

# NEA ARTS

NUMBER 2 2013

## Ahead of Their Time



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## About this Issue

In the modern era, it seems preposterous that jazz music was once considered controversial, that stream-of-consciousness was a questionable literary technique, or that photography was initially dismissed as an art form. As tastes have evolved and cultural norms have broadened, surely we've learned to recognize art—no matter how novel—when we see it.

Or have we? When the NEA first awarded grants for the creation of video games about art or as works of art, critical reaction was strong—why was the NEA supporting something that was entertainment, not art? Yet in the past 50 years, the public has debated the legitimacy of street art, graphic novels, hip-hop, and punk rock, all of which are now firmly established in the cultural canon. For other, older mediums, such as television, it has taken us years to recognize their true artistic potential.

In this issue of *NEA Arts*, we'll talk to some of the pioneers of art forms that have struggled to find acceptance by the mainstream. We'll hear from Ian MacKaye, the father of Washington, DC's early punk scene; Lady Pink, one of the first female graffiti artists to rise to prominence in New York City; Art Spiegelman, author of *Maus*, who turned his love of comics into a new literary genre; and David Chase, the creator of the acclaimed television program *The Sopranos*. We'll also look at the emerging artistic movement in suburban architecture, which is beginning to transition from profit-driven, mass-market appeal to creative, thoughtful design.

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# A PLACE FOR NEW IDEAS

## IAN MACKAYE ON THE LEGACY OF PUNK

INTERVIEW BY DON BALL

When it first emerged on the scene, punk was dismissed as the cacophonous ranting of angst-ridden youth. But what “the establishment” saw as adolescent rebellion went on to become a major artistic and cultural force whose influence is still being felt.

Ian MacKaye’s place in punk music started in 1979 in his hometown of Washington, DC, when he began the Teen Idles with some high school friends. The band broke up in 1980, and pooled its money to create a recording of their band. In order to do this, they formed their own label, Dischord Records, which still exists today as an outlet for DC’s independent music scene. MacKaye’s next major band was Minor Threat, an influential band in the punk scene despite its short lifespan (breaking up in 1983). MacKaye’s longest-running band, Fugazi, formed in 1987 and set itself apart from other post-punk bands with its dynamic rhythm section overlaid by jagged guitar playing and impassioned singing. Although the band has not broken up, they have been on indefinite hiatus since

2003. MacKaye’s music took yet another innovative turn in 2005, when he teamed with Amy Farina to create the Evens, where he plays baritone guitar while Farina plays drums and both handle vocal duties.

MacKaye has been a steadfast supporter of the music community, ensuring that admission prices are kept low and only playing all-ages shows (which has meant finding new venues beyond the bars and clubs where most bands play). We talked with MacKaye by phone and below are his thoughts about becoming enamored with music, the punk scene when he started, and where punk is now.

## FROM WOODSTOCK TO PUNK

I always was really into music, and as a kid my parents had a record player. I would just listen over and over again to certain records. One that comes to mind is this guy Floyd Cramer, and I think he had a song called “Last Date.” I just was hooked.

**ABOVE** | Minor Threat (with MacKaye in middle in hat) performing at the former Washington, DC club dc space. PHOTO BY SUSIE J. HORGAN



**ABOVE** | Ian MacKaye at Dischord Records office. PHOTO BY PAT GRAHAM

**OPPOSITE** | The band Fugazi: (from left) Brendan Canty, Guy Picciotto, Ian MacKaye, and Joe Lally. PHOTO BY CYNTHIA CONNOLLY

He's a piano guy. And then by 1970 it was the Rolling Stones and the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. I really just loved these bands.

And at some point... *Woodstock* came out. I was so into *Woodstock*. And really, to this day, I still think about that movie. Alvin Lee from Ten Years After died recently, and I realized Alvin Lee's performance at Woodstock is so incredible. When he died, it made me think about how powerful an effect that had on me, that footage. It's a curious thing about documentation on that level. That one performance was so incredible. I have, in years since come, across other footage from around that era of [Ten Years After] doing other songs where I realized just how incredible and visionary he was as a guitar player.

And also the Who, because they broke their guitars and stuff. I was absolutely electrified by that. I remember actually getting toy guitars just to break them and then just wanting to play guitar so I could break a guitar, and then trying to learn how to play guitar, which was impossible for me. I couldn't figure it out. I played piano, but I was incapable of transposing from the way you played a piano to a guitar. I couldn't under-

stand the way the notes worked on a guitar, because I had taught myself how to play piano.

So I gave up on the idea of being in a band. It seemed out of reach. It seemed to me that rock music was a pantheon. The people who were playing rock music were sort of in an elevated status and one that I could never reach or get anywhere near. So I gave up on the idea entirely and just became a skateboarder and listened to a lot of Aerosmith and Ted Nugent and that sort of stuff, anything heavy and hard, stuff like Parliament Funkadelic.

In 1978, I was going to Wilson High School [in Washington, DC]. At parties they'd start playing new wave stuff. You'd hear some Ramones song or a lot of *Rocky Horror Picture Show*—that kind of stuff. These songs just started popping up. And they were aesthetically challenging for me because they weren't like hard rock.

At some point I actually listened to it. I studied it. I borrowed some records and I listened to it, and it was really earthshaking for me, because it was not only a music form that was terrifying and electrifying and all that, but it also was, I thought, within reach. It

didn't feel removed. It felt like a secret language or a code that could be shared among a certain tribe, and that tribe was a countercultural tribe, and that's what I had been looking for in my life.

So for me the punk scene or the new wave scene or whatever it was called at the time, this underground, it was this idea of challenging conventional thinking, since conventional thinking is what got this culture into such a mess in the first place.

## STARTING A BAND

[My band] Teen Idles, we largely played to our friends, and they liked us because they were our friends, and we had a good time. We were never careerists. It wasn't until maybe 15 years ago or something, or maybe ten years ago even, where some authority figure asked me what I did for a living, and I wrote down "musician." It had never occurred to me. I never thought about being a musician. I just was a kid who wanted to be in a band, which is different than being a musician. It wasn't a career move. I still don't think about a career. I just don't think like that.

All we were trying to do was create music so we'd have something to do, and other people would come make shows with us so they'd have something to do too. And we were making shows and we were forming a family, a tribe, and that was deeply important for kids, especially kids in Washington, DC, who are so marginalized for so many reasons.

I don't think teenagers in DC are taken very seriously. One thing about this town is that the economic canopy is government, so the arts are not taken seriously. So, for instance, if I say, "I'm a musician," a lot of people say, "Yeah, but what do you do for a living?" Very normal to hear that. But if I'm in LA or New York or Chicago and you say you're an artist or a musician, they're like, "Oh, that's great," because in those cities there is actually an arts or music canopy.

I think, in a way, part of the reason that the DC music scene was so thick, why we were so tight, is that if you live here for a while you start to recognize the tidal nature of the town, how many people come and go. Obviously you have the federal government, you have people coming and going [with elections]. But then you also have all of these students who are coming and going, and then there are huge rafts of people who come to make their bones. They come

and work in DC for a while, and then they go back to where they came from. So when you live in that kind of environment where it's constantly people coming and going, like where water's just coming and going, you just hang on tight to something that doesn't move. And sometimes that has to be each other. I think we desperately wanted to feel a sense of rootedness, and we wanted to have a sense of something that was ours and maybe a culture.

## THE CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT LABEL

[When the Teen Idles broke up], we had some money and we had a demo tape. Instead of splitting up the money and just making cassette copies, we decided that we would document something that was important to us. So we did, and the [Dischord Records] label was started in 1980.

Fugazi's first record didn't come out until eight years later—unlike a lot of other bands, we had an infrastructure in place. The interest from major labels really didn't kick in until Nirvana hit in 1991...Nirvana had done that record *Bleach*, their first record, on Sub Pop, and they had sold maybe 40,000 copies of that record at the time when they signed to Geffen...





**ABOVE** | Ian MacKaye's newest band, the Evens, with Amy Farina. PHOTO BY HARUMI AIDA  
**OPPOSITE** | Ian MacKaye on the phone. PHOTO BY AMY FARINA

By 1991 we sold hundreds of thousands of records, so we were way bigger than Nirvana at that time. You can imagine when Nirvana exploded the labels were like, “Oh, let’s sign Fugazi.”

Essentially we were contacted by virtually every major label in varying degrees, but it was never a consideration. It was never as if they had made an offer which we turned down. We never had lunch with them. Because we had a label, we had decided as a band that no amount of money for us was going to be worth the loss of the control. We wanted the control, which we still have. So, in theory, we turned down millions of dollars. I would actually posit that had we signed to a major label, we would’ve broken up because the structure is something we would not have been able to deal with as a band. We were very, very tight friends and still are very close friends, and it’s a relationship, and that relationship was really founded in the environment that we ourselves created. Brendan [Canty] and Guy [Picciotto] and I had known each other since 1981 or ‘82. Joe [Lally] had been a friend since 1984 or ‘85. And we lived

together and we were very, very close. The scene, our environment, is one that we built.

## DEFINING PUNK

If you ask me now what punk is, I would say it’s the free space. It’s a spot where new ideas can be presented without the requirement of profit, which is what largely steers most sorts of creative offerings in our culture. Some of the most brilliant people I ever met in my life gravitated around the underground.

Punk for me is a place that people gathered because they wanted to see new ideas, so that meant there was a lot of distasteful (perhaps) or unpleasant (perhaps) or just plain bad [ideas], but it’s okay. It’s like we were there for the offering—but also in that you find moments of pure brilliance and genius.

The media has always been derisive about [punk]—they’ve always said it was nihilistic or self-destructive, and there may well have been elements in punk that were self-destructive, they may have been nihilistic or moronic. But what I think is more important to think about is that even with those elements it was a form

# “WE WERE MAKING SHOWS AND WE WERE FORMING A FAMILY, A TRIBE, AND THAT WAS DEEPLY IMPORTANT FOR KIDS.”

important enough to people to stick around. All these bands like the Minutemen, for instance—who were such an amazing band—traveled in the same circles as all these people who were so screwed up.

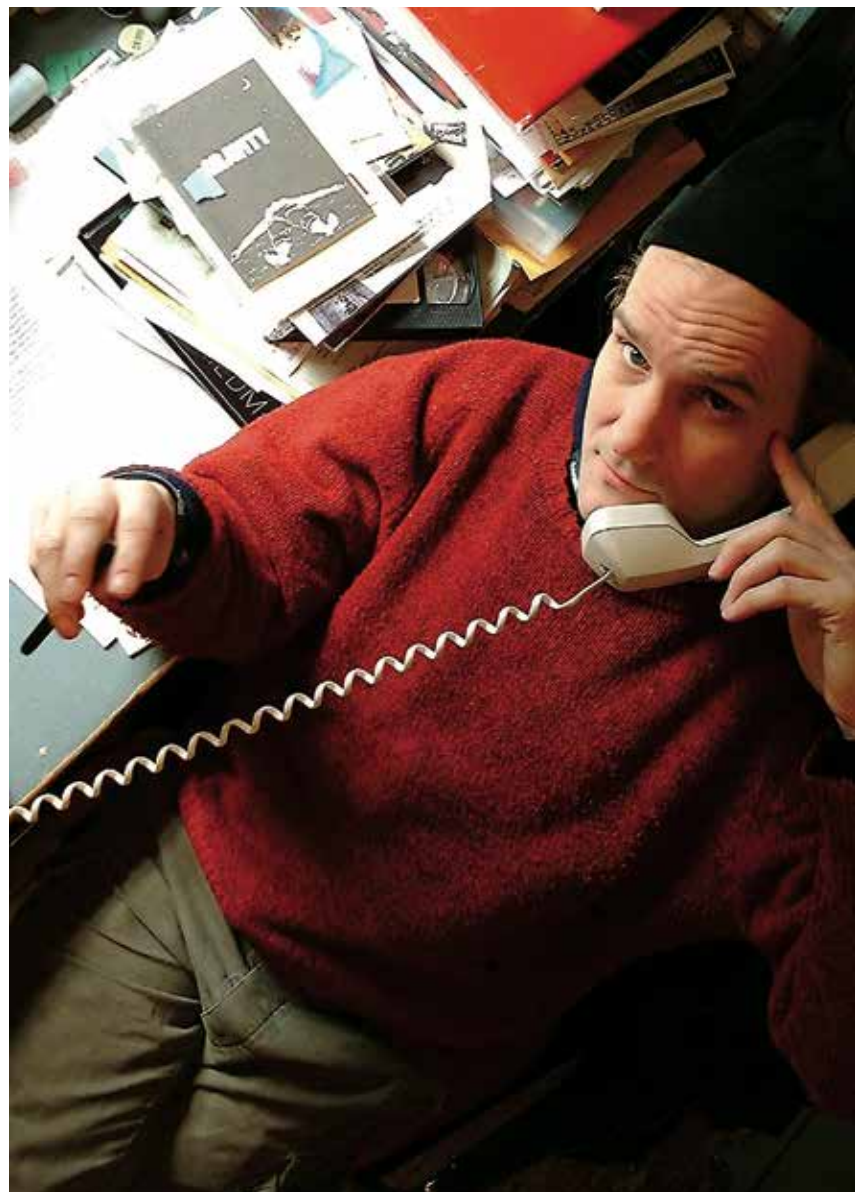
So those of us who are “construction workers” put up with all the craziness. We felt like, “Yeah, we want to make something,” and that sometimes requires being in challenging company on occasion. But one of the great ironies, of course, is that the media’s criticism of punk was also largely, in my opinion, what created those elements. None of my friends were morons who wanted to hit themselves with hammers, but that’s the sort of kind of image that was being broadcast. I think the straight world was just freaked out. At any rate, this organic musical community or scene really exploded in America far below the radar of the industry. It was, I think, a true artistic blossoming. It was the real thing, and it had an effect that I think is still ringing to this day in our culture. Hence the fact that the NEA apparently wants to talk to me about it. I can assure you that if this was 1982 and I was in *Minor Threat*, the NEA was not going to be calling me.

## THE LEGACY OF PUNK

I guess the fact that there are these shows [the Corcoran Gallery of Art’s *Pump Me Up: D.C. Subculture of the 1980s* exhibition and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition *Punk: Chaos to Couture*], and there is this sort of dichotomy [between the two exhibitions], is the legacy of punk. Punk forced the question, and it continues to do so. When I see the free space about punk, it’s the same free space that once was occupied by folk or jazz or rock-and-roll or blues or beat or hip-hop. It’s all the same thing. It was revolutionary. And I think the one thing about punk that kind of maybe made it more sustainable in a weird way or unusual way was that it was harder to co-opt it. [With] rock-and-roll, it was easy, but when you get down to the bones of punk—it kicks back.

Occasionally our music will pop up in a weird place. It’ll just pop up and quite often without our permission. So, for instance, there was a period of time where the [Washington] Redskins were playing a Fugazi song during their football games regularly. And in moments

like that—or when, say, in movies or television shows where the name or the music appears—I can tell you for certain that there is no publicity agent involved. There’s no machinery involved. I know that there’s nobody promoting it. We own the publishing, so there are no publishers trying to get things into movies. Nobody’s trying to exploit this work. I know that. So the fact that these things appear on the surface of mainstream, they bubble up to the surface, from my point of view it proves that the corporations haven’t managed to erect their fence across everything. There are still paths where real art can make it, because people give a damn about real art. ▲



# @ Pure Expression

## Lady Pink and the Evolution of Street Art

*Interview by Jennifer Kreizman*

When Lady Pink discovered graffiti in 1979, her first canvases were New York City subway cars. Although certainly vandalism, some considered it art as well. Her work quickly evolved from tags of an old love's name, and at the age of 16, she was included in the landmark 1980 show *Graffiti Art Success for America* at the gallery Fashion MODA—an exhibit which is now credited with helping graffiti transition into the world of fine art. One of the only women to run with The Cool Five (TC5) and The Public Animals (TPA) graffiti crews, Lady Pink is today considered to be one of the most accomplished female graffiti artists of all time.

Although her days of graffiti are long behind her, she continues to create murals and studio work, and has pieces in the collections of the Whitney Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands. She also shares her decades of experience by teaching young artists through mural workshops and university lectures. Here, Lady Pink discusses graffiti's early days, and what it has been like to witness the continued acceptance and blossoming of street art.

### THE MOVEMENT

When I first started graffiti I was only 15 and there was already a long history of folktales in the subculture. There were heroes and villains







**ABOVE** | New York City subway car with Lady Pink artwork, circa 1983. PHOTO BY LADY PINK  
**OPPOSITE** | Lady Pink at work. PHOTO BY MATT WEBER

and great epic deeds. By the mid-1970s some of the guys had already achieved whole trains—those are ten whole cars—top to bottom, painting the entire train... and we all had to try to achieve the greatness that was already shown. Very quickly it got good. The tourists thought that the subway trains came like that. They thought it was quite charming—they loved it.

[Street art] is a broad term for all the vandalism, but we specifically went for the trains. We didn't do street tagging. We didn't write on people's buildings. Our generation of graffiti writers, of the early 80s, specifically went for the subway trains.

Seeing your work rolling by on a massive train, roaring and making noise and dirty and gigantic and it's rolling with all that energy—there is no other thrill and rush and excitement that you get by seeing your name roll by knowing that you were naughty and you got away with it.

But it quickly got out of hand. It was the '70s. New York City was in chaos economically and physically. Crime was rampant. By the early '80s, the city started to pick itself up and recover, and by the mid-'80s, the graffiti had already been destroyed off the subway trains. They erased the graffiti with an acid, but it also destroyed the trains themselves, so they had to combat it in a different way. They developed the vandal squad, the graffiti police... [Graffiti] is very elaborate and stylized lettering—you have to study it and be schooled in

order to read it. The police not only learned how to run the train tracks, but they learned how to read the stuff and they learned who's who. By 1989 the subway trains were completely clean, and they wiped the graffiti off the face of the Earth.

There [also] were infamous people underground that would destroy others' work. They couldn't do any artwork themselves. So if they destroyed something nice, everyone was talking about them... It was internal strife. It was no longer just fun and games and playing cops and robbers. Folks dropped out left and right. People grow up, got to earn a living. The shelf-life of a graffiti writer is only about two to five years, before you grow up and you have to join the real grown-up life by getting a job.

## GRAFFITI AS FOLK ART

We need rebellion in our society. We need someone to question the status quo. Otherwise, our society will be stagnant. Our country is based on rebellion. If not, we'd still be speaking in a nice British accent. The free thinkers, our forefathers, were the ones that set us free, and we still need it in our society.

What we have been saying for the last quarter of a century is that the art world has become elitist... That you have to study in college in order to be authenticated as an artist and for your work to be valid is nonsense.



We are all capable of doing art and creating art. You don't necessarily have to go to art school to be an artist. You can be an outside artist. You can be a folk artist. That's what we are—technically we are folk art.

If you are to define what folk art is, it's a grassroots movement. The young people who started the graffiti movement were teenagers, literally 13-, 15-, 16-year-olds making stuff up as they went along. The other street artists were also making stuff up—the beginning street artists like Keith Haring and [Jean-Michel] Basquiat and Jenny Holzer and John Specter and Richard Hamilton. All of these cats were the very first street artists. They were working in different mediums...stencils and posters and bucket paint, brush paint. Certainly not with letters or subway trains and spray paint the way we did. They were the first street artists.

## TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

The way I like to say it is I was discovered, [but] I don't stress that for young people I work with. I push them for scholarships and university. That's my goal. Only very few of us are discovered and maybe fell into it and made a career out of it. Most everybody else has to bust their butt in college.

I won't cross the line and do a wall or a spot that is not legal, that is not commissioned. I work with teenagers, so I try to set a good example...I see no need to do anything illegal.

We're teaching kids how to do art, how to copyright their work, how to document their work and how to present their portfolios and book gigs and write invoices—all of those tedious things that go on above ground when you're a legal artist. There's a lot to learn and I teach a lot of young people that. I don't teach anyone how to be a vandal or a graffiti artist. That you're not going to learn from me.

## ON GOING "MAINSTREAM"

There has always been a backlash from the graffiti purists who feel that it belongs only underground, belongs only on the trains, [that] the minute you take money for your artwork, you're selling out. That kind of view did not affect me... It's difficult enough to be an artist, so when you're given an opportunity to put your foot in the door and to be noticed and support yourself as an artist, by all means go for it.

[The fear of selling out] is just a deluded, misguided loyalty to some underground nothing. Nobody has loyalty to that. It's idealistic and foolish. Sure, you can work sweeping floors and pushing paper, but if you have the skills and talent to be an artist, go for it. There have always been the haters and the jealous people that try to hold you back and call you a sell-out.

Doing graffiti taught us a lot of things like college would teach a lot of young people. That was our beginnings. We learned a lot. It gave us backbone. It gave us courage. It gave us confidence. It gave us all these gifts that you get to learn in college; we also picked [them] up. It builds character so that you can stand up for yourself in broad daylight and stand by your work no matter what the criticism. That takes a different kind of courage. Some people just do not have that. They would prefer to be anonymous and that gives them the bravery. They can't face an audience. They don't want to be celebrities. That takes a different kind of courage to be a celebrity and to stand by your work.

It's a huge responsibility to be part of such legitimate and awesome museums like [the Met and Whitney and the Brooklyn Museum]. But I've been training all my life for this, beginning since the age of 16.

Even at the New Museum, in PS1 at 17, in solo shows at the age of 21. This is my career. This is what I do. I take it very seriously.

## STREET ART TODAY

Early on, rock-and-roll was outlawed and feared and all of that, banished from society and the people who did it were outcasts. Now we see where rock-and-roll has gone. There's punk rock, metal, pop, and even hip-hop. There are many different levels of it but it's still all rock-and-roll. And I believe that's where graffiti has gone. It's being labeled in general as street art, but the street artists work in so many different mediums that have nothing to do with one another.

Today, street artists are working outside of spray paint, with knitting, wood, rubber bands, pencils and stickers and bucket paint—they're working with every medium possible.... For so long we have been given these urban landscapes that are dull and boring and utilitarian and gray. And then the street artists come along and we add some life and color and some urban love to our surroundings.

They're creating art for art's sake and not for profit. It's the purest form of expression you can imagine. ▲



**ABOVE** | The 2011 exhibition *Lady Pink: Evolution* at Woodward Gallery in New York City. PHOTO COURTESY OF WOODWARD GALLERY, NYC  
**OPPOSITE** | *Faith in Women*, 2005, is located at Intermediate Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. PHOTO BY LADY PINK



Mixing  
WORDS  
and  
PICTURES

Art Spiegelman Discusses  
the Art of Comics



Interview by Rebecca Gross

**ABOVE** | Art Spiegelman. PHOTO BY NADJA SPIEGELMAN

**OPPOSITE** | The evolution of Spiegelman's story and artwork for his groundbreaking book *Maus*. IMAGES BY ART SPIEGELMAN/METAMAUS, USED COURTESY OF PANTHEON BOOKS

For much of their history, comics have enthralled kids and adolescents with cheap, pulp tales of superheroes and villains. And yet, despite their popularity and often-intricate illustrations, they were always considered to be entertainment rather than art. Things began to shift during the underground comic scene, when cartoonists such as Art Spiegelman began to push the boundaries on what could be held within the rectilinear panels of a comic strip.

Then came *Maus*, which tore away whatever artistic boundaries may have remained. Serialized in *Raw* magazine and published in full in 1991, *Maus* was arguably the first critically acclaimed graphic novel, and established Spiegelman as the man who helped elevate comics into an art form. The two-volume work is a cartoonist's account of his parents' lives as Polish Jews during World War II, featuring Jews portrayed as mice, Poles as pigs, and Germans as cats. Part history, part fiction, and part memoir (Spiegelman's father was an Auschwitz survivor), *Maus* became the first graphic novel to win the Pulitzer Prize, and laid the groundwork for what has become a unique genre in its own right. Here is Spiegelman, in his own words, on the evolution of comics. Visit [arts.gov](http://arts.gov) for a longer version of the interview.

## In the Beginning

The first [comic] that imprinted itself on me was *Mad*. I even did a sequence about it in my book *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&\*!* where I can barely read. I'm with my mother in a drugstore. I pick this thing up. I open it, and it was like this was a like a secret message from the gods, and I had to have it no matter what response my mother had to this thing. And then I studied it like some kids studied the Talmud, as the punchline to that sequence goes.

It never occurred to me that comics were anything other than worthy. They were in fact among the most worthy endeavors I could imagine. They were how culture got introduced to me, more than through other media... I always assumed they were a container big enough to hold whatever I could hold.

## The Underground Scene

My comics got stranger and stranger. There wasn't any obvious place to present or publish such things... [They] were tending toward surrealism and stuff that

can only be called experimental—a comic that didn't have to worry about the obvious forms of communicating either a gag or a suspense story of some kind. That had me puzzled about what I was up to.

[My first magazine *Arcade* emerged at] the moment where the economic realities of comics were shaking. The work was interesting. It was getting somewhat less interesting as it got more and more focused on sex and drugs... the field was sort of bottoming out a bit. And with an underground cartoonist I was very close with in San Francisco, Bill Griffith, I started *Arcade* as a kind of lifeboat for what we thought was important about our scene with the hopes of turning it into a quarterly newsstand magazine.

I moved back to New York [from San Francisco]... In New York, everything was much more organized around trying to appear in the existing magazine structure. There was, again, no place to publish the kinds of things that I was interested in.

It was in that world of underground comics seeming more and more predictable that *Raw* grew up because [my wife Françoise Mouly] naively said, "Let's do a magazine!" I had enough, thank you, after *Arcade*, but she dragged me into this thing because there weren't any other prospects... Everybody in the book had a certain degree of real ambition of making comics that hadn't been like anything made before.





## The Making of Maus

I had done a three-page comic strip called *Maus* in an underground comic called *Funny Animals* back in '72. That made a bit of a stir insofar as within that small teacup there could be a stir. I knew I had made something that wasn't like other things. It was rather different than the longer version of course, but it already was, by underground comic standards, quite sober. I knew I was working on something that was important to me and that people could respond to.

I returned to the three-page *Maus* and was expanding it, partially because I just moved back to New York. I had to be in touch with my father anyway, and a microphone would be a handy defense weapon. I started doing this in no context whatsoever, just thinking it would be interesting to make a very long comic book that would need a bookmark and ask to be reread.

During the ongoing interviews with my father, I was trying different ways of drawing, and at the same time, without thinking about it, making these very rough sketches to indicate the panel breakdowns and how much language would fit in a panel and how the pages might structure themselves. Eventually it became clear to me that the problem with drawing this large size and bringing it down [to scale] was that it was a way of minimizing the personal errors, and thereby giving oneself extra authority as the artist.... The sketches I was making felt much more vulnerable. All of my mistakes were at full size. I didn't like seeing the work blown up, because then it magnified the mistakes. The problems that that style brought up had to do with clarity. It was also important with a story this complex that I not get in the way by [causing somebody to] stare at it for a long time to find out if that was a foot or a tree. I had to eventually synthesize something that looked like my first sketches but had the clarity of a typeface.

## Comics as a Medium

A critical mass was reached, not when *Maus* first came out but within ten years—critical mass meaning enough work that critics would have to pay attention to it. The weight that comics could achieve was present. It was the culmination of that Faustian deal.

Now it's something one can slow down and consider as a medium, but the full range of what's available,

## The Faustian Deal

At that point I figured it was time for the Faustian deal, meaning comics were still a mass medium, but not as mass as they used to be. Therefore one had to set up a situation where comics could be invited into museums, bookshops, libraries, and universities. Then we could get grants just like poets do who aren't in the commerce business. That was a very specific articulation that developed in the period when we were starting *Raw*. It was at that time that I was applying to places like the NEA and [New York State Council on the Arts] programs and meeting no interest whatsoever. I remember I was applying for some grant to work on *Maus*. Invariably in these attempts, I'd be told, "Well, you can't apply in the drawing category. It's got writing. You can't apply in the writing category. It's got drawing. I guess we put it in mixed media."

What's interesting about comics is they really are a separate medium from anything else.... They're their own medium that synthesizes these two different strands of expression and ties them together. Every great comic is the result of finding a new cocktail for how these things fit together.

possible, and can be made in comics is now probably flowering like never before in the history of the medium...As a result, the people drawn into making comics come from a more sophisticated gene pool of people who have a wider set of options often, and the readers are not only ones who can't read books without pictures.

[Comics are] now firmly enough entrenched that they're going to affect all future making. Because the conventional wisdom might be right, which is that we do live in a more visual culture, and therefore for information to come at us visually and be able to decode those visuals is kind of urgent. Comics have the advantage of existing between the two languages so that they'll stand still long enough for you to contemplate them rather than be part of the laser-beam barrage, and that gives them a certain potency.

## The Terminology of Graphic Novels

The respectability that came with the phrase "graphic novel" is a thoroughgoing annoyance to me, because it leads to books that are made to be studied in academia, and that's no less of a marketplace than making comics to appeal to 12-year-old boys whose prepubescent stirrings are beginning and they have to be titillated with action and sexualized images.

It's a great marketing term. What I called *Maus* while I was working on it was a long comic book that needed a bookmark and has to be reread. I don't think that that would make a great subtitle for a category for a library or a bookstore.... In general, if there is a need for the phrase, it's because people are embarrassed to read comics, but they're not embarrassed to read graphic novels. They even get hipness points for it.

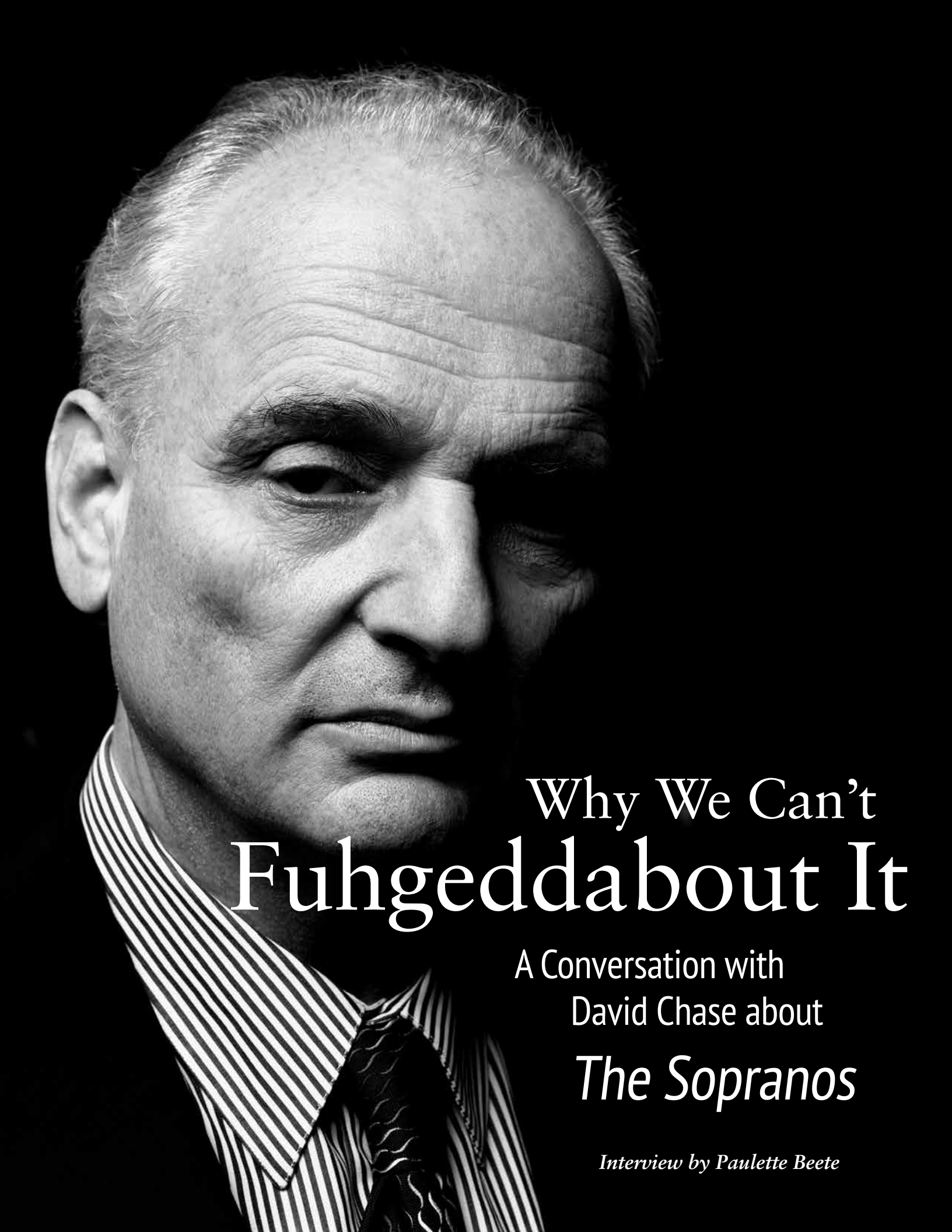
I'm fine with the word "comics" even though it's a total misnomer, but it's the misnomer that got there first. I've been spelling it "co-mix"...Comix with an X was what the underground comics were called because they were X-rated very often. And if you mispronounce

it "co-mix," then you get to mix together the words and the pictures and you have something that's actually sort of accurate and belonging to its roots. But I'm not pitching for another marketing term...Whether I like it or not [the term "graphic novel"] is useful, because it communicates to people the notion of an ambitious work that stirs words and pictures together. Me, I just call myself a cartoonist, and I'm making co-mix. ▲



**ABOVE** | An excerpt from the final copy of *Maus*. IMAGE BY ART SPIEGELMAN/METAMAUS, USED COURTESY OF PANTHEON BOOKS

**OPPOSITE** | The continuing evolution of Spiegelman's story and artwork for his groundbreaking book *Maus*. IMAGES BY ART SPIEGELMAN/METAMAUS, USED COURTESY OF PANTHEON BOOKS

A black and white close-up portrait of David Chase, looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. He is wearing a striped shirt and a dark tie. The background is dark.

# Why We Can't Fuhgeddabout It

A Conversation with  
David Chase about

*The Sopranos*

*Interview by Paulette Beete*



In 1999, HBO already had a reputation for pushing boundaries with shows like *Oz*—which dared to be sympathetic about prison inmates—and *The Larry Sanders Show*, a show about the duplicitous nature of the late-night television business. But though the lines between hero and villain were somewhat fuzzier on cable, and cable shows weren't hampered by multiple ad breaks, cable series still looked fairly similar to their network cousins, most of which could be categorized as benign sitcoms or predictable dramas. Then along came *The Sopranos*. Premiering on January 10, 1999, the show ran for six seasons and amassed a slew of awards along the way, including 21 Emmys.

It's difficult to find any media coverage of the series that doesn't include some variation on the phrase "the best-written dramatic series in the history of television," as *Vanity Fair* enthused in a 2007 feature. The show went on to set a new artistic standard for television, which series like *Lost* and *Homeland* have since

aspired to reach. Despite what we now recognize as the show's clear artistic merit, veteran producer and screenwriter David Chase (*Rockford Files*, *Northern Exposure*), only landed the deal to produce *The Sopranos* for HBO after being turned down by each of the traditional networks. Chase not only brought a new type of story to the small screen, but he changed the very way in which television stories were told. We spoke with him by telephone to find out what exactly made *The Sopranos* so groundbreaking.

## From Rock-and-Roller to Filmmaker to TV Maker

I was initially interested in rock-and-roll music, and I wanted to be a rock-and-roll singer, a drummer first and then a singer. At the same time, this was early college, I went to school in New York and... I began to go to foreign films. It was there it first occurred to me



**ABOVE** | David Chase (standing, center) discussing the final scene of *The Sopranos* with the actors (seated, from left) Edie Falco, Robert Iler, and James Gandolfini. PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO  
**OPPOSITE** | PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID CHASE



ABOVE | James Gandolfini as Tony Soprano (right) in a session with his psychiatrist Dr. Jennifer Melfi (played by Lorraine Bracco) in *The Sopranos*. PHOTO BY ABBOT GENSER/HBO

that a movie was not like a Chevrolet, it was not these things that are produced out in Hollywood, these machines—which is what they’ve become.

I saw that there were credits on them and that a movie was directed by so-and-so, and maybe even written and directed by the same person, and I just fell under the spell. I’ve been under the spell of movies ever since I was little, but [that was when] I thought it was something maybe I could do. I wrote movie scripts and I never sold any. But I did get a chance to write for TV and I stayed in TV and I did okay in TV. But my first goal was to be a filmmaker.

## Sometimes a Great Notion

I was working in television, but as I said, I wanted to be in movies, and I thought [the idea for *The Sopranos*] would make a good motion picture or an interesting motion picture—a story about a mobster in therapy and his mother who’s making his life miserable. This was in the mid-’90s or something. At that time, I was picturing [Robert] De Niro as the mobster and Anne Bancroft as his mother. It turns out later on they went and almost made that movie: they did *Analyze This*, which is very similar to *The Sopranos* in concept form. But when I came up with it as a movie, my agents at that time told me, “Oh mob

comedies, nobody cares,” and, blah, blah, blah. I listened, but I had it in my back pocket. So when it came time for me to do a TV show, I thought, “Maybe [this will] work as a television show since I’m not doing anything with it as a movie.”

I may have been aware subconsciously that there was a need in certain parts of the viewing public for something more than they were getting from the networks, something more complicated... something more surprising, something that rolled out at a different pace, something that mixed comedy and drama together instead of keeping them ghettoized.

As a person who wanted to work in TV, there was nothing really interesting that I wanted to work on. And so some part of me thought maybe there’s an appetite for this from people, maybe they’re ready to just do something different and a little more risky.

## On the Appeal of Untidy Endings

As I’m looking back now, [the narrative structure of *The Sopranos*] all had to do with pace. I didn’t want the narrative to unfurl at the kind of pace at which I was used to working. I wanted the story to unfold much more slowly, or maybe even

more quickly. I just didn't like that pace of network television. And so in trying to tell a story at a different pace, it kind of affected the things [like] not necessarily tidying everything up at the end.

The chronology's interrupted—it has to do with time. I think something in me was chafing under the scourge of network time. In other words there were 42 minutes in a [television] hour, not an hour. There were 42 minutes and the rest of it was commercials. I wanted to do something where I wasn't sharing any time with any other stories, with any commercials. I wanted to do a pure television show that didn't talk about Tide washing machine products or anything like that and didn't distract you from the essence of the narrative. I wanted to do that—that's more like a movie. That *is* a movie.

When I started seeing foreign films, or films by people that I hadn't really heard of before as a kid, like Orson Welles or even Hitchcock—if you look at his endings, they're not tidy. And that was something that appealed to me a great deal—the lack of tidiness. I don't mean that Hitchcock isn't a very tidy man—he's very tidy and very tight—but at the end of *Vertigo*, for example, what is he really saying? I think he's saying a couple of things whereas at the end of *The Sound of Music*, they're saying one thing. Or at the end of an episode of *Magnum*, they're saying one thing: they caught the guy.

## Using Soundtracks to Extend Narrative

As a pure audience member, as somebody who just went to the movies on a Saturday afternoon or went to the drive-in movies on Saturday night, I don't really think I noticed [the music] very much. I mean, I'd heard of Otto Preminger and [people] like that, but it never really clicked for me that movies were the work of an individual or a group of individuals, and it never really clicked for me that the music was playing while things were happening. But once I started getting into music, I started getting into rock-and-roll music, I started thinking about how rock-and-roll music could be used in movies. I wasn't the only one, obviously. Martin Scorsese was there a long time before me and once I saw that he had [used rock-and-roll in movies], and Dennis Hopper did it in *Easy Rider*, I

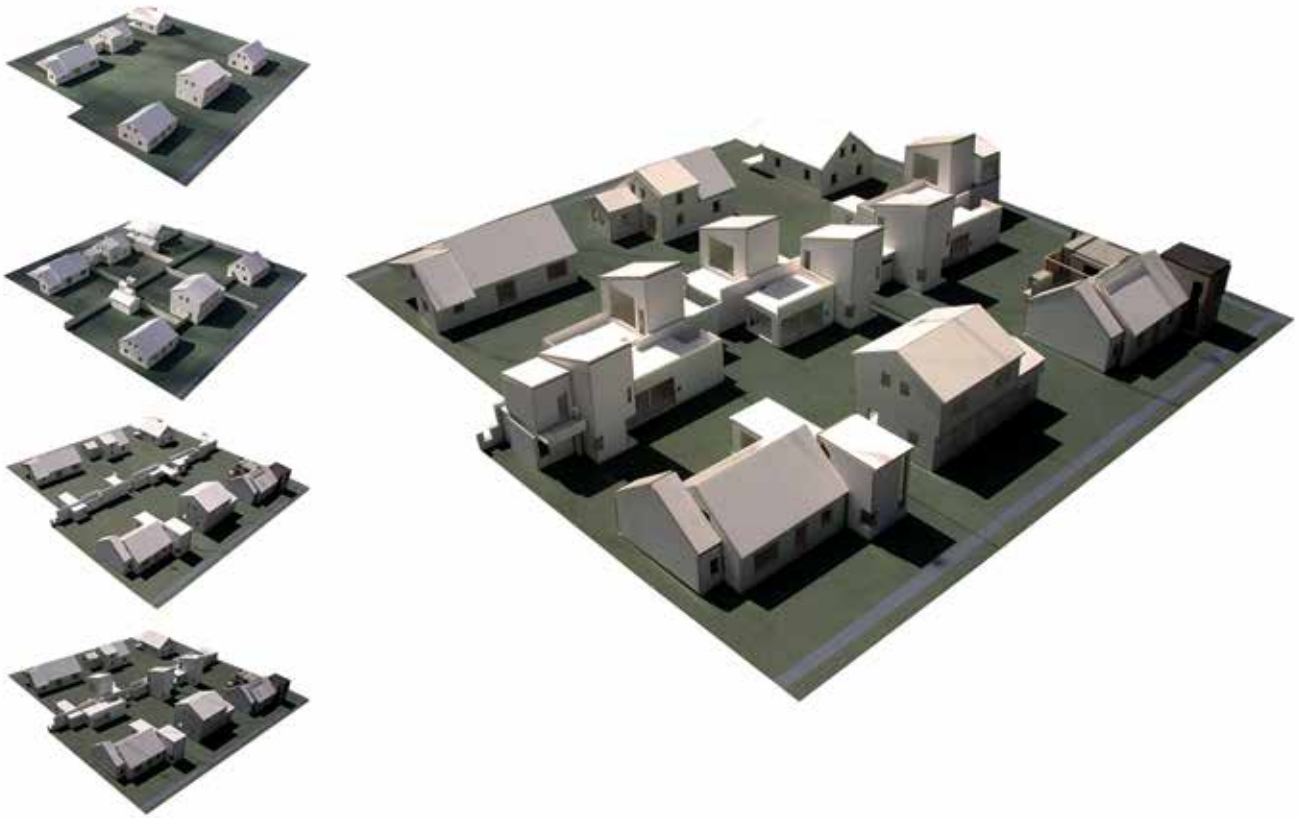
began to pay more attention to the music, because I was listening to that music more than I did the scores of [instrumental composers]. The [instrumental] scores to me were kind of inaudible. But using a song by the Byrds was not inaudible to me, because that I related to.

Was I trying to extend the narrative? I was probably trying to amplify it or nail it down or give it a roundness, give it an overview.... That's what I started to feel was possible. At the same time, other people were doing it too. Stanley Kubrick is another guy who doesn't use orchestral scores; he uses existing music. And that's the way it was with *The Sopranos*.

I very seldom planned anything around a song. No narrative was planned because of a song. Maybe a couple of times, but mostly they were not. The shows were written, and then the song was decided afterward because you could change the feeling of the show by the song you ended it with. You could change the meaning and the feeling. So I wasn't extending the narrative, but I was extending the artistic process, the process of creating narrative. I was extending that by the choice of song.

## The Future of Television

I think cable TV is the wave of the future... If you're talking about network television, where does that need to go? It needs to go where it's always needed to go and never has gone, which is taking the risk and the chance that you might insult somehow, or offend or horrify or surprise someone. Once you're relieved of the job of selling Volkswagens, you don't have to be worried that Volkswagen's going to be angry at you because you lost a few customers because they didn't like the episode you did about gay marriage. So then you can do anything you want. In other words, cable television, they're just selling *Mad Men*, or they're just selling *Game of Thrones*. *Game of Thrones* is going to exist or not exist on its ability to gather viewers. And if *Game of Thrones* does an episode in which some falcon is slaughtered and a certain number of people in the animal rights organization are going to say, "I'm never going to watch this show again," that's only the problem for *Game of Thrones*. It's not a problem for General Motors or Bristol Myers or anybody else. The product just has to work on its own. ▲



# The Suburban Canvas

## An Emerging Architectural Model of Artistic Possibilities

*Interviews by Rebecca Gross*

For much of its existence, American suburbia has been considered an architectural wasteland. From shopping malls to McMansions to residential developments, suburbs from Connecticut to California look eerily similar and share a similar pattern of quick, cheap construction that has left little if any room for thoughtful design.

But with the recent foreclosure crisis and growing environmental concerns, new opportunities have emerged to re-imagine the suburbs into sustainable, architecturally innovative communities. Although the other art forms examined in this issue have fully established themselves, suburban design—traditionally the realm of profit-driven developers—is only now beginning to emerge as an artistic field. Fueled by exhibits such as the Museum of Modern Art's *Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream* and *Dwell* magazine's Reurbia Design Competition, architects and designers are beginning to explore what the sub-

urbs could potentially look and feel like. We spoke with several architects who are leaders within this growing trend, and are quite literally designing new artistic possibilities for all those “little boxes on the hillside.” In their own words, here are some of their concerns, projects, and visions. Visit [arts.gov](http://arts.gov) for additional perspectives on designing suburbs.

### JUNE WILLIAMSON

*An associate professor of architecture at the City College of New York, June Williamson is co-author of the books *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs* (2011) and *Designing Suburban Futures: New Models from Build a Better Burb* (2013). She also served as jury coordinator for the *Build a Burb* competition, which sought to re-imagine possibilities for neglected or underutilized spaces on Long Island, New York.*

You're socialized, in studying architecture, to reorient yourself to cities and the urban environment. But there was always this nagging interest in what was happening in the vast territories that I was taught weren't the concern of architects; that was the concern of production builders. It was business; it was product. It was commercial work.

I think we've moved past prominent architects doing projects that take this ironic stance about suburban commercial development or residential development. There's a much more earnest and engaged dialogue from academics to students, who are interested in this stuff and understand the impact that it can have on their own lives, on

their parents' lives, on their children's lives. They get that and are energized by it. I think the development community, in part because of the big blows of the recession, understands that they need to do things differently. They have to be creative about financing. They need to be more cognizant of the impacts and benefits of what they propose. All of that is promising for bringing creative thought to the table and being less formulaic.

A lot of creative people who grew up in these environments and had questions about them are seeing the decay or lost investment in some of these properties. [They are] scratching their heads about what that might mean and what those places could be.



**ABOVE** | Designed by Paul Lukez Architecture, the Walsh House is located in a suburban tract development in Lexington, Massachusetts. It offers a modern update to the neighborhood's 1950's split-level homes, integrating the residence with neighboring houses while creating flowing, light-filled interiors and a harmonious relationship with the landscape. PHOTO BY GREG PREMURU.

**OPPOSITE** | Group of modular backyard second units in Sited in the Setback: Increasing Density in Levittown, a winning proposal by Meri Tepper from the Build a Better Burb competition. Sited in the Setback, from *Designing Suburban Futures*, Island Press, 2013

It's interesting to see photographers and other kinds of artists, who have a much more nuanced view, I think, of the positive and the negative in these places [imagine new possibilities for the suburbs]. It's stimulating.

There are so many ways in which design can optimize the use of whatever square footage you have in your home. One of the things we emphasize in Build a Better Burb, which is really taking off across the country, is the opportunity to enable second units or accessory dwelling units. [I believe] you should be able to do whatever you want with a house, if you want to carve out an apartment for your adult child or your elderly parents or to rent out to somebody and make a little extra money in an entrepreneurial way or to help you with the mortgage.

Then there's the whole issue of how you use your yard. They could be used with more xeriscaping [landscaping that conserves water] or landscaping of native materials with habitats for wildlife, for growing food. There are all sorts of interesting opportunities there.

Culturally, we need to move past the kind of obsolete, oppositional constraints that it's city versus suburb. We're all knit together in the metropolis, so there's a metropolitan mindset that needs to emerge.... I think design has a significant role to play, both in visualizing this cultural shift to help people better understand the data and the trends and be optimistic about it, to building structures and projects that can demonstrate how it can be done.

#### PAUL LUKEZ

*Paul Lukez is the principal and founder of Boston-based Paul Lukez Architecture, and has taught architecture for 20 years. In 2007, he published the book Suburban Transformations, which highlights ways to develop suburbia into sustainable communities with unique identities. He puts these ideals into practice through his design consultancy Transform X, which uses digital mapping tools to chart a community's evolution over time.*

One of the things that's lacking in the suburbs is a sense of space. Everybody does their own thing. They build an object, and their object doesn't relate to another object, nor does it relate to the landscape. It tends to be a very flat world.

What we try to do is create a more three-dimensional relationship, both in relationship to other buildings and the landscape, but also in the Z-axis. So as you're moving

up and down through a building, you get different vantage points of the landscape, of your neighbors, of [other] buildings. A richness develops, and variety, that wasn't there before.

I think in general there's a greater awareness of the power of design in the public. People are becoming more educated about and aware of the different kinds of options that are available, and that design is an important part of life. Particularly as they start looking around their own environments, people begin to wonder, "How can we improve it? How can we make it better?"

The role of public space becomes really important. Those places that we have to go, whether it's restaurants, whether it's stores, whether it's libraries, schools, places of work—all those places share a public realm. How those are designed individually, and how they relate to one another, creates a network, both physically and as an experiential network. The stronger those networks are tied to each other as memorable experiences, the bigger the impact they will have on our consciousness. There are many things that we can do to make those really memorable places. We can integrate the landscape in ways that are pleasing, that stimulate our senses. We can create places that are pleasant to work in and to live in. We can create places that encourage social interaction or opportunities to see other people. There are ways in which we can create and form and shape community that can enhance the human experience.

Bigger is not always better. I think the future is about building smarter, more intelligently, and being aware of what we're doing in a way that's connected to the landscape, to our communities, and to our daily lives.

#### SHANE COEN

*Based in Minneapolis, Shane Coen is the principal and founder of the landscape architecture firm Coen + Partners. Coen's work was featured in the Walker Art Center's exhibition Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes, and his award-winning designs for the Jackson Meadow and Mayo Woodlands communities have been lauded for their sensitive integration of natural and man-made elements. Jackson Meadow, discussed below, is a residential development in Marine on St. Croix, Minnesota. Coen also presented at the NEA-supported Mayors' Institute on City Design event in Lexington, Kentucky.*



**ABOVE** | A collaboration between Coen + Partners and Salmela Architect, Jackson Meadow is a planned residential development in Marine on St. Croix, Minnesota. Seventy-five percent of the site's 145 acres was left as dedicated open space, and the neighborhood connects by trails to nearby communities and parks. PHOTO BY PETER BASTIANELLI KERZE

[In Europe,] the importance of architecture and design is integrated into the educational system and it's not in ours, anywhere. You don't have somebody that teaches you how to see, and to look at things and to ask questions on why it's beautiful and why you like it and why you don't like it—our society tends to not think about it at all.

I think the type of developers that were attracted to the suburbs weren't interested in design. It was a profit-driven mission that I would group in there with the fast-food movement. Fast-food and malls and housing were all about speed and how much square footage you could offer for less money.

[For Jackson Meadow,] our philosophy was that if we create a sensitive, artistic development, community will actually be partially created because we're going to attract people that care about these issues. And that happened.

The architectural concept was based upon the Finnish architecture of the region; a modern emulation of the Finnish architecture. [The houses] are very contextual and meaningful to the region, and are respectful of the heritage, but they were adapted to the times.

We used a lot of glass; the natural light is invigorating to your daily life. You literally feel like

you're connected to the outdoors at all times—the same with the detached garage. You get to walk to your front door instead of entering your house through a laundry room, and [can] experience your house the same way everybody else experiences it. But you also create space between your garage and your guest house and your main house, so you get a cluster of buildings that is more reminiscent of rural architecture, in a modern way.

Even as a landscape architect, moving into my house out there for the first time was something I'll never forget. Everywhere I turned and everywhere I walked, I was connected to both light and the outside. I still feel like I'm on vacation 12 years later.

[In the future,] I hope that planning is contextual to the land. Most suburbs were planned in an office; they weren't planned by looking at a piece of land and figuring out what that land was really telling you to do with it... Certainly, I believe, once you move outside the [inner suburban] ring that a public, connected open space system should be a requirement of all suburban development. The land is going to continue to be developed over time, there's no way around it. If we don't focus on it, we're just going to repeat what's already been done. ▲



**ABOVE** | Hip-hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa, appointed as a visiting scholar at Cornell University in 2012, standing in front of a painting of the university. PHOTO BY PETE BEST, COURTESY OF CORNELL UNIVERSITY



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**A**s part of our online content for this issue, which you can find by scanning the QR code or visiting [arts.gov](http://arts.gov), we talk with Afrika Bambaataa, one of the early pioneers of hip-hop music; look at the Fun Gallery, one of the first spots to exhibit graffiti art; tour the Visionary Arts Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, an institution dedicated to outsider or self-taught artists; examine the Maker Faire, a do-it-yourself movement that mixes art, technology, and craft; speak with contemporary graphic novelist Daniel Clowes about his art; and more.

Don't forget to check out our Art Works Blog ([artworks.arts.gov](http://artworks.arts.gov)) for daily stories on the arts around the country, and join us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/NationalEndowmentfortheArts](http://www.facebook.com/NationalEndowmentfortheArts)), Twitter (@NEAArts), and YouTube ([www.youtube.com/NEAArts](http://www.youtube.com/NEAArts)).

**FRONT COVER** | Lady Pink's *Lady of the Leaf*, 2011, was featured in her exhibition at Woodward Gallery in New York City. PHOTO BY LADY PINK