

**Bastien Aubry and Dimitri Broquard met in the 1990s at the visual arts school in Biel (CH), where together with several of their friends they produced the zine SILEX, creating a different format and graphic design for each issue. After their studies they both left for Berlin; Dimitri later to New York. Both back in Zurich in 2002, they decided to create a graphic design studio together, called FLAG, where they now work for institutions like the Berne Theatre, for publishers, or to create illustrations for the press, among other things.**

**In 2007 they began to create amorphous pitchers and strange 3-D objects. Their work as contemporary visual artists, under their real names, was born from these creations, and is starting to take over their time spent on graphic design commissions. They're regularly invited to festivals and galleries to exhibit their installations, composed of ceramics and digital paintings.**

**As they construct their damp, limp, 3-D microcosm (the title of their last book published by the Swiss publisher Nieves, *In the Beginning It Was Humid*, fulfills both the desire to begin [again] and to take off for new territory, and examines the idea of the original oozing amniotic fluid), Dimitri Broquard and Bastien Aubry work with the same spontaneity as they do in their role as graphic designers.**

**Juxtaposing ceramics and digital paintings, they play with the interaction of different materials, building bridges between art and the artisanal by deforming the audience's perception. Wood becomes fragile and brilliant, jars and dishes become soft — melted in the sun — all transformed into failed artisanal pieces, useless, examining the idea of 'design' itself.**

**Intrigued by their shiny, flaccid sculptures and by their double identities as graphic designers and contemporary artists, we met up with Dimitri when he was passing through Paris, then invited Bastien to respond to and comment on that interview via email.**

**You've worked as a pair under the name FLAG for quite some time now. You've continued this partnership in your more recent visual arts pieces. Did you think about separating or was it obvious to stay together?**

(Dimitri) We come up with new projects separately, of course—Bastien, for example, creates jewelry, and I do drawings. But it just happened that way. Our network asks for us together. But we also like working together. We're an old couple—we know each other so well that all it takes is a look!

(Bastien) It's a question I think about a lot. It seems important to me that each person be able to develop their own visions as well. For our communal projects, we often start from a personal initiative. Then we analyze the result and develop the project. What I like about pair work is that we stimulate each other. Generally, when we decide on something, we do it.

**How did you end up making ceramics? You come from the world of images but, in your visual arts, there is above all this question of volume.**

(D) Actually, we started by doing pitchers.

**Yes, so how did this idea come to you?**

(D) In 2007, the *My Monkey* gallery space in Nancy invited us to display our graphic design work. In this gallery, there are alcoves with these kinds of shelves. So we wondered, "What could we possibly put there? Hey, why not pitchers? They're classic!" There you have it, it started like that!

**Because a poster wouldn't fit, you installed a pitcher?**

(D) Yes, in a way! We wanted to place objects there... From there on, we continued to make them and we displayed them in another exhibition. Besides, my mother has a kiln and does ceramics. We made the pitchers with her. Since then we've worked with a ceramist in the Jura region.

**Was it kind of a joke at the start?**

(D) Yes, a snub...

**You work above all with objects. I'm thinking of the pitchers, the shoe, the cigarette butt... The shoe, for example, is the archetypal tchotchke that decorates the mantel.**

(D) We really like working with the kitschy and the grotesque, and with bad taste ...

(B) In art, you don't have to have a positive message, like in design for example. You're not obligated to follow esthetic codes, or other codes. It really feels good to be able to make objects that have no purpose!

**But these ceramics are nevertheless displayed on furniture of an obvious beauty, which you yourselves have created.**

(D) That's true. It was for an exhibition at the *Fumetto festival* in Lucerne, Switzerland. We are more formalists than intellectuals.

(B) I like the contrast between this rigid furniture and these limp things. Besides, the problem is that you can't make big objects with ceramics. These stands thus also serve as a liaison between those objects.

**You were saying before that form and intelligence went hand in hand.**

(D) You can be intelligent and a formalist. OK, is the interview over? (Laughs)

**And what's represented on the Delftware-inspired pitchers?**

(D) We mixed classic elements—like little landscapes, knights—and other, more contemporary elements—buildings, car accidents...

(B) Paradoxically, the less prepared we were, the better the drawings came out... The results were much more spontaneous. We became more confident in ourselves with time.

(D) We created a series of fifty pitchers with our potter from the Jura. He threw them, let them dry for a day, then we deformed them before baking and painting them.

**It's funny to think that these pitchers could have been functional artisanal objects except that, at the last minute, you diverted them from this role by displaying them as sculptures. Is it an homage, however deprecadationist, to artisanry?**

(D) No, not really. At the root of it, what interests us about this project is diverting banal objects that come from everyday life. We focused on pitchers because in addition to their interesting and varied forms they're objects that are in between the utilitarian and the decorative. They've always

existed. Their forms and styles are representative of a historical period, like any designed object.

(B) It's also exhilarating to start with a 'beautiful' and functional object and to destroy it and make it useless. Then we like to place these objects in situations, to recreate contexts.

**The graphic designer Mathias Schweizer—whom you know well—has a different approach from yours. In his visual arts exhibitions, he displays posters—undoubtedly arranged within the context of the exhibition—but the posters have often been created on commission, whereas you abandon your image expertise by producing objects.**

**This gap between your two activities could also be seen in the way your former studio was organized. There were two rooms, and the door to your graphic design room read 'FLAG—Mr. Aubry & Mr. Broquard', whereas the other door read 'The King of Shit'. Or another example would be Le Havre, during the 2010 graphic design season, where you exhibited both your graphic and visual arts but separated them into two clearly distinct rooms.**

(D) It was a graphic arts exhibition but we didn't want to display only that. We averted the problem by splitting the space in two and linking the rooms together with a hole in the wall. The first part displayed our graphic work while the second was kind of the dark side of our work.

(B) Graphic design exhibitions generally don't interest me much. That exhibition in Le Havre marked a turning point in our work.

**Is that what you prefer to exhibit—the work that's outside the graphic design realm?**

(D) We always want to go further in that direction, towards personal projects. Right now, Bastien and I are sort of in conflict. He would like to do nothing but visual arts, whereas I find that the two activities nourish each other.

(B) Honestly, now I see graphic design almost as a supplementary job. The problem is that we often have rather cool clients and we've got to live up to their expectations! (Laughs)

**And why is it that you, unlike Bastien, don't want to jump all the way in?**

(D) I appreciate coming face to face with what the client brings in, which is often new and foreign to me. I'm curious by nature and I love being in contact with the world. Artists are too often focused on themselves. When you do a design project, it's done in partnership, through human contact, through exchanges with the client.

(B) I also love being in contact with them. But sometimes when our clients reveal their hopes and vision for our work, I would almost prefer they'd shut up... I find that the egotistical visions of the artist allow us to obtain results that are much more interesting and pure. It's for that reason too that we are so intrigued by art brut.

**Is there a real difference between doing visual arts and doing design jobs? When somebody commissions posters from you, do they tend to give their opinion, to say, "Er... no, you must change that"?**

(D) Less and less. People respect us more and more with time. But when you're the graphic designer, you're always a little bit the 'underling', at other people's service. Whereas when you're an artist, you're placed on a pedestal. Curators always look for solutions for what you want to do. It's better

to be an artist, actually. (Laughs) OK, I'm exaggerating a bit. It's not as dramatic as all that!

**What's very noticeable in your work is your interest in imitation. You create wooden boards out of ceramics. Some of your drawings seem like they're digital. And then, in your current project, *Comprendre la sculpture moderne*, you reproduce sculptures that have been photographed in the public space.**

(D) We're rather fascinated by materials. We try to use them towards something different from that which they were meant for. For *Comprendre la sculpture moderne*, we photographed ourselves in front of sculptures that we would then reproduce as miniatures. It's an idea that we really like, which resembles the Vitra chair miniatures a bit.

**Are these sculptures found around Lake Zurich?**

(D) Not exclusively. We research 'abstract modernist sculptures on pedestals'. We've been photographing ourselves in front of them for several years now. We don't really know yet what we're going to do with them. What's interesting with these sculptures displayed in the public space is wondering whether people find them beautiful. That's why we photograph ourselves looking at them. I also find it interesting to reproduce an existing sculpture in order to better understand what the artist wanted to do.

**To return to the subject of imitation, you use pyrography to draw fires, which is like drawing fire with fire.**

(D) Yes, indeed. We also like to try new techniques. Writing fire with fire happened rather by accident. We didn't really intend to reflect upon the notion of imitation.

(B) We like to play with the perception of things, like how people constantly compare what they see with what they know. I find it interesting to play with memories and then to distort them.

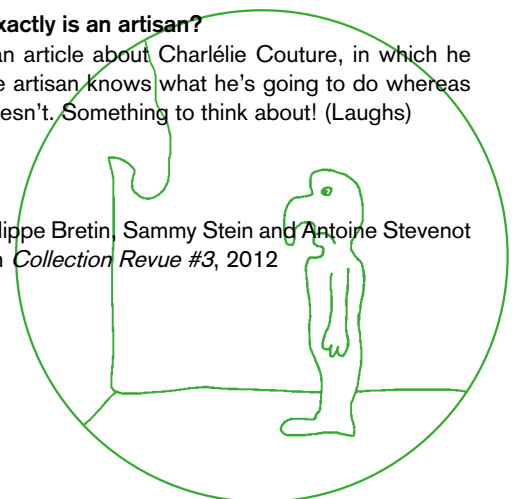
**In one of his writings, your friend Manuel Krebs revisited the graphic design school where you all met. You found yourselves among chefs, mechanics, bakers, and hair stylists. And Manuel presumed that it was this environment that led you to develop this attraction to things outside your field.**

(D) Yes, and I also think it's our artisanal side, and the fact that we don't get too worked up about anything. We see ourselves a bit as artisans.

**But what exactly is an artisan?**

(D) I read an article about Charl e Couture, in which he said that the artisan knows what he's going to do whereas the artist doesn't. Something to think about! (Laughs)

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