

# GREAT ART BEGINS WITH AN IDEA

SOMETIMES A VAGUE OR EVEN BAD ONE. HOW DOES THAT SPARK OF CREATIVITY THEN FIND ITS WAY TO THE CANVAS, THE PAGE, THE DINNER PLATE, OR THE MOVIE SCREEN? HOW IS INSPIRATION REFINED INTO THE FORMS THAT DELIGHT OR PROVOKE US? WE ENLISTED SOME OF AMERICA'S FOREMOST ARTISTS TO DISCUSS THE SOMETIMES MESSY, FREQUENTLY MADDENING, AND ALMOST ALWAYS MYSTERIOUS PROCESS OF CREATING SOMETHING NEW.

*Project:*

# FIRST DRAFTS

inside  
the CREATIVE  
THINKING of

CHUCK CLOSE T. C. BOYLE

JENNIFER YUH NELSON PAUL SIMON

SARAH RUHL & SCOTT BRADLEY TIM BURTON

J MAYS FRANK GEHRY MICHAEL BIERUT

GRANT ACHATZ LAURA & KATE MULLEAVY

LUPE FIASCO

LETTERING BY ERIK MARINOVICH / FRIENDS OF TYPE

# CHUCK CLOSE

PAINTER/PHOTOGRAPHER/PRINTMAKER

PROJECT: CREATE A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST KARA WALKER

①



## FINDING THE POSE

The first thing I do is take Polaroids of the sitter—10 or 12 color Polaroids and eight or 10 black-and-whites. They're large—24 by 20—and the camera's as big as a Volkswagen. Each print is finished within 90 seconds and goes up on the wall. So the sitter and I have a chance to look at it at the same time. We're both involved in the process. I try to take a range of expressions—though I like something neutral. I don't want laughing or crying or smirking. I just leave it neutral or flat-footed, and leave it up to the viewer to decode the image.

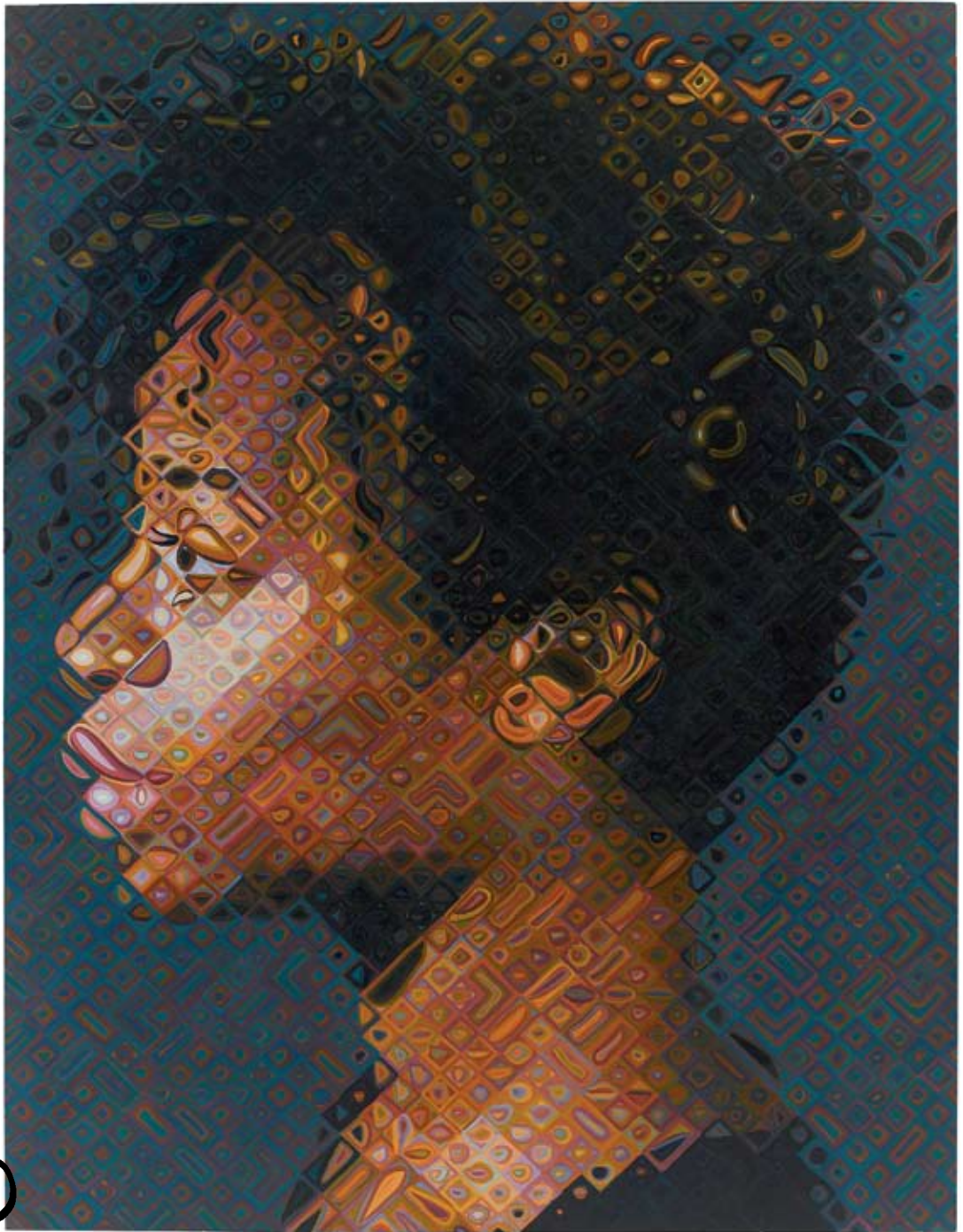


## FROM POLAROID TO CANVAS

I have a series of grids drawn on pieces of Mylar. There are finer and coarser grids, and there are horizontal/vertical and diagonal grids. I slide these on top of the photograph. There is no drawing on the canvas other than the grid, and there are four times as many squares on the painting as there are on the photograph.

In the first pass, colors go on. It's sort of like a rough draft. It's just a bunch of colors, things to respond to—just one or two colors in each square. The correcting strokes that then go on top of each have to be different from their neighbors. That's what makes the painting interesting. I don't want the viewer to be able to peel away the layers of my painting like the layers of an onion and find that all the blues are on the same level.





③

### THE FREEDOM INSIDE THE LINES

After the first pass, the painting is wrong—at least in that it's not complete yet. Because it's a face, I can't leave it turquoise, I can't leave it purple. I love having rights and wrongs. You have to hang in there until you get it to read correctly. I just work intuitively and start making corrections. The colors combine like words into a sentence, or notes into a chord. Then I'll rotate the painting so that a different axis is up. That allows me to reanalyze all the shapes and colors. The system seems totally mechanical and so systematized, but in fact the thing about limitations like these is that they free you to be more spontaneous and intuitive. The painting is always in a state of flux. It's a process well-suited to me, because I'm a nervous wreck. I'm a slob. I have a short attention span. All of which would seem to guarantee that I wouldn't make work like this, but in fact it relaxes me. There's something Zen-like about the way I work—it's like raking gravel in a Zen Buddhist garden.

—As told to Alex Hoyt



# T.C. BOYLE

NOVELIST

PROJECT: WRITE THE NOVEL *THE TORTILLA CURTAIN*

I'VE ALWAYS COMPOSED directly on a keyboard, never by hand, and I made the switch from the portable Olivetti my mother gave me for college to the computer in the 1990s. Since then, my finished manuscripts show very little emendation, but the page here, which I dug at random out of the archives, is representative of the process that has been replaced by the great and ongoing miracle of technology. The sort of corrections you see here are now made moment to moment in the process of composition—and, of course, evidence

of those corrections now vanishes with a keystroke, lost in the synaptical fire of the brain/computer matrix.

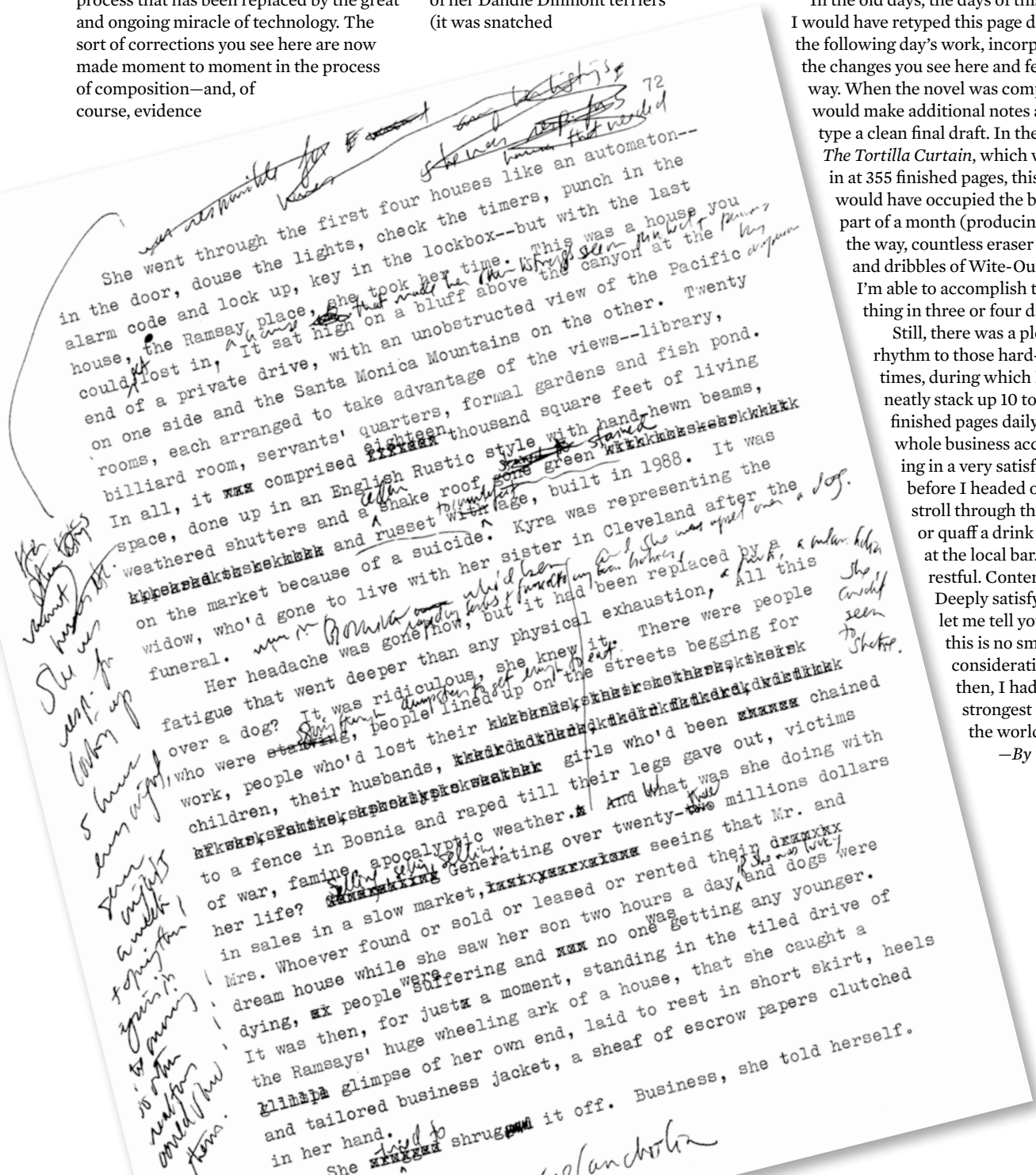
The section here is from perhaps my best-known novel, *The Tortilla Curtain*, published in 1995. Kyra, who makes her living in real estate, is going through a bit of a *crise de conscience* after the death of one of her Dandie Dinmont terriers (it was snatched

and devoured by a coyote). I decided to expand the section to give more of a sense of her involvement with the mansion she is currently selling, so that we can see her begin to reevaluate her career goals with respect to thoughts of mortality and the inequalities of income distribution throughout the county, nation, and world.

In the old days, the days of this artifact, I would have retyped this page during the following day's work, incorporating the changes you see here and feeling my way. When the novel was completed, I would make additional notes and then type a clean final draft. In the case of *The Tortilla Curtain*, which weighs in at 355 finished pages, this process would have occupied the better part of a month (producing, along the way, countless eraser shreds and dribbles of Wite-Out). Now I'm able to accomplish the same thing in three or four days.

Still, there was a pleasant rhythm to those hard-typing times, during which I would neatly stack up 10 to 12 finished pages daily, the whole business accumulating in a very satisfying way before I headed off to stroll through the woods or quaff a drink or two at the local bar. It was restful. Contemplative. Deeply satisfying. And let me tell you—and this is no small consideration—back then, I had the strongest fingers in the world.

—By T. C. Boyle



# JENNIFER YUH NELSON

ANIMATOR/DIRECTOR, DREAMWORKS

PROJECT: DEVELOP THE VILLAIN FOR *KUNG FU PANDA 2*

A MOVIE IS ONLY AS GOOD as its villain. So Lord Shen was one of the first things we thought about when we began work three years ago. A small group of us gets together. We get a lot of snacks, and we get in a room and start spitballing ideas. In the first movie, we had Tai Lung—a guy who could walk into a room and punch someone in the face. We thought, *Why don't we go in the opposite direction—somebody who is devious, sharp, and dangerous in a different*

way? We made him into a peacock, a character with speed and flash.

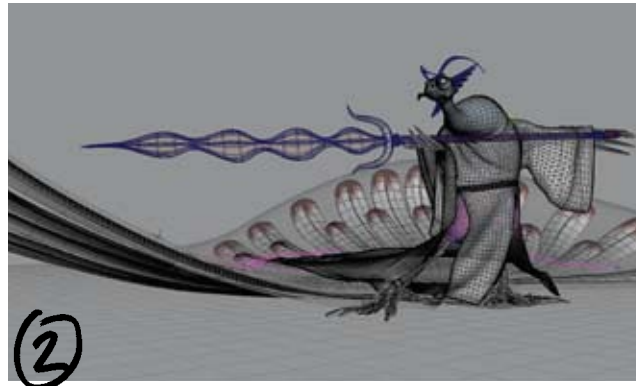
I admit, my initial reaction was “That’s not intimidating.” I drew a white peacock—because white is the color of death in Asia—and I happened to have red on the computer, so it got red eyes. Then other people piled on with ideas and soon we realized it was really cool, and so unexpected. Of course, the voice informs how you get to where you want to go. Gary Oldman was the only voice I’d ever thought of—he can read a grocery list and it’ll sound dangerous.

So we take our ideas to the character designer. Hundreds of people work on the film, but we have only one character designer. One. That way we get a consistent look. Nico Marlet does his drawings on paper, on what looks like parchment.

You wonder how he doesn’t mess up. From those drawings, the production designer begins turning the 2-D designs into 3-D images on the computer. His team creates something that rotates in space, which then has to be surfaced with colors and textures. We have very complicated textures—things like fur and fabric. Shen, for example, has feathers that all move independently. It’s so freakishly complicated.

Ultimately, making a character is about more than making a model or a picture. When we take him into animation, we look for the tiny things that make him like a real person. It takes a lot of time to make something real. You look at a scene and go, “Oh man, that doesn’t work,” and then you do it again and again and again. It is an utter marathon.

—As told to Geoffrey Gagnon



# PAUL SIMON

SONGWRITER

PROJECT: WRITE THE SONG "LOVE AND HARD TIMES"



THIS IS THE FIRST TIME in 20 years that I sat down in a room and wrote songs the way I used to—like with, say, “Still Crazy After All These Years,” or any of those songs from the ’70s. I was really out of practice in just sitting with the guitar. I was really starting with a blank page.

So when I begin, I usually improvise a melody and sing words—and often those words are just clichés. If it is an old songwriting cliché, most of the time I throw it away, but sometimes I keep it, because they’re nice to have. They’re familiar. They’re like a breather for the listener. You can stop wondering or thinking for a little while and just float along with the music.

I may come to a point in the song where I realize I don’t really have to come up with a great line here. I can let the music speak. What I need is a hooky melody. You’re going back and forth, words and music. If they come together—your best words with your best melody—well, that’s something. That’s rare.

You know, I haven’t spoken to any of the other guys of my generation about how they do it. I’ve known Bob Dylan for a long time and I’ve known Paul McCartney for a long time, but we’ve never talked about songwriting. Poets seem more inclined to reveal how they work. Friends of mine like Billy Collins, for instance—he gets an idea and he writes it down and if he doesn’t finish it in that first burst of energy, he lets it go. With me, if it’s a good idea and I don’t have it right, I stay with it. You have to be patient, just keep erasing what you don’t like. At a certain point it becomes alive, and you know the problems are solvable with solutions you may have used before. That’s my songwriting process.

—As told to Alex Hoyt

Love and Hard Times 12/25/01  
God and His only son  
Came down for a  
one Sunday morn  
Angel opened } *birds  
singing  
nature*

## FIRST VERSE

The first verse is this vivid line about God and his only son in this Disneyfied setting of orange blossoms and birds singing—a very sweet depiction.

get  
Gotta get  
Send the restless Lord  
To the Son  
The one who has got to be born  
Creation is never done  
Anyway  
These people here are slobs  
*at best. HEH*

## SECOND VERSE

In the second verse, God’s unimpressed with the way we’ve tidied up or not tidied up the planet. I mean, these people are slobs. Once I’d finished with that verse, my instinct said the rest of the song is a love song. I’ve finished with my quotient of cynicism. Now it has to be a love song.

It’s like walking on faith  
If anyone cared for me  
They would wash the air  
They have poisoned the air  
I feel no wonder  
How to love in hard times

## DISCARDED VERSE

Many of the songs start very bleakly, and then they turn. Why would I do that? Well, I don’t really know. I just notice that that happens. It’s the first thing that comes out of me. Obviously I’m not of the “first thought, best thought” school of thinking.

## FINAL VERSE

“Thank God I found you” is an expression of profound love, but it also turns the song and connects it to God, who in the second verse called these people a bunch of slobs. So, as well as being an expression of a deeply felt love, the line is ironic in the context of the first two verses.

## LOVE AND HARD TIMES

Words and music by Paul Simon

God and His only Son  
Paid a courtesy call on Earth  
One Sunday mornin'  
Orange blossoms opened their  
fragrant lips  
Songbirds sang from the tips of  
cottonwoods  
Old folks wept for His love in these  
hard times

“Well, we got to get going,” said the  
restless Lord to the Son  
“There are galaxies yet to be born  
Creation is never done  
Anyway, these people are slobs here  
If we stay it’s bound to be a mob scene  
But, disappear, and it’s love and hard  
times”

I loved her the first time I saw her  
I know that’s an old songwriting cliché  
Loved you the first time I saw you  
Can’t describe it any other way  
Any other way  
The light of her beauty was warm as a  
summer day  
Clouds of antelope rolled by  
No hint of rain to come  
In the prairie sky  
Just love, love, love, love, love

When the rains came, the tears  
burned, windows rattled, locks  
turned  
It’s easy to be generous when you’re  
on a roll  
It’s hard to be grateful when you’re out  
of control  
And love is gone

The light at the edge of the curtain  
Is the quiet dawn  
The bedroom breathes  
In clicks and clacks  
Uneasy heartbeat, can’t relax  
But then your hand takes mine  
Thank God, I found you in time  
Thank God, I found you  
Thank God, I found you

From the new album *So Beautiful or So What*,  
released in April

# SARAH RUHL & SCOTT BRADLEY

PLAYWRIGHT & SET DESIGNER

PROJECT: WRITE THE STAGE DIRECTION AND CREATE THE SET FOR THE PLAY *EURYDICE*

The sound of an elevator ding.  
An elevator door opens.  
Inside the elevator, it is raining.



RUHL: I have a visual imagination, but not a three-dimensional imagination. In the original Greek myth, Eurydice gets dipped in the River of Lethe and she forgets everything. I wanted to find a contemporary metaphor of transportation. But it had to be strange. I also wanted there to be water onstage, but I wanted it to be patchy, since memory bleeds through in the way that drops of water are just partial.

BRADLEY: I lost my partner about a month before I read *Eurydice*. After I read it I had a dream that I met up with my partner. I was in an elevator, and I saw the elevator fill up with water. When the doors opened, it was like a big exhale of tears. I woke up and made a watercolor of what I’d seen. I sometimes do watercolor renderings of set designs, because they help me imagine the colors and the lighting.

BRADLEY: We used a 300-gallon tank of water to flood the elevator cavity, along with pressurized rain pipes from above, so when the doors opened, it was a little six-foot-square box of storm. For me, that conveyed the physicality of crying after a horrible event. It was like unlocking a door that I could step through and experience what I was longing for, which was a conversation with the person I lost.

RUHL: It’s pure pleasure for me to sit in a room with designers and to watch them interpret my plays. When a set is moved onstage for the first time, it’s just magic. For *Eurydice*, I think Scott struck a balance between the grief in the play and the beautiful, playful fairy tale that is the myth.

—As told to Nicole Allan

# TIM BURTON

FILMMAKER

PROJECT: DEVELOP THE CHARACTERS FOR *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*

"I've always been attracted to large eyes and exaggerated features. For the Red Queen and the Mad Hatter, I thought it might be interesting to take this exaggeration even further, a step beyond. It's part of their madness—each in their own way."



"The design of the characters came more from interpretations of the books—*Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*—through music videos, fashion, other films, and artistic renderings, rather than reading. I had been talking to Johnny Depp about the Mad Hatter, so those sketches definitely had him in mind."

"With advances in computer technology, the means to create these characters may change, but my initial inspiration remains the same. Before, it was achieved with prosthetics; now the fad is digital. In a stop-motion film, you can have all kinds of unique, handcrafted characters."

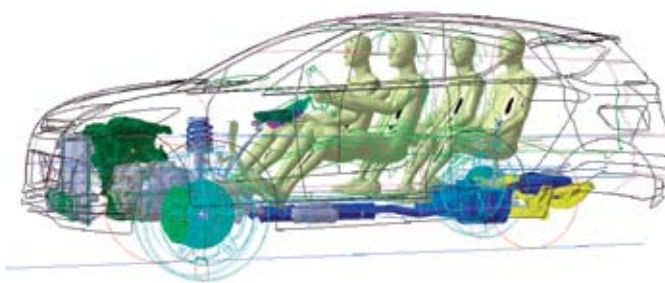


SKETCHES: ©TIM BURTON 2008

# J MAYS

AUTO DESIGNER, FORD

PROJECT: CREATE THE VERTREK, A CONCEPT SUV



## THE INSPIRATION

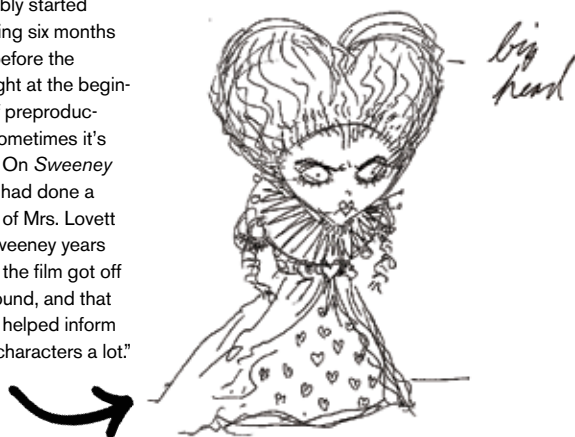
We create the design brief for the car—the qualities we want it to convey. We make a list of attributes—upscale, elegant, sporty—and pull together images that visually articulate those attributes. For the Vertrek, we compared photos of premium materials—leather boots and suede jackets—to images of light and neon, which inspired highlight colors in the otherwise richly premium experience inside the vehicle.

To understand the dimensions, we create the “package”—a technical drawing based on the size of the people that will occupy the vehicle, the size of the engine, and everything else that needs to fit inside.

©CREATION BAUMANN, LANGENTHAL/SWITZERLAND



"I probably started sketching six months or so before the film—right at the beginning of preproduction. Sometimes it's earlier. On *Sweeney Todd*, I had done a sketch of Mrs. Lovett and Sweeney years before the film got off the ground, and that sketch helped inform those characters a lot."



"I don't sit down and try to draw a character. I attempt to reserve some time each day for myself to sit and do nothing—stare off into space or doodle or whatever—just be in my own head. That time is very precious for me, and sometimes the characters will strike me in these quiet moments."



"John Tenniel, the 19th-century *Alice* illustrator, was definitely an influence. A lot of his characters had exaggerated characteristics and unique texture that I wanted to maintain even though we were rendering them in a computer. But also Arthur Rackham, who drew *Alice* in 1907. Especially since my office during the film was in his former home—I think there was a weird connection because of that. Ultimately, though, we went in our own direction for the final look."

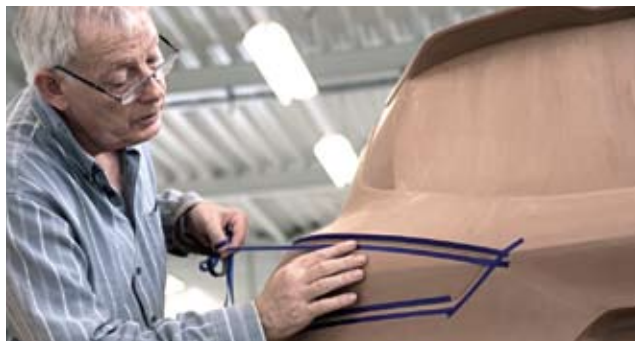


MOVIE STILL: ©DISNEY ENTERPRISES, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

### THE MODELING

While we're sketching, we're also creating quarter-scale clay models. Now, the beauty of all this is that we don't have any idea of what we're doing. Nothing is better than being able to stand in front of the model and walk around it, just as you would in a parking lot. The Vertrek is a concept car, which is like a piece of couture fashion, because you build only one of them. So we finalize the shape in hard material, and usually a mold is taken of that to produce the exterior shell of the vehicle. We're then able to cut the windows out, put in glass, and put in the engine and interior. It starts to come to life at that point.

—As told to Nicole Allan



### THE SKETCHES

Our designers—in this case, four designers based in Cologne, Germany—then spend two or three months making sketches. We want to essentially walk around the car through sketches, from the side to the front to the rear to the top. At Ford, we like to do what we call "kinetic design"—in other words, we want to make it look as though the car is moving when it's standing still. If you look at this pencil sketch, you'll see that it looks as though someone's made quite loose gestures; you can really see the flow of the pencil across every line.

CAR SKETCHES AND PHOTO: FORD MOTOR COMPANY

# FRANK GEHRY

ARCHITECT

PROJECT: DESIGN CONCERT HALL FOR THE NEW WORLD SYMPHONY



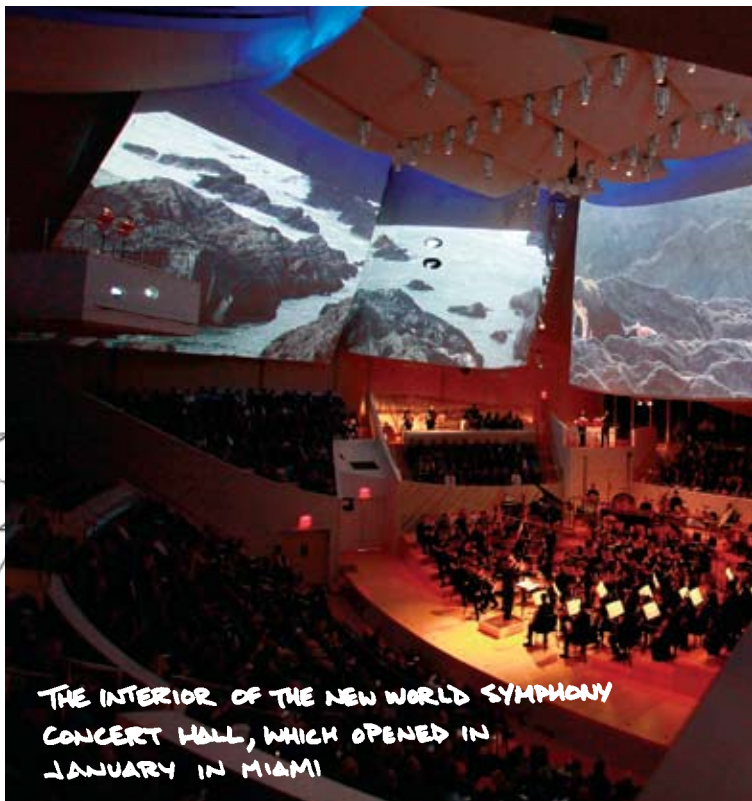
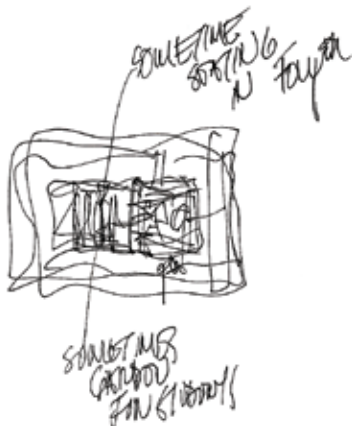
ARCHITECTURE IS A SERVICE BUSINESS. An architect is given a program, budget, place, and schedule. Sometimes the end product rises to art—or at least people call it that.

I work in model; the young kids now are going to be able to work in computer. But I make a model of the site. There are some obvious things: where the entrance should be, where the cars have to go in. You start to get the scale of it. You understand the client's needs, and what the client is hoping for and yearning for. Once I understand all that, it's easy to sketch in scale. So quite often, the first sketches are incredibly, uncannily close to the final building—

I don't understand that, really. Compared with when I was just starting out, I'm faster now. I'm better. I know where the bullshit is. I'm pretty good at editing it out before I let it go too far.

I work from the inside out. The sketches may imply form, but they're educated implications. These have interior and exterior. For example, when I did this sketch [above, left], with the box on the right-hand side, it's in the same proportion—I knew that the box for the theater would be there. Then I drew what's inside [below, left].

Above the stage, the ceiling and the sides have to reflect the sound of the orchestra, and they have to be made a certain thickness—two inches of solid cement plaster. The



THE INTERIOR OF THE NEW WORLD SYMPHONY CONCERT HALL, WHICH OPENED IN JANUARY IN MIAMI

idea is for them to disperse sound in all directions at once, which means a spherical shape.

Some people may say my curved panels look like sails. Well, I am a sailor, so I guess I probably do use that metaphor in my work—though not consciously. I mean, why did de Kooning put so much paint on his brush? He probably didn't know, himself. He kept doing the same thing so much that he probably realized it was something he liked. I always say this process is like the cat with the ball of twine. You're intuitive, but your intuition is informed.

Look, architecture has a lot of places to hide behind, a lot of excuses. "The client made me do this." "The city made me do this." "Oh, the budget." I don't believe that anymore. In the end, you have to rise above them. You have to say you solved all that. You're bringing an informed aesthetic point of view to a visual problem. You have freedom, so you have to make choices—and at the point when I make a choice, the building starts to look like a Frank Gehry building. It's a signature.

—As told to Alex Hoyt



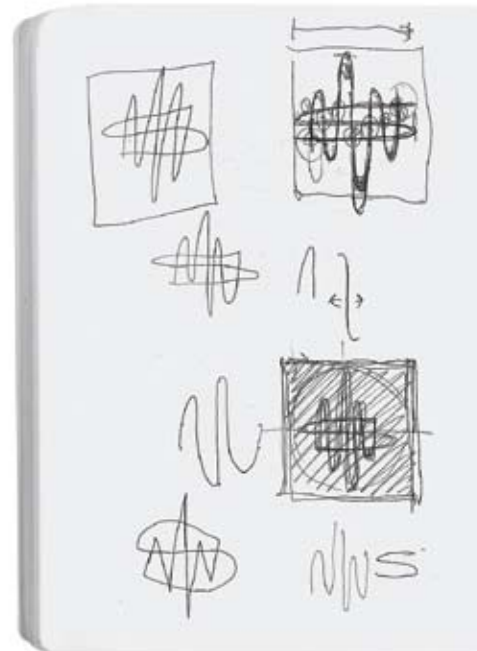
# MICHAEL BIERUT

GRAPHIC DESIGNER, PENTAGRAM

PROJECT: CREATE LOGO FOR THE NEW WORLD SYMPHONY IN MIAMI



After presenting several early concepts that didn't seem to excite either himself or his clients, Bierut took a look at some monogram sketches created by the symphony's founder and artistic director, Michael Tilson Thomas. In the linked lettering of the orchestra's initials, Bierut saw aspects of Gehry's conceptual sketches, as well as a chance to graphically show the sinuous curves of sound waves. "One of the things we were trying to capture in the logo was the sense that this wasn't generated by a machine," Bierut says, "that this was the gesture of a human being."



With a concept in mind, next came the technical task of linking the letters in one graceful yet energetic symbol. "I thought there might be a way to make the initials something you wouldn't immediately discover in the logo, sort of like a toy surprise," Bierut says. To ensure symmetry while he experimented with curves and proportion, he numbered the spots where his lines intersected. "I was just so frustrated, trying to make those letters work. And then finally when I realized, Hey, this might actually come together, I felt pretty elated."

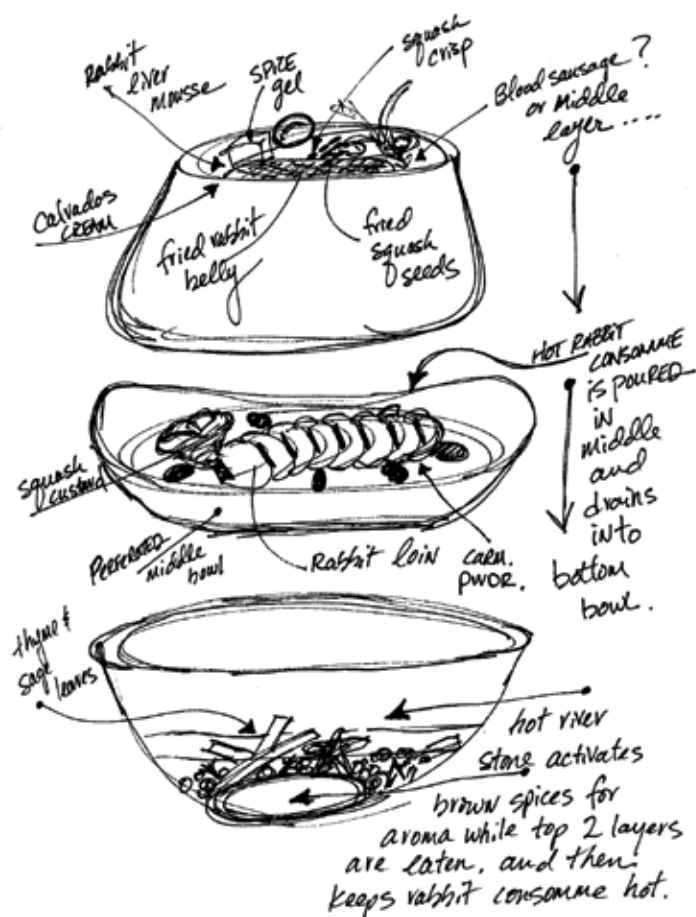


With an eye toward further echoing Gehry's design, Bierut says, he tried several versions in which he placed his finished design within a square. "But we just thought it was fresher and more liberated without it," he says of the final logo, which he hopes communicates the sense that the sounds and performances within the building are alive and vibrant. "We just tried to capture a little bit of that as a visual mnemonic for the aural experience you'd have in the hall!"

# GRANT ACHATZ

CHEF

PROJECT: CREATE A DISH FOR HIS CHICAGO RESTAURANT ALINEA



WHEN WE CREATE a dish for Alinea, we think in terms of key ingredients, sensation, season. Sometimes we focus on the serving dish. The “apple bowl” service piece, by design, lets us explore an ingredient, theme, or flavor profile in three layered sections. We found the piece and got really excited about it, but it took us forever to get enough of them.

For this course, “RABBIT, parfait, rilette, consommé,” we wanted an unmistakable association with autumn. So we chose a palette of oranges, browns, and black, as well as flavors of brown spices, apple, cinnamon, wild mushrooms, and squash—all of which go well with the various manipulations of rabbit. The course progresses in temperature from a chilled section in the beginning, to a warm one in the middle, to a hot one in the end. The unveiling of each

section adds an element of surprise and anticipation for the guest.

It had been almost three years since we’d had rabbit, traditionally a fall animal, on the menu, and we wanted to showcase every part of it. We first made a chilled mousse from the livers, and contrasted the smooth texture with crisp shredded rabbit belly. In the center is a warm rilette made with the rabbit leg, confitted. Cinnamon is the most prominent aromatic element, and takes the form of a spice gelée at the very top, melting on the palate to punctuate the richness of the mousse.

We always wanted the bottom to be the strongest aroma aspect. We tried placing herbs and citrus peel on the bottom, and thought of having a hot stone somewhere on it. In the end we went with something more functional: a boiling-hot, intensely

flavored consommé scented with a cinnamon-stick sachet. The aroma steams up through the perforated insert, complementing the flavors of the rilette above.

We do different tests of every dish. Someone will have an idea, work on it, and put something in front of me. I’ll taste it and make comments and suggestions. We’ll continue the process until we all think it’s where we want to be. If we have concerns that a dish will be too challenging for the customer, we usually address them before it goes onto the menu; a lot of thought goes into every dish before we even serve it. With the rabbit, we wondered about the amount of strange or intimidating things. But we put the course on the menu in October, and it’s still on. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

—As told to Corby Kummer

SKETCH: GRANT ACHATZ  
PHOTO: CHRISTIAN SEEL

# LAURA & KATE MULLEAVY

FASHION DESIGNERS, RODARTE

PROJECT: DEVELOP FALL 2011 COLLECTION



Days of Heaven



Andrew Wyeth, Christina's World



Storm-chasing



Andrew Wyeth, Wind From the Sea



The Wizard of Oz



WE START a collection by talking. The initial idea for this one was the prairie, the great American plains. You never know where a starting point comes from—sometimes it's just a memory. Our minds wander off; we do a lot of research with books and images. Images help us create a feeling.

The first thing we thought of for this collection was Terrence Malick's film *Days of Heaven*. What we loved was the light. We wanted to show light in a field of wheat throughout the day, so we did five variations of a dress. We started with dawn—a pale yellow, like a sunrise. Then we did a midday print with a blue sky and roaming clouds, and then a sunset print with pastel tones. We did a stormy version of the dress that was inspired by tornadoes. Storm chasers fascinate us. You have an idyllic space with these beautiful sunrises and sunsets, but in between, you have all this possibility for something to go haywire.

We also looked to *The Wizard of Oz*. The way the film moves from black-and-white to Technicolor, that had a strong pull, so we put two red dresses at the end of the show. When it came to the textures, a big inspiration was the artist Andrew Wyeth. For example, his painting of a curtain blowing in the wind—we thought it was interesting that a curtain meant to block light could be so delicate. We wanted to explore things that looked soft. You might think of prairie materials as being very weighty or rustic, but here's something very delicate and see-through.

Mostly, though, we were inspired by the landscape, by the flatness of the plains, by sky country. We grew up taking a lot of road trips, and Kate and I think all of our work is very nature-driven.

—As told to Nicole Allan

PAINTINGS: WIND FROM THE SEA, 1947 TEMPERA © ANDREW WYETH; IMAGE COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART.  
CHRISTINA'S WORLD, 1948 TEMPERA © ANDREW WYETH; STORM: MIKE HOLLINGSHEAD/SCIENCE FACTION/CORBIS;  
DAYS OF HEAVEN: © PARAMOUNT PICTURES; WIZARD OF OZ: MGM/THE KOBAL COLLECTION; AUTUMN DE WILDE

# LUPE FIASCO

RAPPER

PROJECT: WRITE THE LYRICS FOR "WORDS I NEVER SAID"

"I've always been into political commentary and social events. This one is a little more stinging. It's very direct and real and raw. Atlantic Records put together a team of lawyers, fact-checking every single little piece, making sure it wasn't libelous. The lawyers always want to make sure everything is nice and tidy. But I didn't get any revisions or edits in the actual lyrics—not from my crew or the record company."

WINS 2010...

I really think it's hard on the road is a  
Bunch of bullshit, just a poor excuse for you to  
Use up all your bullets, how much money does it take 2  
Crazy make a four cup, 9/11 Building 7 NO the Party  
P... T...? A bunch of other covers -  
Your child's future was for to go w/ budget coz!  
If you think that hands turn what those cars the upward.  
The school was garbage in the to place two on  
The up + up ... keep you on the bottom but there you  
W/ the upward you get it new buy more. So you  
Never keep up enough.. If you have a val you sees a  
Bunch of WTF's. No De is Datus So the sev' BLABBERNO  
But such as such and the Am) Jesse some heart  
That's the news ad there the same paper supposedly telling  
US the rest of... ~~language~~ is a racist, Green Arch is A  
Racist, Great Strip was written Barbed Obama Not  
SAY SHIT, That's why I saw vote for Him, that  
one entered, I'm a part of the problem, My problem is  
In perspective ...

you say, bail, tail, snakes, turtles

"For songs that I write prior to hearing any music, it looks like this. It's just words that rhyme—*jail, bail, tail*. It's just a bunch of words scribbled down that I'll put together once I have a piece of music I actually like."

I'M NOT THE TYPE THAT WRITES before I have music. I know some people that do that. When I'm creating something specifically for an album, I'll sit down with the track and communicate with the music first. A lot of times, I write in the studio. It's usually just the engineer and me, and I'm either writing at the engineer's desk—where the mixing board and all that stuff is—or with the music playing through the speakers or headphones. I write down a line, I'll go record it. With this song, I'd write a little bit, record that, then maybe stop for a bit. Listen to the track a few more times, write a little, record a little more.

Creativity comes in weird places and in weird ways. Sometimes I find I write better in the car, with just the beat playing and me driving. There's something about the way the thoughts come out when I'm actually in motion. Everybody has a different take. With Jay-Z, for instance, I've seen him go into a studio and lay a record down just like that. Walk out, finished. I'm like, "How did you just do that?" Then some people, it will take them three days to write the song. They'll sit there and literally write word for word, erase, try it again. Some rappers need to sit to write, but for some raps, you need to stand up. It's a weird process. I definitely think people would give hip-hop a little bit more credit if they saw the actual creative process.

—As told to Alex Hoyt