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FAST FORWARD FASHION

GRAPHIC GUERRILLA

RYAN MCGINNESS BLURS THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN FINE ART AND GRAPHIC DESIGN. TERRY LEWIS VENTURES INTO THE YOUNG ARTIST'S GARRET



EQUAL PARTS PROVOCATEUR and perfectionist, graphic designer Ryan McGinness is known for throwing spanners into the art world's works. His graphic guerrilla tactics—the logos with "art" represented by a figure vomiting into a trash can, the "I love my bipolar disorder" bumperstickers, the slapping of art critics by statistically revealing their misogyny—are upbeat critiques of a milieu that takes itself very seriously. With his latest work, a book titled *pieceofmind*, the 29-year-old designer has gone baroque, with luscious gold and black figures submerged in a forest of sumptuous signs.

"I don't want to spell out tight narratives with no room for interpretation, no room for a slippery language of sorts"

Six flights up in a run-down Chinatown building, Ryan McGinness' studio is immaculate, colorful and nicely laid out, much like the pages of a good design book. He asks me to take off my shoes, offers a pair of furry pit-bull slippers and proceeds to show me around his spacious studio filled with industrial objects—beer cozies, books, skateboards—all covered with his trademark iconography. With numerous solo shows under his belt, you might say Ryan has elevated graphic design into an art form. But blurring boundaries is what he does best.

Terry: In your previous books, like *flatnessisgood*, *luxurygood* and *vocabularyfast*, the work looks more free-form. There are more sketches and rough shapes and you use different media. *Pieceofmind*, on the other hand, seems more abstract and graphic. What's up?

Ryan: That's the direction I am moving in. I'd been working with line and shape and found images. Now I am more concerned with concentrating on shape. I wanted to explore working with two colors, black and gold, so I do that throughout. You can see some of the black is behind the gold and

some of the gold is behind the black. There's no room for interpretation, no room for a slippery language of sorts.

Terry: Some phrases that you use in your books and produced objects say "art is boring" and "nobody cares about art." Is this how you feel about the art world today?

Ryan: What I want to do is communicate to as many people as possible and if you want to do that, you have to compete with industries outside of the art industry like the entertainment, gaming, movie, and television industries. A lot of people simply do not care about art, or maybe they don't realize that they do.

Terry: You obviously have no problem with designing your work for mass production and sale. Would you consider yourself a commercial artist?

Ryan: So what is a commercial artist? I'm not providing a service but I am providing commodities that I am originating. But I also don't have a problem doing commissioned work. Sometimes the projects reside somewhere in between. They are commissioned but with all the creative freedom in the world. If you're a traditional fine art painter and you're commissioned to do a portrait, is that commercial art? I like mixing it up.

I'm playing off the translucency and opaqueness of each ink.

Terry: This work is almost like a graphic designer's mind on acid. You follow the shapes and they lead you off into entirely different worlds. Are you trying to convey a specific point or are you trying to leave it up to the viewer?

Ryan: I want it to be somewhat ambiguous so that you bring to the work your own interpretation and your own history and you can take away from the work whatever you invest in it. I don't want to spell out tight nar-

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 COLETTE, PARIS, \$40, 112 PAGES, PAPERBACK