

DREAM

COMPASSION

LOVE

FAITH

HAPP

LUCK

MAP of the  
Interior World.

DESIRE



**Opposite** Brazil-based **Eduardo Recife** balances personal self-initiated projects that encompass his passion for self-expression through the use of collage and typography

# The illustration revival

In 2010, illustration is finally getting the attention and respect it deserves. **Lawrence Zeegen** investigates an increasingly independent medium that is setting scenes and calling shots

**In 2010, illustration continues to resist categorisation. Once positioned in the no-man's land between graphic design and fine art, dodging scuds and shells from both sides, illustration is now a discipline heroically standing its own ground.** Today's new professional practitioners are ignoring barriers, borders and battle-lines and doing what they do best: setting new agendas and setting themselves up as the true mavericks of tomorrow's contemporary visual communication design scene.

By sidestepping stereotyping, casting typecasting aside and redefining their own roles and responsibilities, here is a fresh generation of illustrators who seize the opportunity to shape their own destiny. They are no longer content to be purely commercially-driven, commission-led, reactive practitioners; the new batch of illustrators are proactive professionals doing so much more than patiently awaiting the ping of an incoming email or the ring of the phone – the most motivated movers and shakers are making it happen on their own terms. And while they're at it, they are redefining the role of the illustrator.

Faced with a complex set of tasks, 21st century illustrators strive to combine personal expression with pictorial representation to convey complex ideas and messages to communicate, persuade, inform, educate and entertain with clarity, vision and style. One of the most direct forms of visual communication, illustration has become increasingly diverse – constantly crisscrossing boundaries and

disciplines – as today's practitioners make images for print, screen, galleries, architectural spaces or apparel. Illustration is on the street, in stores, in the home; it appears on book jackets, in magazines, on flyers, 'zines and posters, on CD and record sleeves, on mobiles, on TV, on the web... the list goes on.

But long before print and digital technology, before man had even developed written language, the drawn image played a crucial role in aiding communication between people, helping us to make sense of our world. It enabled us to record, describe, and communicate the intricacies of life. And, in some ways, little has changed, as today's illustrators reflect and comment upon, interpret and reinterpret our world – and their own worlds too, of course. From illustration's beginnings as a commercial art, created for a client to fulfil a task or brief, the discipline has moved into a unique new space somewhere between satisfying a service and exploring personal expression. Illustration in 2010 may continue to shine a mirror on society, but it is freed from the constraints of working entirely for the commissioner, now utilising more entrepreneurial methods. Illustration practice has come of age.

The smart money was always on illustration rising up and breaking free from the shackles of entirely commercially →

#### Featured illustrators

James Dawe  
Eduardo Recife  
Charlie Duck  
Tom Burns  
Merijn Hos  
Owen Gildersleeve  
Kyle Bean  
Pomme Chan  
Emily Forgot  
Alex Spiro and Sam Arthur (Nobrow)



01

→ driven projects. A more entrepreneurial spirit has come about, in part due to the fact that digital hardware and software has come down so dramatically in price, coupled with fast broadband/wi-fi combos becoming standard issue. This has so readily enabled the creation and production, distribution and promotion of images that contemporary illustration has emerged from the shadows to kick-start new self-initiated projects, publications and associated publicity. Equally responsible for the rise in fortune, but far less recognised perhaps, has been the input and impact of a new breed of art and design school educators, who are pushing graduates into a competitive marketplace fuelled with the vision to succeed self-sufficiently.

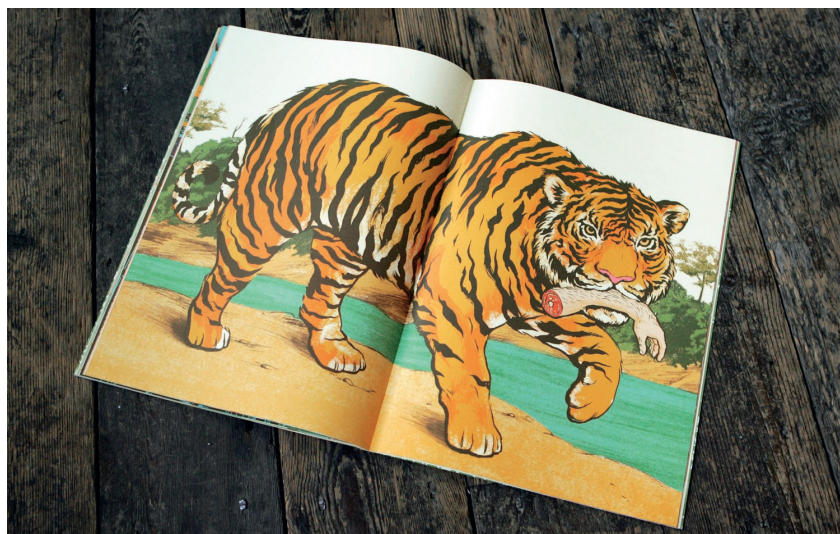
Alex Spiro and Sam Arthur run *Nobrow*. Following a first degree reading History at the University of Oxford, Spiro graduated from Central St Martins with a 1st class honours degree in Illustration before teaming up with Sam Arthur in 2008. Arthur is no slouch either, with 10 years of experience as a director of short films, commercials and pop promos. Together they started their own

01 This cover for *The Guardian's The Guide* typifies the approach that **James Dawe** takes to his image-making – bold John Heartfield- and Rodchenko-inspired collage

treatment but with a contemporary visual and conceptual twist

02 **Alex Spiro** created this surreal, macabre image for *Nobrow 2* – a collection of works combining passions for illustration, drawing, print and the art of the book as an object

03 Published by the **Nobrow Press**, graphic novella *Abecederia* by **BlexBolex** is the story of a settlement founded in Katagonia in 1963 to assist victims of a meteorite strike



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independent publishing unit, the aim for *Nobrow* being refreshingly straightforward: to simply showcase the very best talent in illustration and graphic arts. "Both of us were passionate about illustration and drawing," enthuses Spiro, "and we were keen to provide a platform for it that focused on craft and skill as well as an understanding of print production and an appreciation of the book as an art form in itself."

So, how easy was it to move from a simple idea to actually setting up and running a small publishing company? "We started *Nobrow* with a screen-printing set-up and a small budget for the first issue," Spiro continues. Issue one of *Nobrow* took the theme 'Gods and Monsters' and contained the work of 24 hand-picked talented individuals from across the globe, all invited to contribute images based on the title theme. Printed in two spot colours on heavy paper in an oversized format, it was produced in an edition of just 3000. "We work closely with locally based printers wherever possible so that we can be involved in the process from start to finish," adds Spiro. "We always try to achieve finished products that are not only filled with great work but are also art objects to be coveted, collected and cherished." Following the success of an ever-growing number of publications, *Nobrow* has moved into signed and numbered small-run prints through *Nobrow Small Press*. All the prints are extremely limited, with just 100 of each being made available. →

**oo** We try to achieve finished products that are also art objects to be coveted, collected and cherished **oo** **Alex Spiro**



[illegible]

[www.jamesdawe.co.uk](http://www.jamesdawe.co.uk)





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→ Across continents is Eduardo Recife, a Brazilian born and based experimental illustrator and typographer. His online “playground for personal works”, Misprinted Type, first emerged back in 1998 and quickly gathered a cult following. “I’ve drawn since I was little,” says Recife, “and at some point I became fascinated with type, so I started to work with typefaces, making collages as a way to apply my fonts” – all available to download from his site. Recife describes Misprinted Type as a place “where I put my ideas together, either in the form of a simple text, a collage, a drawing or a typeface – everything on the site is one of my personal projects – there is no client, no brief, nothing”. He smiles: “Call it design, illustration, art or a waste of time, but for me it is a therapy, a hobby and makes me

**05 Eduardo Recife** moves seamlessly from self-initiated into commercial projects. This image was created in his studio in Brazil before being enlarged to fill an entire wall at

Urban Golf in Kensington, London

**06 ‘Kingdoms 03’ by Charlie Duck.** “I’m inspired predominantly by film and literature,” he explains, “specifically the methods employed to evoke feeling or atmosphere.”

**07 Kyle Bean** turned his model-making skills to making this 3D representation of the famous London store Liberty entirely from Hermes packaging for an in-store display



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happy.” And it is much more besides a hobby, acting as a portfolio site that attracts attention – Recife has recently been invited to participate in an exhibition of fax art, *Fax Ex-Machina*, at the KK Outlet on Hoxton Square in east London.

Another creative breaking out of the confines of traditional illustration is Kyle Bean, a recent graduate of the University of Brighton’s well established and highly regarded Illustration course. Bean moves seamlessly from illustration to animation and into model-making: “LEGO and Airfix models were a huge aspect of my childhood. As well as making things, I also took things apart – even today I’m very influenced by the way things work.” Bean’s creative urges to make things move kicked in at a young age, too. “I made very basic stop-frame animations using a webcam to create a short film with my LEGO models – my 3D creations came to life,” he marvels. “I was so amazed by the results.”

Today Bean makes 3D illustrations for *The New York Times*, and has made in-store displays for Hermes and Liberty. Not pausing for long enough to fully consider his next move, he remains motivated by every project, whatever the medium. “I’ve just written and designed my first pop-book, *Guide for the Unlucky*, for a US publisher,” he states excitedly. “I suppose I fit into this current wave of ‘craft’ that seems to be very much a zeitgeist of our time. I do constantly ask myself when it might end, but craft has always been around, [acting] as a human touch in design.” →

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be a zeitgeist of our time

Kyle Bean



**08** For *Poder* magazine, **Tom Burns** created this Robert Rauschenberg-inspired image for a feature entitled 'Rebuilding Haiti'



**08**  
→ Dividing one's time between commercial and self-initiated projects takes nerves of steel – turning down freelance paid work for the relative insecurity of working on ideas, themes and projects that may never see the light of day isn't easy. Merijn Hos, a graduate from the Utrecht School of Visual Arts, splits his projects 50-50 – half his time is spent on commercial illustrations and the other half on independent publishing projects and exhibitions. "The self-set work helps me to find and experience new directions and philosophies in my work that I can use in future when working on commercial projects," Hos explains – a perfect trade-off.

Owen Gildersleeve of the collective Evening Tweed started out wanting to work as either a fine artist or a photographer: "I really enjoyed the freedom of the two art forms, and for some time my →

**09** **Merijn Hos** created this image for *The Guardian*. Hos's colourful, psychedelic images include his own characters, with "big hairdos and freckles".

**10** **Emily Forgot's** approach to the MTV Hidden World Style Guide brief, 'Antennae' is a fusion of future-facing, graphically arresting components

**11** Finding beauty in the over-looked was the inspiration behind **Pomme Chan's** 'Alternate Universe'



**09**

### Project focus

Diving behind the scenes on the industry's best creative projects and briefs

## MTV: Hidden World Style Guide 2010

The Gild recently commissioned, through Agency Rush, **Emily Forgot** and **Pomme Chan** to evolve and create artworks for the **MTV Hidden World Style Guide 2010**. The guide is a resource tool for licensees to build their own branded apparel and accessories with a view to creating a new international female fashion brand.

The over-arching story, 'Hidden Worlds', included 'Antennae' (an electric vision of the future illustrated by Emily Forgot) and 'Alternate Universe' (about taking a closer look and finding beauty in the over-looked, illustrated by Pomme Chan). Helen Rush at



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Agency Rush explains: "Emily and Pomme were perfectly paired with their sub-themes. They were both fully immersed in the project – a brilliant brief, expertly art-directed by The Gild, that helped push and evolve their styles to stunning effect." A unique challenge for the two illustrators was to produce modular images which – no matter how they might be put together or re-purposed by licensees – would work in visually striking ways.

[www.emilyforgot.co.uk](http://www.emilyforgot.co.uk)  
[www.pommepomme.com](http://www.pommepomme.com)



**11**



12 To promote 'The Fresher', a new guide for students produced by *The Guardian*, **Owen Gildersleeve** set about making this illustrative approach by

predominantly crafting the image from cut paper and card, adding a few 3D elements to give the promo some depth



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→ work was greatly inspired by both. It wasn't until I studied graphic design and illustration that I could see how to bring together both of these interests in my work." Now constantly experimenting with new materials and forms, Gildersleeve has been putting together an impressive client list that includes the Tate Modern, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, with a body of work strong on handcrafted techniques that has attracted many admirers. Gildersleeve joins Evening Tweed at the *Pick Me Up* exhibition at Somerset House this spring.

Breaking down preconceptions may have been a long time coming, but today's illustrators are finally receiving respect and recognition for their territory-defying approach, proving that illustration in 2010 and beyond no longer need justify an existence someplace between fine art and graphic design. Illustration can call the shots – it is its own boss, at last.

## Five to watch

The illustrators you'll be seeing much more of this year...



### 01 Charlie Duck

Charlie Duck is interested in the relationships between narratives, the viewer and himself as an artist. "I aim to produce works that engage with the viewer," he explains, "encouraging them to find their own connections and meanings behind my drawings." Duck understands the balance of self-set and client-set projects: "I enjoy the pressures of commercial work and the excitement of the initial brief – though I do take the most pleasure from the freedom to explore my own practice." [www.charlieduck.co.uk](http://www.charlieduck.co.uk)



### 02 Tom Burns

An MA Illustration graduate from Kingston University, Tom Burns takes influences from US pop artist Robert Rauschenberg, but brings a visual sensitivity to his image-making through digital working methods that have started to win him some high profile commissions for clients including the British Heart Foundation and *Poder* magazine in the US. [www.tomburns.co.uk](http://www.tomburns.co.uk)



### 03 Merijn Hos

The main characteristics of the work of Merijn Hos are, at first glimpse, the long-legged figures in high-heeled shoes with big hairdos and freckles, lots of colour and abstract psychedelic landscapes. But the content is darker than one might first expect – Hos's images deal with life, death and ghosts. [www.bfreeone.com](http://www.bfreeone.com)



### 04 Owen Gildersleeve

For Minale Design Strategy's calendar image for the month of November, Owen Gildersleeve recreated the logo with a visual solution that consisted of 300 handcrafted paper leaves. It was "quite a struggle in the timescale given," he admits. "I was very happy when it all came together." Gildersleeve tackles each and every project as they come – though it is his ideas that primarily lead his choice and use of materials. [www.eveningtweed.com](http://www.eveningtweed.com)



### 05 Kyle Bean

"I'm quite critical of my own work," admits Kyle Bean. "I want to make sure that everything I create has a strong message and isn't just aesthetically pleasing." Bean's model-making skills and ideas-led approach was of interest to Blink Art, a division of Blink, who took him on initially to assist directors on commercials and are now finding him concept-driven work model-making and creating shop displays. [www.kylebean.co.uk](http://www.kylebean.co.uk)