





GROWING UP IN OAKVILLE, ONTARIO, **SURROUNDED** *by* ARTISTIC PARENTS, THERE WAS AN INTEREST IN ALL THINGS **VISUAL**. INFLUENCED *by* STUDIO GHIBLI, RANKIN BASS STOP-MOTION FILMS *and* MOST *of* ALL THE GUMBY MOVIE, HE WAS **HOOKED** ON ART. MOVING FROM GRAPHIC DESIGN *to* ILLUSTRATION *at* OCAD UNIVERSITY OFFERED THE CHANCE *to* **MAKE** SOMETHING OUT *of* NOTHING; **COMPOSITION** CUES FROM ARTIST ALEX COLVILLE *and* PHOTOGRAPHER JEFF WALL ADDED HEFT. GRADUATION **HONORS** LED *to* HIS FIRST NEW YORK TIMES ASSIGNMENT.

NO.84

H U D S O N C H R I S T I E

INTERVIEWED BY MARK FOX PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAMELA DUNGAO

In conversation, Hudson Christie laughs easily, and often. He is amused by incongruity in art and film, and finds unintentional flaws especially endearing. “It’s why the original *Star Wars* trilogy—before George Lucas got his hands on CG and went back and ‘fixed’ it—is a lot more fun to look at. Because you can see the seams,” he says. All of which may help explain Hudson’s aesthetic, what might be termed “blobular affability.”

THIS PLAYFUL, CHILDLIKE QUALITY seems instantly familiar—perhaps because all of us at one time or another have had the experience of squeezing a handful of Play-Doh. The immediacy and accessibility of this visual language is one of its strengths: it is difficult to not be charmed by Hudson’s work.

POPULATED BY PLASTIC LIFEFORMS in largely pastel hues, Hudson’s illustrations bring to mind a junk drawer of claymation spare parts. “Art Clokey is certainly an influence—I watched the weird 90s *Gumby* movie as a kid over and over—and so are the other stop-motion products I consumed as a kid: “Pingu”, and the Rankin-Bass Christmas films. *Gumby* is a particularly good example because there’s a lot of really unpolished but inventive animation techniques happening there—although it’s at times pretty ugly, compared to the work by Aardman Animations (*Wallace & Gromit*).” ONE OF THE MEMORABLE FEATURES of Hudson’s work is the incongruity he creates between three-dimensional space and the elements that inhabit it. “With 2D work depth is quite variable,” Hudson notes, “whereas with 3D work, although it becomes a two-di-

mensional picture, it’s impossible to fully flatten things out. I think that’s a merit of my work, where I’m trying to find that grey area where the drawing suggests a flattened or distorted perspective while working with something inherently 3D.”

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN two-and three-dimensions is playfully skewed further in illustrations such as one about factory farming in which the dimensional animals feature eyes that are painted on in a gestural, graphic style that makes no pretense about the illusion of depth. The contrast between flat and volumetric is even more apparent in an animation for the *New York Times Upshot* about home births versus hospital births. A simple linework drawing of a house—then a hospital—is superimposed over a ballooning, pregnant woman. The woman occupies a physical space and casts a shadow, while the changing drawings float in the foreground untethered by the physical world.

AT OTHER TIMES HUDSON REVELS in using perspective that is deliriously off-kilter, as

though he first studied drawing in medieval Europe and later apprenticed with the set designer of the 1920 film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. His cover illustration for *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* about filing taxes exemplifies Hudson’s disregard for the established rules of one-point perspective. “I constantly come back to medieval painters and early Northern Renaissance painters, like Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Hieronymus Bosch,” he says. “There’s crazy receding angles, and there’s no consistency to it.”

HUDSON’S
WORK
PERFECTLY
CAPTURES
THAT SPACE
WHERE
THE REAL
BECOMES
ABSURD.
I LOVE HIS
PIECES
BECAUSE
THEY
CREATE
AN
ENTIRE
WORLD
IN A
SINGLE
IMAGE.

Haley
Cullingham
Senior Editor
Penguin
Random
House

I like the idea that illustrators can make something out of nothing. No need to use pre-existing things like typefaces, or find actual subject matter to photograph. If you can think it and draw it you can make a picture of anything.

Hudson has described the models he formerly built as “sets,” but when I propose the analogy of theater—the model as a stage on which the illustrator lights and directs his performers—Hudson demurs. “I treat my work much more like a painting than a play. I’m trying to capture all the relevant information and meaning in a single, aesthetically clear and pleasing frame, rather than stringing the viewer along through a sequential narrative.”

Surprisingly, Hudson’s illustration process privileges language over images. “I am not much of a drawer, actually. When I’m coming up with ideas it’s 90% written notes. I’m always trying to figure out what the perfect subject matter is textually before I even start drawing.” He explains further, “There’s a huge difference between drawing and working three-dimensionally. Working in 2D constrains your techniques in a funny way—a drawing can be incredibly simple if you want, whereas a 3D render

is inherently complex due to accurate perspective, or ray tracing, in the case of CG (Computer Graphics).” ALTHOUGH HUDSON NOW WORKS EXCLUSIVELY with Blender software, he launched his career in 2014 using Sculpey oven-bake clay painted with acrylic gouache. “I built my sets out of foam core and paper and I lit and photographed everything traditionally—with a digital camera, of course,” he recalls. “I never invested in any stop-motion rigging and software which is why my animations were never more than a minute long. They’re very brief, very bite-sized, which is perfect for editorial.”

Over time, however, this way of working became excruciating. “It stopped being as fun because it’s slow, and its unforgiving as hell. Doing revisions was miserable,” he admits. In 2019 Hudson finally “hit a huge wall” and was unable to work for the better part of a year. “I left my studio space and started using Blender to make my work. I was resistant at first because I didn’t want to lose the ‘aura’ around my pictures, but this is another part of taking care of my mental health—doing things traditionally was exhausting and unsustainable, especially with the deadlines of

editorial jobs.”

THREE MONTHS AFTER DOWNLOADING the app, Hudson found that working with Blender was far more forgiving than working in analog. “When you’re working physically there are millions of variables that you just don’t have control over. The paper you’re going to use as your backdrop only comes in so many colors—and the store may be out of that color when

you need it. The paint that you’re using is going to react funnily in camera and the camera is going to pick up certain colors differently than others because camera sensors have limitations.”

By contrast, working digitally allows Hudson to micro-manage his illustrations, applying algorithmically-generated textures and fine-tuning colors on the fly. Now the biggest challenge is authenticity. “I have to think: If I were doing this traditionally, how would I make this part move? Is this even a



part that could move? And does gravity have an influence on the objects here?” Hudson is seeking a kind of hybridity with his work, a merging of traditional materials and processes with contemporary technology. He is hoping to avoid falling into what he calls “this weird hegemonic computer graphics look,” and instead use his work to “cast a new light on an older way of working.”

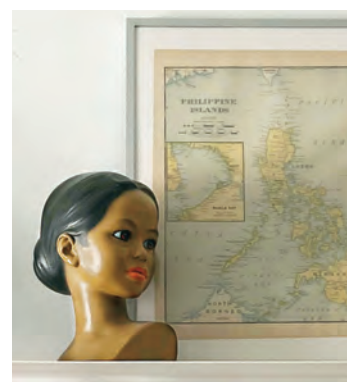
IN THE FUTURE Hudson would like to explore animation as a theme more, in particular replacement animation. “It’s something I started to doing with the shelf sculptures—the sequential breakdown of something, making physical objects that represent each frame. Rather than manipulating the object, you make several objects and put them in, frame by frame.” HUDSON ALSO PLANS TO CONTINUE TEACHING illustration at OCAD University in Toronto. “Illustration at this point comes naturally and teaching still doesn’t. And that’s kind of good—especially for someone who can become really insular. I don’t go on social media because it makes me anxious. I’ve come to accept that is part of who I am, but also I have to have something like teaching challenging me in that way.”



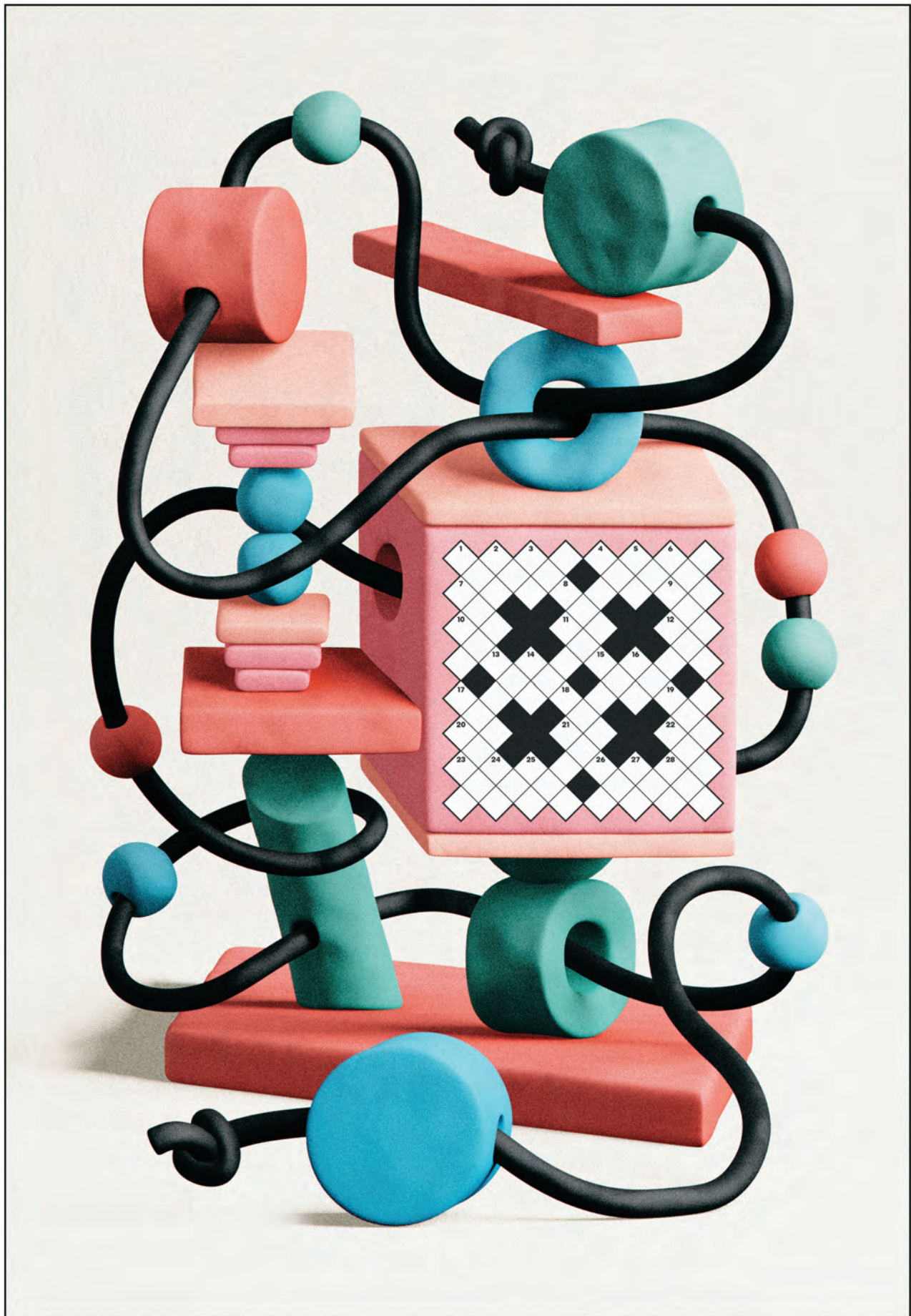


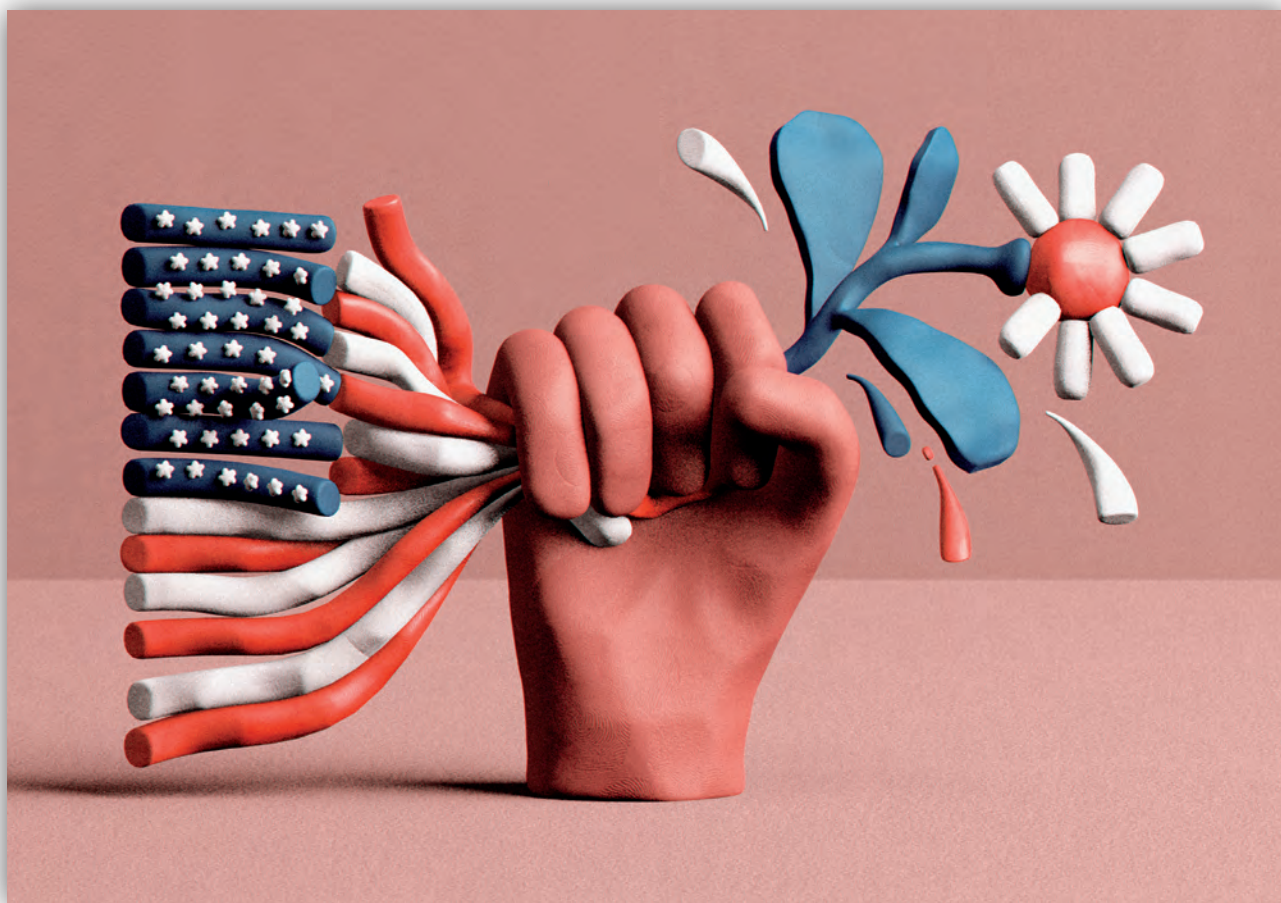
ONE OF THE THINGS I LOVED ABOUT WORKING WITH HUDSON WAS HOW HIS MIND WENT IMMEDIATELY TO AN ART-HISTORICAL REFERENCE—PICASSO'S GUERNICA—WHICH GAVE HIS PIECE INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL DEPTH, AS WELL AS TAKING THE SUBJECT OF ANIMAL RIGHTS AND ABATTOIRS SERIOUSLY. GIVEN THE LIGHT-HEARTED TONE THAT HIS METHOD SEEMS TO IMPLY THIS WAS AN ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT MOVE—AS A VISUAL COMMENTARY ON THE WRITTEN PIECE IT WAS PITCH PERFECT.

Brian Morgan
Art director
Literary Review of Canada





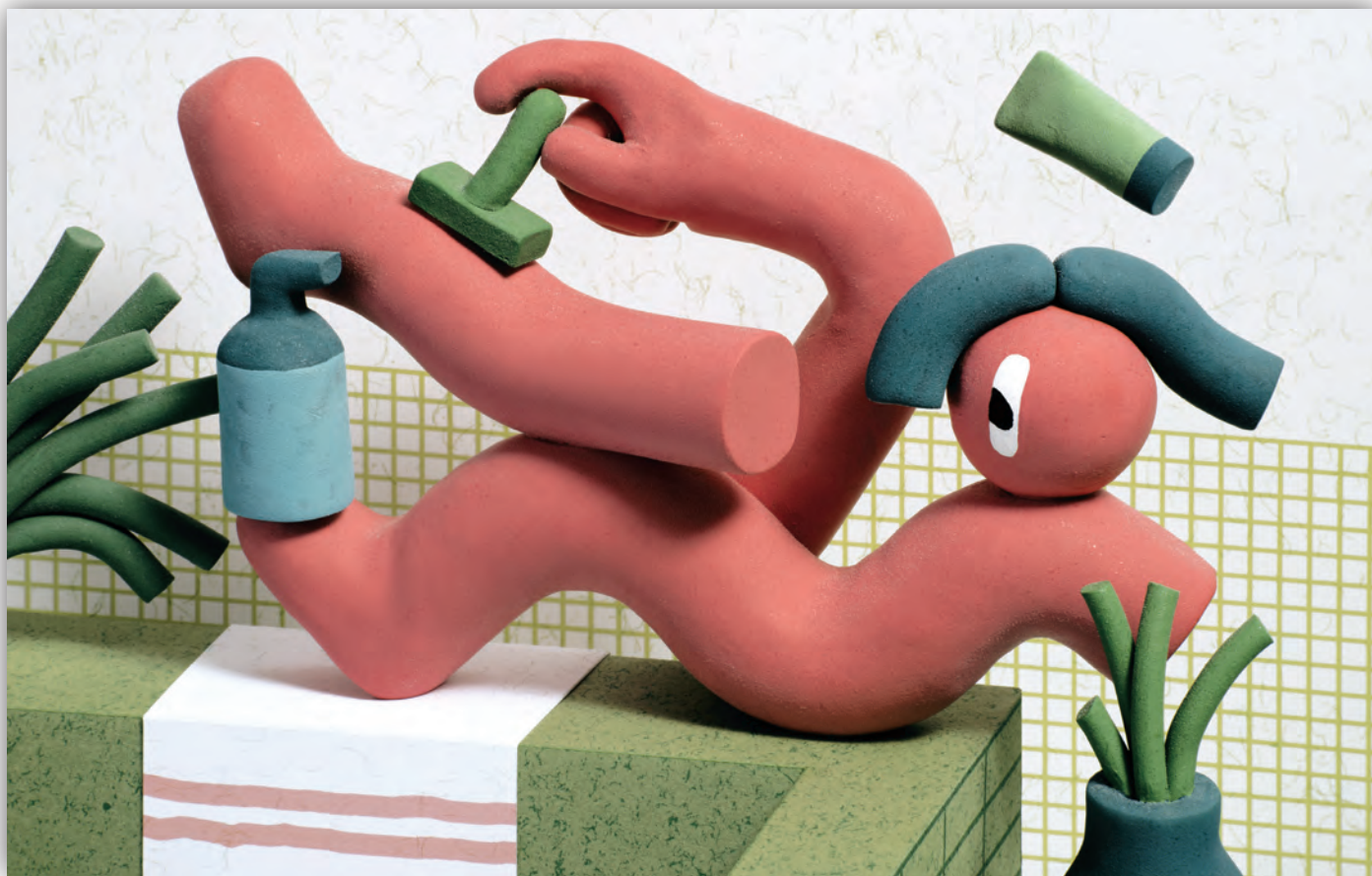




HUDSON'S SECOND BEST ASSET IS HIS LOOK.
HIS BEST ASSET IS HIS VOICE,
BRINGING THOUGHTFUL SKEPTICISM TO THE WHOLE OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR
WITHOUT EVER TIPPING OVER INTO BLANKET CYNICISM (WHICH IS A TOUGH LINE TO WALK). THE
LOOK IS A PERPETUALLY HYPNOTIC LURE,
BUT THE KNOWING ADULT-MINDED ABSURDISM IS WHAT GIVES THE WORK
AN UNDIMINISHED SHELF LIFE.

Matt Dorfman
Art Director
New York Times Book Review





*My gido—my hardened Ukrainian-Canadian grandpa—used to carve
hundreds of these little fishermen out of wood.*

*I grew up with a bunch of them in my house as a kid,
so I think it was one of those early childhood visual influences
that rooted itself in my brain.*

*Eventually I realized
that I should just try
making sculptures
and photographing
them
as
finals.*





HUDSON IS
THE CONSUMMATE ARTIST—AN EXPERT
AND CLEVER
CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVER
AND TINKERER
WHO CAN TAKE ANY BRIEF
AND MAKE IT
SINGULAR,
CHARMING,
AND FANTASTICAL.
HIS WORK
CAPTURES THE ETHOS
OF WILLY WONKA'S INGENUITY,
WITH A DASH OF
LO-FI DELIGHT
FROM THE PLAYBOOK
OF PEE-WEE'S PLAYHOUSE.

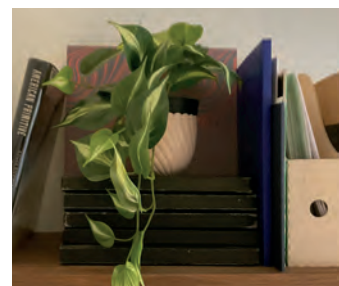
Diana Pam
Freelance
Senior Art Producer





SEEMINGLY SIMPLISTIC, YET BEAUTIFULLY EXECUTED,
HUDSONS' WHIMSICAL, CLEVER ILLUSTRATIONS
ADD BRIGHTNESS AND LEVITY
TO OTHERWISE DRY STORIES.
IF ONLY HE COULD TAKE ON MORE COMMISSIONS.

Frank Augugliaro
Deputy Design Director, Opinion
The New York Times





HUDSON DID MORE THAN JUST DELIVER
CLEVER
AND
EXCEPTIONALLY
CRAFTED
CREATIVE, HE HELPED US UNDERSTAND OUR OWN PROJECT,
AND SET THE BAR FOR THOSE TO COME.

Devin Croda
Design Director
Lemonade

