

CPZ
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copper

press

AMIR H. FALLAH

INTRO & INTERVIEW BY STEVEN M. BRYDGES



What is the juxtaposition between the words beautiful and decay in terms of how they apply to your publication?

The name originally comes from a quote by the artist Barry McGee (Twist) in one of my favorite graffiti 'zines, *12oz. Prophet*. The name described everything that I loved about graffiti art and underground culture as a whole. Graffiti is simultaneously loved and hated by people depending of what their background is. Everyone has an opinion about graffiti. The same thing could be said in regards to design, fine art, and various aspects of Pop culture. Another reason we chose the name was because it didn't sound like every other magazine title. It immediately popped off the shelves and grabbed the viewer's attention.

Does the forward slash serve as a merger of apparently unrelated ideas or things? If so, why is bringing those things together important to you?

The slash in the title was a way for people to be able to read the words together or separately. I wanted it to convey the idea that the two words are opposites but at times they can converge.

What inspired you and Jay Littleton to start *Beautiful/Decay* back in Fairfax, VA? How old were you when you started it?

When you grow up in the suburbs you get bored real quick. There isn't much to do. We were just bored and decided to do a punk 'zine that included everything from music to art. We started the 'zine around 1996. I really don't have an exact date.

I read in an interview in *Faesthetic* that you became bored with it after three issues and ceased publishing for about four years. Why'd you become bored with it and what about the process or the idea itself bored you? Were financial concerns behind its cessation?

I think Jay and I were gearing up for college and just let the 'zine fade out. The magazine at that point was so small. We didn't take it too seriously. We were more worried about graduating and figuring out what we wanted to do with our lives. I don't think finances were ever a concern. We didn't spend much money on the b/w issues. The most we ever spent was \$100 per issue.

What factors were behind the decision to bring it back?

I think about four to five years had passed when I decided to start up the magazine again. I was going to college in Baltimore but went to NYC for a semester for an exchange program. While I was there, I became exposed to the real art world. It was a very inspiring time for me. I interned at Roebing Hall Gallery in Brooklyn and at Deitch Projects in Soho at the same time. When I returned to Baltimore to finish my undergraduate degree, I ended up spending a lot of time in the library flipping through everything and anything I could get my hands on. I started to realize that out of all the books and magazines in the library there was nothing for someone like me. You either had the high-end art magazines that were so dry that they would put you to sleep or you had the graffiti magazines that had zero to little content and were just stuffed with images. I thought to myself, "Hey maybe there are other people out there that wanted a art/design magazine that is intelligent but doesn't read like a critical theory paper."

You have stated you knew when you first started out there was a need for a magazine like *Beautiful/Decay*. Is this because you couldn't find a magazine that brought together the various aspects of art and music you enjoyed?

At that time there were no magazines documenting the convergence of art/design/illustration/graffiti art/ and pop culture. I thought that if I could combine all of my various interests I could create a publication that bridged the narrow gap between these various fields.

Something about the control of content is satisfying to an editor of a DIY-'zine. How do you feel about complete creative control?

Creative control is the most important thing to me. I'm lucky that my business partners (Ben Osher & Fubz) share my vision and have let me do what I want with the content. At first I think some of my opinions and ideas worried them but once they saw that the magazine was getting a positive response they let me run loose with my crazy ideas.

Any specific examples you can relate regarding a seemingly risky idea that worked out? Any that haven't?

Amir H. Fallah publishes a noisy but beautiful publication about noisy but beautiful yet controversial art. Graffiti. It's name conjured images in my rural mind of adolescents in hoodies tagging train cars and overpasses; gang symbols of which I couldn't possibly fathom the meaning – nor have any desire to; streaks on subways; urban decay. Fallah, through his magazine *Beautiful/Decay* is an education, a quarterly course on the distinction between graffiti and the folk tradition of Street art, and the juxtaposition between it and fine art.

Fallah is also a fine arts painter, a speaker, and a world traveler in addition to his duties as creative director and founder of *Beautiful/Decay*. But his most important contribution has been symbolic: See a niche, fill it. He had a vision of a graffiti magazine rich with content crossed with a fine art magazine for the layman. He wanted there to be a magazine he'd want to read, and because there was no such thing at the time, he and a friend started one out of their bedrooms. And how he's making noise in the art world, illuminating urban folk art with the power of a 1000-megawatt streetlight, and educating rubes like me that there's more to the colors of the street than just Colors, holmes.

When we first started out, we had a lot of requests by already established artists, designers, graffiti artists and so on to be featured in the magazine. These were the type of people that got press in every magazine out on the stands. We had a lot of discussions about if this would help us sell more magazines and in turn enable us to keep the magazine going. I felt very strongly about supporting the underdog and giving press to young undiscovered talent. It was a risk that we took but fortunately it ended up working in our favor and established us as the premier publication that continuously features artists that the general public have never heard of but should have.

What did your first issue cost to produce? How many copies were printed? How did you pay for it?

The first b/w issue cost 100 dollars to make. We printed about 80-100 copies. I think Jay and I just pooled our allowance money together.

Why not cover artists that are "hot" or hip? Do your readers expect something different from *B/D*?

Everyone gets bored of reading the same interview questions with the same five artists over and over again in every magazine. I think *Beautiful/Decay* has gained a reputation of breaking young artists. We were the first to cover a handful of groundbreaking artists and designers who have gone off to do big things in their fields.

How do you feel about showing your own art in *B/D*?

I never show my personal work in *Beautiful/Decay*. I've done several illustrations for the magazine in the past, but I try to focus on other artists work. I think people would get tired of looking at my work in every issue.

Is *B/D* supported by any grants or endowments or is it fully a "for-profit" publication? What are the biggest challenges to running *B/D*?

B/D is a for-profit publication. No grants, endowments, or loans have funded it.

The biggest challenge is obviously to generate enough money to support the magazine. We run entirely on ad revenue, which is extremely tough for a publication like ours. Many of our competitors are lifestyle- or product-driven magazines that function more like catalogs for their advertisers than a publication. We have tried to stay away from that as much as possible focusing on interesting content over hyping up products to keep advertisers happy. It's taken a lot of time and effort on our part to make advertisers realize our relevance. In the last year, many companies that wouldn't return our calls in the beginning have started to come around realizing how powerful good content and originality can be in the publishing business.

BEAUTIFUL/
DECAY



How have internet publications affected *B/D*?

When I restarted *B/D* in 2001 the internet was my only marketing/promotions outlet. I used it to promote the publication internationally, sell issues, and notify our readers of our release parties. Today, the internet plays a vital role in the magazine. We update our website daily with links to interesting art/design/culture sites, have an extensive online shop carrying everything from art/design books to clothing, and have a monthly online magazine called Anthology which is a counterpart to the print version of *B/D*. Simply put without the internet I don't think *Beautiful/Decay* would be around today.

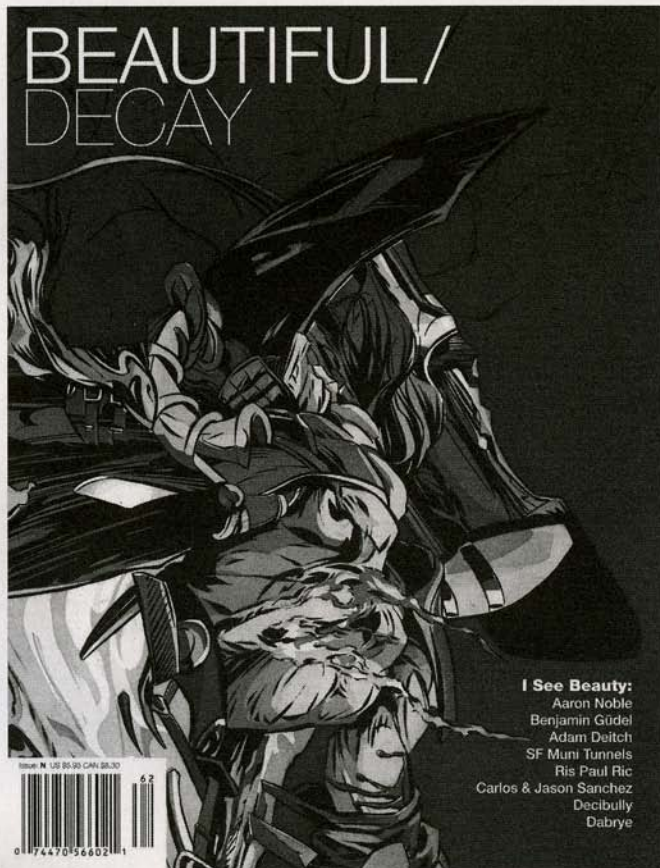
Since issue D, which, if my alphabetically math is correct, was the first issue you created when you fired 'er back up, how much and in what way has *B/D* evolved?

Actually the first three issues of *B/D* weren't lettered. They were b/w 'zines made at the local Kinko's.

When I restarted the magazine in 2001 in full color it was still very small. Issue A was only 32 pages and full color in a print run of 3,000.

If you could create the perfect gallery space, what would you do?

A lot of people tell me that we should open a gallery.



I See Beauty:

Aaron Noble
Benjamin Güdel
Adam Daltch
SF Muni Tunnels
Ris Paul Ric
Carlos & Jason Sanchez
Decibully
Dabrye



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apprenticing for other graffiti writers to learn how it's done, repetition of the same act over and over, etc. All of these things fall in line with folk art.

The difference between graffiti art and street art is that graffiti art is based around the use of spray paint and markers to create lettering and characters.

Street art or public art is an extension of graffiti art where the artist will use posters, stickers, sculptures, and public interventions to get a message across. It's a very new subgenre of graffiti. *Beautiful/Decay* was actually the first magazine to comprehensively document Street art in the US. Since then it has grown in popularity by an amazing rate.

You wrote in *Butter* magazine that you took an art class to learn more about and to become more proficient at graffiti art. Isn't that antithetical to the core of graffiti, the street? Also: They taught graffiti art in high school?

I took the art class in eighth grade. It was a basic art



class and had nothing to do with graffiti. I just wanted to take a class where I could take time to draw and not get in trouble.

What sort of work do you do besides *Beautiful/Decay*?

The two constant things that I do is work on *Beautiful/Decay* and make/show my personal artwork. Aside from that I'm involved with various creative fields in my "downtime." Here is a rundown of what I'm doing this month: Teaching a print design course in the UCLA media arts department; speaking in Mexico at the Congreso Creactivo Conference about print media; work-

ing as the head creative director for the UCLA Art Department; Going to Aspen Colorado to create backdrops for "Spring Jam," a festival sponsored by the Aspen Museum of Art, and freelance designing for various clients.

How did you get hooked up with the Third Line Gallery in Dubai, UAE?

One of the curators at The Third Line had seen my work in a few magazines and had read a bit about my work. She emailed me and told me about the gallery and what they were trying to do. We worked for about a year planning the show. I flew out there for about ten days to hang the show and create a large 8x6 foot painting on site. The show was a huge success and was reviewed in over ten publications in Dubai. The Third Line is doing major things in the Middle East. They are the first contemporary art gallery in the region and have some of the most interesting Middle Eastern artists from around the world showing there.

What is the biggest sin an art magazine can perform?

Feature the same artists that every other magazine covers.

call me: OPITI

Name?
Opiti, Mr. Poulet, Pivoine, Daro Wilmer

Age?
30000

Location?
Bordeaux, France

Your Way or Their Way?
Comme ils veulent

America or Asia?
La France comme d'habitude

Gallery or Streets?
or Trendy Magazines ?????

Carnivore or Herbivore?
Vero carné?

Hate 'n' Love?
Avec les deux sexes et de la même coin

Bikes or Cars?
L'ancien Américain et la jetée

Alpines or Boats?
Néa Davien or Tsunami?

Corporate or Indie?
o

Design or Art?
Avec les deux acronyme de la même

Hip-hop or Rock?
Même et différent

Democracy or Anarchy?
"Anarchie y a toujours" (Mackie, 1981 by Carolina, three years old)

Right or Wrong?
Wack, or Ehé?

Stencil or Wheatpaste?
I want to be subconsciously

Beauty or Decay?
Barcelona is the real capital of graffiti, not New York



