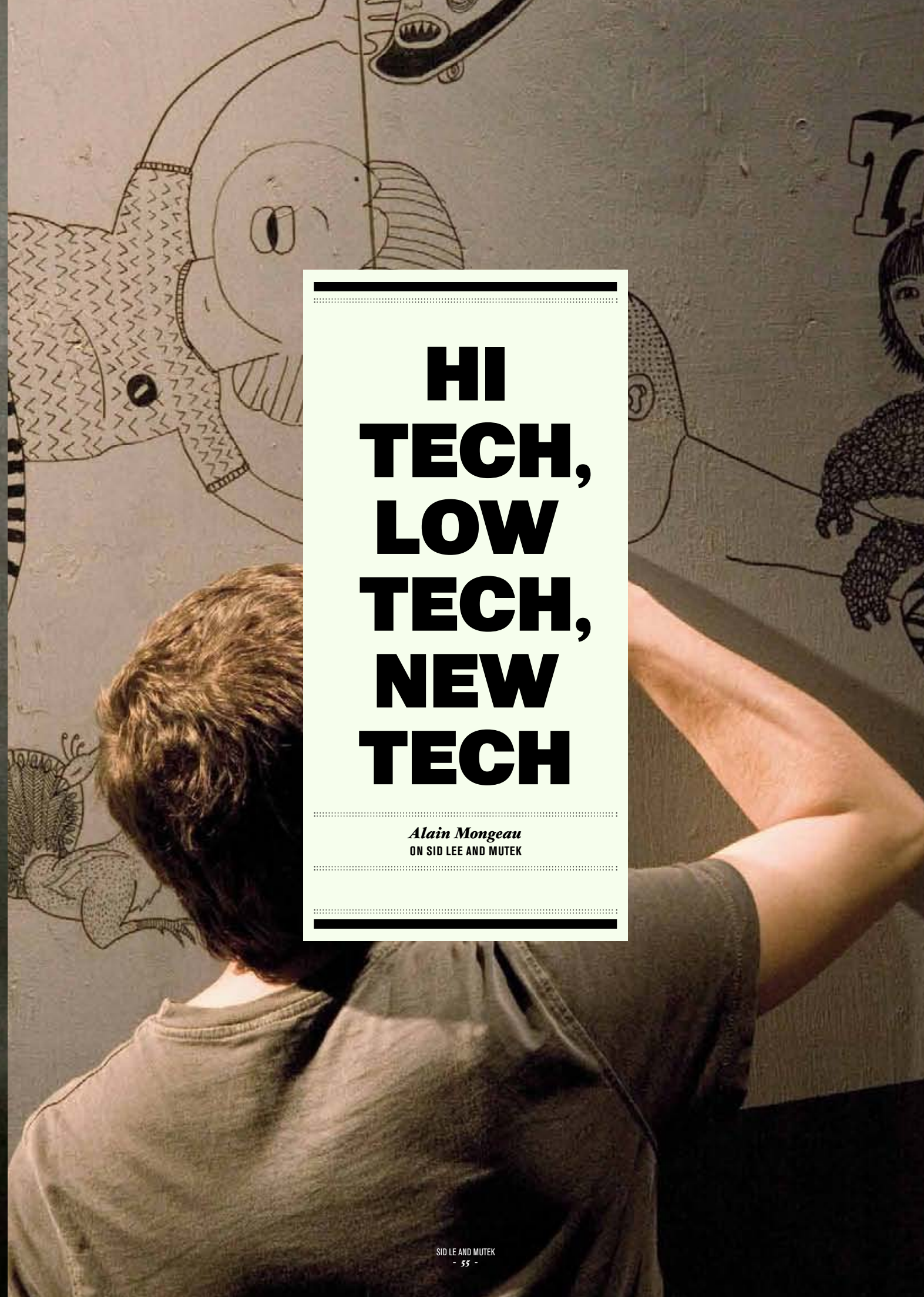
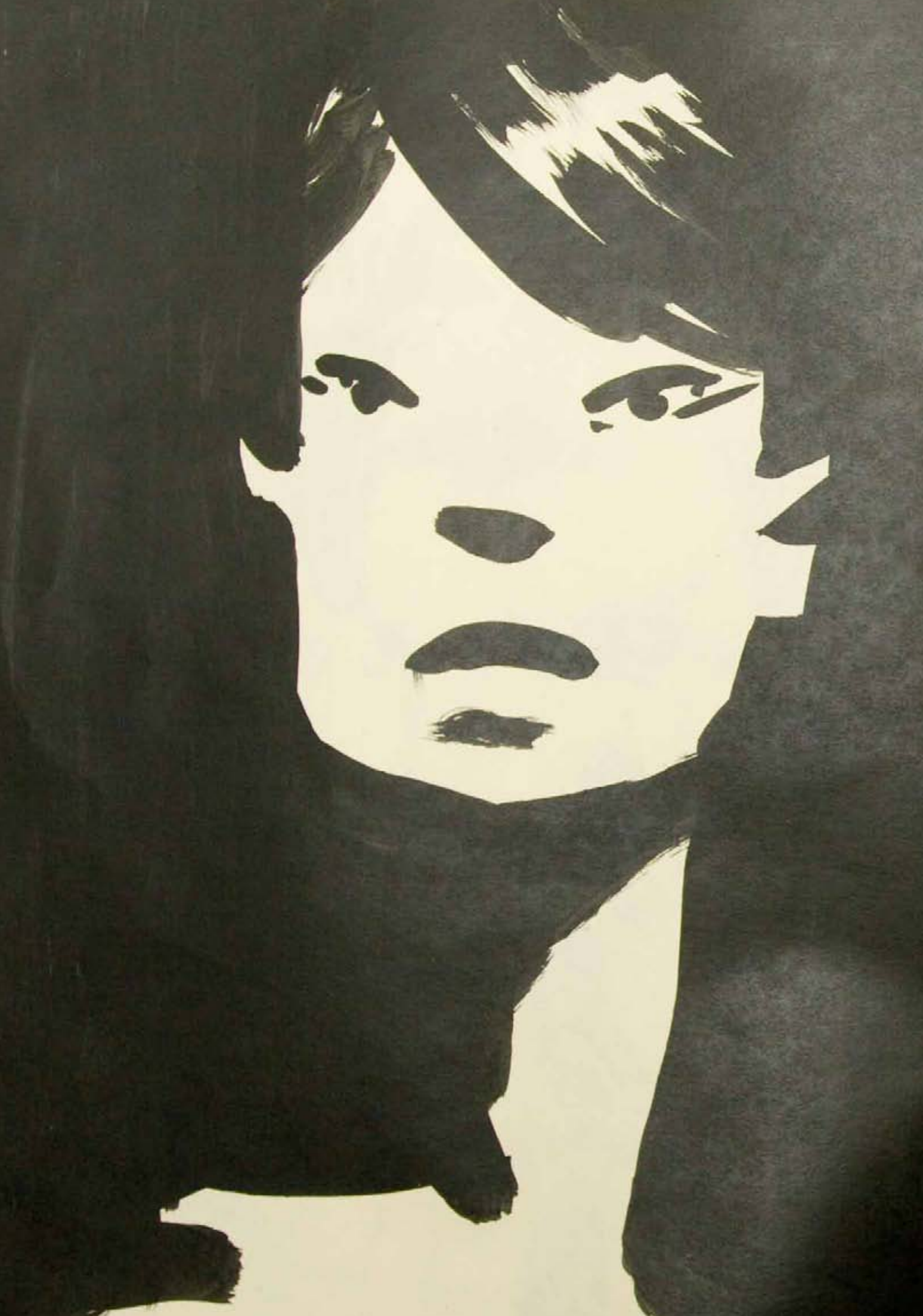
The SUCC was unveiled at the 2008 SIDIM (Salon International du Design d'Intérieur de Montréal) to surprisingly positive reactions. "We had some interest, people pointing at them and laughing," Pelletier recalls. "Some guy said to me, 'Man, I smoke pot and have long hair, but you're crazy!' Some people asked to buy them, perhaps in different colours, and how much they were, and we didn't know what to answer yet."

"A woman came up to me," says Saint-Pierre, "and said, 'Oh... my... God. That's what I've been looking for. I sent a letter to my company to say that meetings are too long.' She'd made a financial plan to explain how much money they lost during the meetings. That was perfect."

The SUCC appears at the new Sid Lee store in Amsterdam

in the fall of 2008, and in Milan next year. Could the SUCC, with the discomfort dialed down a touch, become commonplace? "I think they'll remain as uncomfortable as they are right now," says Pelletier. "I don't think we'll compromise on that. But I can see corporations buying some for their conference rooms and boardrooms—to make a point, a reminder to their employees. There is a potential market for it, a niche market—but I don't see them being distributed through Ikea." ■





# HI TECH, LOW TECH, NEW TECH

*Alain Mongeau*  
ON SID LEE AND MUTEK



Since 2000, Montreal has been hosting the annual MUTEK festival, a smorgasbord of cutting-edge, often highly experimental electronic music and arts. It was initially an offshoot of the city's International Festival of New Cinema and New Media, or FCMM, of which MUTEK founder Alain Mongeau was artistic director, but it quickly became its own beast, bringing in such notable talent as Pole, Coil, Matmos, Señor Coconut, Richie Hawtin and Ricardo Villalobos.

By 2005, MUTEK had branched out to creating events internationally, notably in New York City, Berlin and across Latin America. But in 2007, the festival team decided they needed a facelift of sorts. That's where Sid Lee came into the picture.

"We approached them to relaunch, in a way, our image, our graphic signature," says Mongeau. "We wanted to refresh it, make it more dynamic. Each year, they put new resources at our disposal. We feel very well handled by their contributions, by both their reading of what MUTEK could be, and what they've delivered."

With Sid Lee Collective, which Mongeau calls the marketing firm's "creative incubator," the cooperation has gone beyond just ad and Web design. In 2007, as part of their Blackboard project, the collective brought French art group ShoboShobo to Montreal (read more about it elsewhere in this zine).

"We benefited from that by having ShoboShobo programmed into the festival. We did a night with them, co-presented by Sid Lee and MUTEK, and during that same night, Sid Lee Collective also oversaw a stuffed-toy workshop," Mongeau says with a chuckle. Not an obvious choice, perhaps, but the low-tech, hands-on participatory element played a nice counterpoint to MUTEK's highly digitized and at times distanced programming.

"This year, we did somewhat the same thing. The collaboration happened from the Wednesday to the Friday, in the happy-hour slot." Plans to bring up an Argentine art collective fell through, but the Sid Lee Collective team did their part, conducting a fanzine workshop.

"The intersection with Sid Lee Collective hasn't existed very long, but what's interesting is how it opens up new dimensions for us. The exchange between Sid Lee Collective and MUTEK is much bigger than it appears. We trade ideas and connections. Last year, for instance, we brought in the Pictoplasma people from Berlin, and they've stayed in touch since. We also put Sid Lee in touch with the Trimarchi DG (a design convention in Argentina).

"It's a young relationship, so I think we've just scratched the surface of what's possible. Sid Lee has a certain flair, and so does MUTEK, and I think the two are compatible, so we can enrich each other." ■

# The citing IS ON THE WALL



**Hélène Godin**  
ON THE SID LEE COLLECTIVE POSTERS  
FOR MONTREAL'S UNESCO CITY OF DESIGN DESIGNATION

Every city worth its salt has its own code, its idiosyncratic cryptography of catchphrases and collective memories, places and personalities. Such a code can't be cracked with a pocket-sized guidebook. No, one has to gradually absorb the details of the city, connecting the dots and interpreting the patterns that emerge.

Montreal, in the Canadian province of Quebec, is certainly worth its salt—and one can find plenty of the useful mineral, melting away the road-top ice brought by the heavy winters that are among Montreal's many defining characteristics. Another is its intricate tapestry of languages, faiths and cultures. French is predominant, but it leaves room for everyone else—trilingual residents abound.

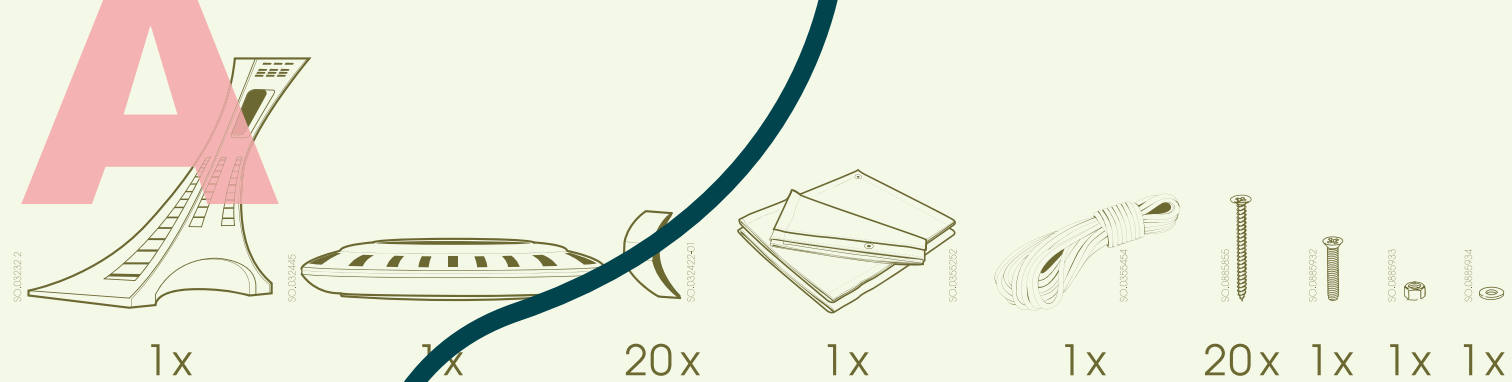
Hélène Godin certainly knows Montreal's code. A life-long resident of the city (and a

creative director and partner at Sid Lee, where she's worked for eight years), Godin prefers to get around by bicycle, weather permitting, as do many other Montrealers.

"Those are my creative moments," Godin says of her daily commutes on the city's criss-crossing bike lanes. "I'm in my creative bubble."

In a bubble, but not unaware. Her sidelong glances register countless clues and signals—buildings and landmarks, grandiose graffiti and plastered publicity, colourful characters and familiar faces. "You understand the culture of a city through those things," she says.

In 2006, UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization—ranked Montreal as only the third, after Berlin and Buenos Aires, of its "Cities of Design." A wise choice, given



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that Montreal is the only North American city with a municipal-level design commission, on top of its numerous design events and institutions.

Don't bust out the champagne just yet, though. "To me," says Godin, "it's more of a springboard than an award. Like, we're proud but we can't just sit back. No, it's a challenge."

A challenge Godin was all too eager to accept. "The award doesn't mean anything if people don't do anything with it.

"It's a way to be seen by other cities. We're not the capital of design yet, but we have the people and the creativity here in this city to become more visible."

As anyone from the grimmest punk-rock promoter to the slickest liquor importer can tell you, one of the best means of achieving visibility is the poster—so a poster series, celebrating UNESCO's nod to Montreal, is what Godin proposed to the Sid Lee team.

"The first idea was heading out with glue and putting them up around the city," Godin recalls, "but we didn't want to get arrested! We would have had to get permits and everything. So I

changed my mind and said, maybe it would be good to expose them in the middle of the street during an event. Each year, we have a big fashion and design event called the Fashion Week."

Negotiations with the directors of Fashion Week quickly bore fruit. "We approached it as a mini-exhibition, where people were given information about each design. You know, they weren't for advertising, so sometimes, you could look at them and think, wow, it's nice—but what does it mean?"

"We went, the whole gang, with our white jumpsuits and glue buckets, to paste them up by hand on plywood sheets. We made an event of it on the spot."

Architects and industrial designers might scoff at the notion that something as scrappy and ephemeral as a pasted-up poster could be a key player in constructing a city's long-term identity. Godin would strongly disagree. To her, graphic design, often underappreciated, is an essential component.

"It's a part of the personality of the city. Think of New York City with its yellow cabs. Someone, somewhere, decided

# C MONTRÉAL, VILLE UNESCO DE DESIGN

that the cabs would be yellow. Now they're icons.

"It's more difficult to spot the icons in Montreal, but sure enough, they're there."

The Sid Lee team was tasked with finding and celebrating those icons in a series of posters. Some chose subjects that were mundane, maybe even a bit trashy. Montreal's dubious delicacy, poutine—French fries with cheese curds and gravy, popular with late-night partygoers—earned a poster, as did the city's notorious potholes. Sid Lee's Roxana Zegan, paint and brushes in hand, literally hit the street to conjure beauty out of cracked asphalt.

"We usually see potholes as an accident, or something unpleasant, so these," she says, holding up Zegan's trio of abstract photo-posters, "are another way to see them."

Other designers had higher, even historical intentions. A key resource was the vestigial remains of Expo 67, the World Fair hosted by Montreal in 1967. The fair's various pan-national pavilions, so futuristic in appearance, still capture the imagination.

"Expo 67 changed the face of the city. It was a 180-degree turn. After that, people around the world could put Montreal on the map, in terms of design."

One poster has a portrait of Mayor Jean Drapeau, in office in 1967, laid over a collage of Expo 67 postcards. "For some people, he was a great mayor, for others, the worst," Godin shrugs. "But today, we can say he did something."

Drapeau did several things, actually. He green-lighted the Big O, the stadium built for the 1976 Summer Olympics. That imposing structure, and also architect Moishe Safdie's bizarre, blocky Habitat 67 apartment complex, are cleverly shown anew as assemble-yourself kits, not unlike Ikea instruction sheets, on two of the Sid Lee posters.

Other posters are more current, capitalizing on what Godin calls "our vernacular language of design—with an accent on our multiculturalism." One, for instance, offers a series of flags. The black one bisected by a green bar with a white dot in the middle? That's from Montreal's Métro, or subway system, maps. The red, white





and blue stripes are taken from the jerseys of the Canadiens, the local hockey team. Two orange stripes framing a white space—hey, that’s from the sign of the famous Schwartz’s deli on Boulevard St-Laurent, the city’s main thoroughfare.

Further posters employed design language, such as serif and sans serif typefaces, recreated out of elements of the Montreal cityscape—a fragment of the Champlain Bridge, for example. Others still drew stark, black-on-white abstracts out of sections of the city map, such as the Turcot interchange and trainyards.

Several posters were in fact pages from various ethnic community newspaper pages, with Montreal icons silkscreened on them—“the links between all these communities,” says Godin, who has since been invited to be on the administrative board of Heritage Montreal, the city’s municipal preservation commission.

Links, in fact, are the true motive of the UNESCO City of Design initiative, one that Sid Lee didn’t miss out on, taking the posters down to present

them at a design conference in Argentina. “There was a second life for them in Buenos Aires, and there might be a third life too—I’ve started up another poster project. Maybe we’ll get to Berlin to present those!

“We just did it to celebrate Montreal, and whoops,” she laughs, “it became something even bigger!” ■



## NEXT, PLEASE!

### WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR SID LEE COLLECTIVE

*Freaky furniture,*

*innovative art,*

*cool collaborations,*

*wonders of the Web*

—in two short years, Sid Lee Collective has conjured up a cavalcade of creativity. The story doesn't end here, though, not by a long shot.

Several of the projects described in this zine continue to evolve. The world hasn't seen the last of the Slightly Uncomfortable Chair Collection, which will be on display in Milan in the spring of 2008. The globologos.com website is, if anything, only getting started—if you've got crazy creative ideas of your own, don't hesitate to upload them, it's your website as much as anyone else's.

Another round of posters saluting Montreal's UNESCO City of Design designation is in the works too. Speaking of posters, when in Montreal, keep an eye out for another such project, uniting Sid Lee Collective with Mouvement Art Public, a non-profit initiative to bring high art to the general population using mass-media methods usually reserved for advertising. Some 800 public display spaces in Mexico—bus shelters, subway station walls—will be graced by works that include 10 new posters from Sid Lee Collective.

Rather more mysterious, and very guerrilla in approach, is Sid Lee Collective's enigmatic assemblage of public pranks and puzzling performance art, les Fourmis ("the Ants"). The less said the better, but citizens of Montreal and beyond can expect to soon be confronted by strange little alterations of their day-to-day environment, designed to confuse, provoke and perhaps even enlighten.

The Blackboard project is by its very nature a fountain of perpetual possibilities, and while what's been drawn so far will have been erased by the time you read this, the works have been preserved in the forthcoming Blackboard book.

Where can you find the book—and even a blackboard bar, to chalk up a few funny ideas of your own? At the Sid Lee Collective space in Amsterdam, itself the biggest news of the moment for the collective.

Painstakingly designed to be both sleek and crafty, the space is far more than just a European business outpost for Sid Lee.

Tread its cozy timber floors and you'll find an art gallery with pieces by staffers and friends of Sid Lee—Shary Boyle's fantastical porcelain works, Julie Doucet's wild collages and Team Macho's twisted doodles among them. The gallery is bookended

by the inviting Blackboard bar, a great place to grab a coffee or perhaps a beer, and the Sid Lee Collective boutique. That's the place to shop for the unmistakable housewares, clothing, publications and more that come care of the Sid Lee Collective. Choose your favourites and take them home in our distinctive shopping bags—count on stares of jealousy on the street, though!

Among the worthy products on display, you may well spot Sid Lee Collective's new Doodle lamp series. Don't worry, no small burrowing mammals were harmed—the lampshades are caked with sketches and scribbles drawn from the Moleskin notebooks Sid Lee staffers are often seen scribbling in when brainstorming.

You might also soon grab one of Sid Lee Collective's sardonic Bone Dry Greetings cards, for that not-so-special person in your life—a close friend or imminent enemy, someone who deserves a poke in the eye rather than a pat on the back. Hallmark, watch your back!

Whether shopping for your home, soaking up some fascinating art or just grabbing a quick espresso with a friend, the Sid Lee Collective creative space is the place to do it. Expect quality, originality and above all the unexpected! ■

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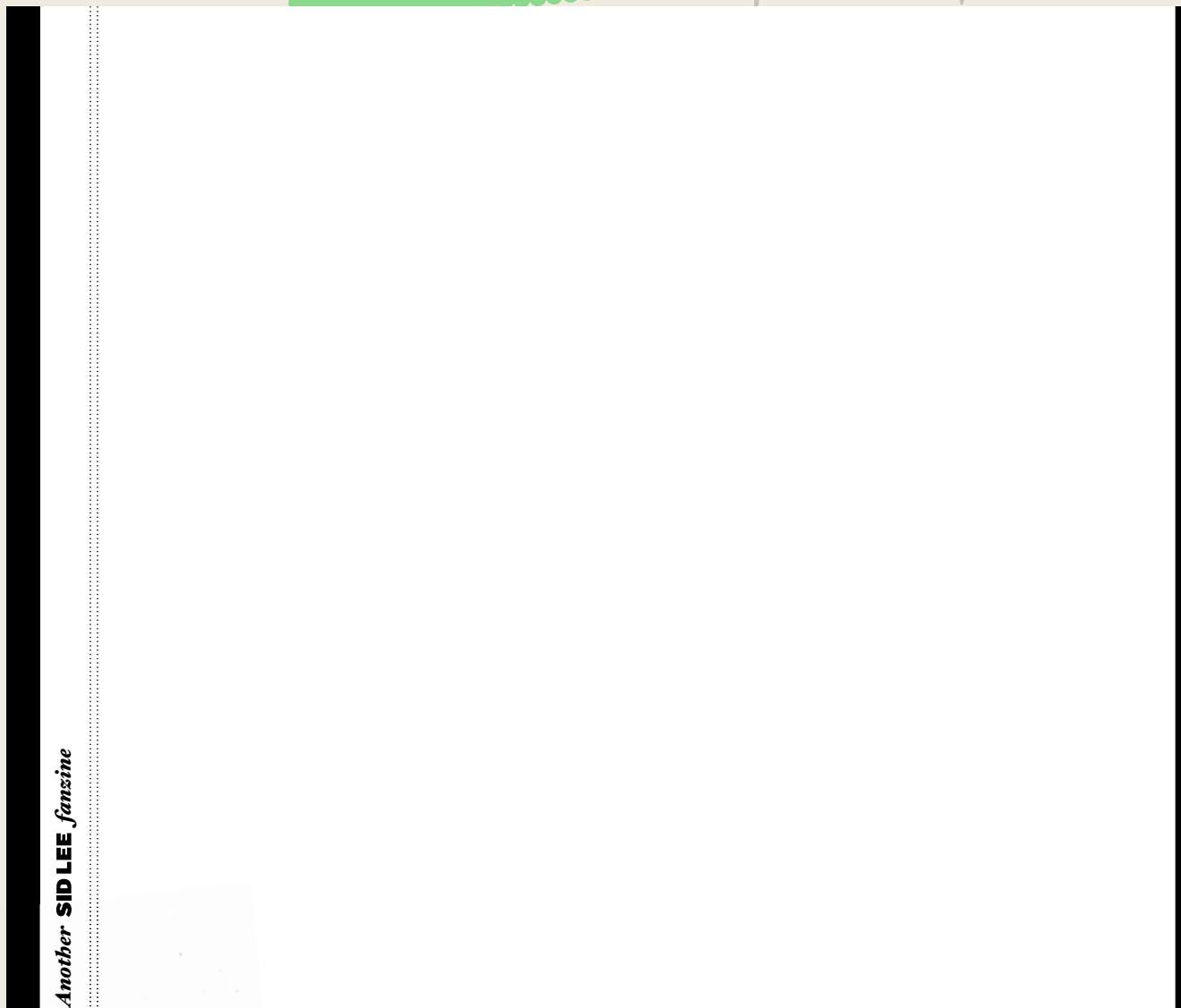
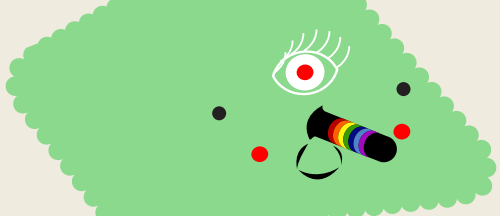
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[jimmylee.tv](http://jimmylee.tv)

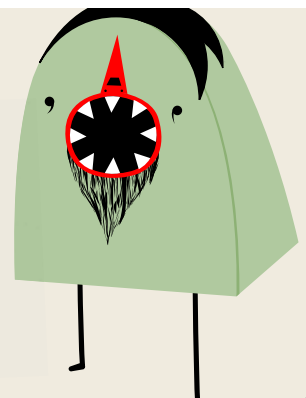
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Another **SID LEE** fanszine

Hello, we're  
Sid Lee Collective



Make it happen.

