









GROWING UP IN LONG ISLAND, WITH PARENTS HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH THE NEW YORK ART SCENE, IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT ART WOULD BE A PART OF HER FUTURE. CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND MAGAZINES WERE A SOURCE OF EARLY INSPIRATION. SWITCHING FROM FINE ART TO PARSONS SCHOOL OF DESIGN PAVED THE PATH TOWARDS ILLUSTRATION. WHILE STILL IN SCHOOL, A PIECE FOR *THE NEW YORKER*; AFTER, A JOB AT CROWN PRINT PRESS AFFORDED THE TIME TO HYPE THE PORTFOLIO AND A CHANCE FOR HER FIRST *TIME* MAGAZINE COVER.

NO.86

J O H A N N A  
G O O D M A N

INTERVIEWED BY MARK FOX PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHANNA GOODMAN

LIKE THE AMERICAN PAINTER John James Audubon or German photographer Karl Blossfeldt, Johanna Goodman fulfills the role of the artist-as-naturalist—but with the notable difference that she invents the exotic species she so laboriously documents. “I call them ‘Imaginary Beings’ because I didn’t want them to just be ‘people in outfits,’” she laughs. “I had this idea that I would love to make a giant reference book, like the Audubon compendium of birds, with big illustrated plates, and each one has a plate number at the bottom.” At this point her compendium would exceed 400 plates—or “the mid-fours,” as she puts it. One of the signature aspects of Johanna’s *Catalogue of Imaginary Beings* is her reinvention of the body’s proportions. Massive, freeform torsos dominate these collages, with miniaturized heads, hands, and feet emerging like tiny appendages: whereas the standard head-to-body ratio taught in figure drawing classes is around 1:8, the head-to-body ratio of most Beings is roughly 1:14. The change in scale monumentalizes and mythologizes the figures even as it creates a somewhat comical effect—or if not comic, perhaps the tiny extremities simply render these powerful bodies a tad less menacing.

THE UNEXPECTED SHIFT IN HIERARCHY—from the face to the body—creates opportunities for unexpected narratives. “Much like Nick Cave’s *Soundsuits*, so much can be expressed through the body,” Johanna observes. “Focusing on the figure frees me up to emphasize gesture and adornment and gives me the

opportunity to make the body not a body at all, but something else—anything at all.”

JOHANNA’S SHAPE-SHIFTING BODIES and their adornment do indeed become many things: pastoral landscapes, modern cityscapes, protest posters, galactic visions and natural phenomena, among others. In her 2018 illustration for *Persisticon* (an organization

devoted to electing feminists to public office), a conglomeration of 35 black and white eyes constitutes the figure’s body and garb. This vigilant Being is a modern-day Argos, the Greek giant with so many eyes that he continued to keep watch, even while asleep.

An Imaginary Being commissioned by *The River Newsroom* and *Chronogram* magazine in 2021 features the Hudson Valley architect Juhee Lee-Hartford. Clothed in a loose schematic of a multilevel dwelling, Juhee is transformed into the architectural ideal of a Living Building—a structure that is compatible with nature and thus with life itself.

In addition to the artist Nick Cave, Johanna cites Julie Taymor and her costume designs for *The Lion King* as creative points of reference.

“Those are puppets, but there is something about their over-the-topness, their larger-than-life power that I love and that I try to tap into a

little bit,” she says. Johanna likens her Beings’ adornment to costume or even armor, and the projection of power and agency is common to all of her portraits of women. “Not to simplify it too much, but I think representation is important; there’s so little representation for so many women. I like making women

JOHANNA IS JUST ON IT. SHE DOESN’T MISS. ALSO, SOMETHING ABOUT HOW SHE TREATS PEOPLE’S FEET IN ALL OF HER IMAGINARY BEINGS. THEY’RE THESE LITTLE BONUS MOMENTS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE COMPOSITIONS THAT MAKE THE WHOLE THING SING.

Larry Buchanan  
Art Director  
*Racquet*  
magazine

*I feed myself a lot of visual inspiration—other artists' work, ads, music, crafts and people on the street. Then I try and take as many cues as possible from my intuition. Not knowing exactly where a piece is going is the best way for me. If I have it too planned before starting the work, the journey isn't as surprising and fulfilling.*

very big—as big as possible—and letting them take up space and be loud and opinionated.” Johanna concludes: “They’re not for the male gaze. They’re for my own, or for everybody’s.”

COLLAGE SEEMS TO BE A NATURAL EXTENSION of Johanna’s interest in the material world—and what might be thought of as her mix-and-match aesthetic. “I love finding stuff other than collage material,” she admits. “I have a little obsession with tag sales and second-hand stores, and I love sifting through junk to find hidden treasures. I suppose it’s a lifestyle. Just as in a collage, putting a room or outfit together from disparate, collected materials found by mistake that don’t seem to go together is so much more interesting and satisfying than anything prescribed or planned.”

THE UNPLANNED component is an important one for Johanna, and she typically starts her illustrations by considering composition and adornment only—any specific meanings can be teased out later.

The advantage of this approach is that Johanna gives herself the freedom to propose juxtapositions that might defy logic or escape notice if her initial thought process were more linear. “I always hated trying to get things right, and working cohesively—I just hate that!” she tells me. “I just really, really love it when things don’t go together. There’s nothing better than that.”

MUCH OF THE GRAPHIC impact of Johanna’s collages come from “things that don’t go together.” Some of these visual conflicts are obvious—black and white photographs against color, for example—but others are more subtle, like the conflict between two irreconcilable points of view. Plate No. 324 features an Imaginary Being standing in a frozen landscape photographed at eye-level.

The chef’s hat silhouette of the Being’s dress, however, is filled with tree branches photographed from a low angle. Collapsing these images—two realities—into one moment creates an impossible perspective that

increases the mythic power of the image. Curiously, it also confers a godlike power to the viewer who now sees the world from multiple vantage points at once. In Plate No. 356 the magic of the image is in the incongruity between foreground and background. An ombré sky of corals and lavenders above the Hollywood sign forms the comma-shaped garment that a Being wears in front of a stuccoed Angeleno facade. What must be background—the sign, ridge, and a small helicopter in the distance—is nonetheless foreground, and vice versa. This weird defiance of our shared understanding of space is one of the many delights of Johanna’s work, and I never tire of this simple, playful maneuver.

“TO ME, MAKING A COLLAGE FEELS LIKE PLAY

because I was never taught collage,” she offers. “I was taught how to draw and paint but collage wasn’t in my education. It feels like there is no ‘right’ way to do it.” Although Johanna’s collages are informed by thirty years of considering color, composition and concept as an illustrator, she sees these aspects infusing her current work more through “osmosis” than from any calculated approach. “I love the combination of control with lack of control of the medium.”

THE BRILLIANCE OF USING *The Catalogue of Imaginary Beings* as the title for this series is in its double entendre. When “Beings” is a noun it aptly describes the mythic creatures that Johanna assembles. But when “Being” is understood as a tense of the verb “to be,” as in “a state of being,” it turns out that Johanna’s Imaginary Beings are also imagined ways of living. The range of women this body of work depicts, and the models for being that it offers, reminds

me of Walt Whitman’s famous verse: “Do I contradict myself?/Very well then I contradict myself,/ I am large, I contain multitudes.” Four-hundred plus collages later, Johanna Goodman has forcefully demonstrated that she and her Beings also contain multitudes—and most happily so.







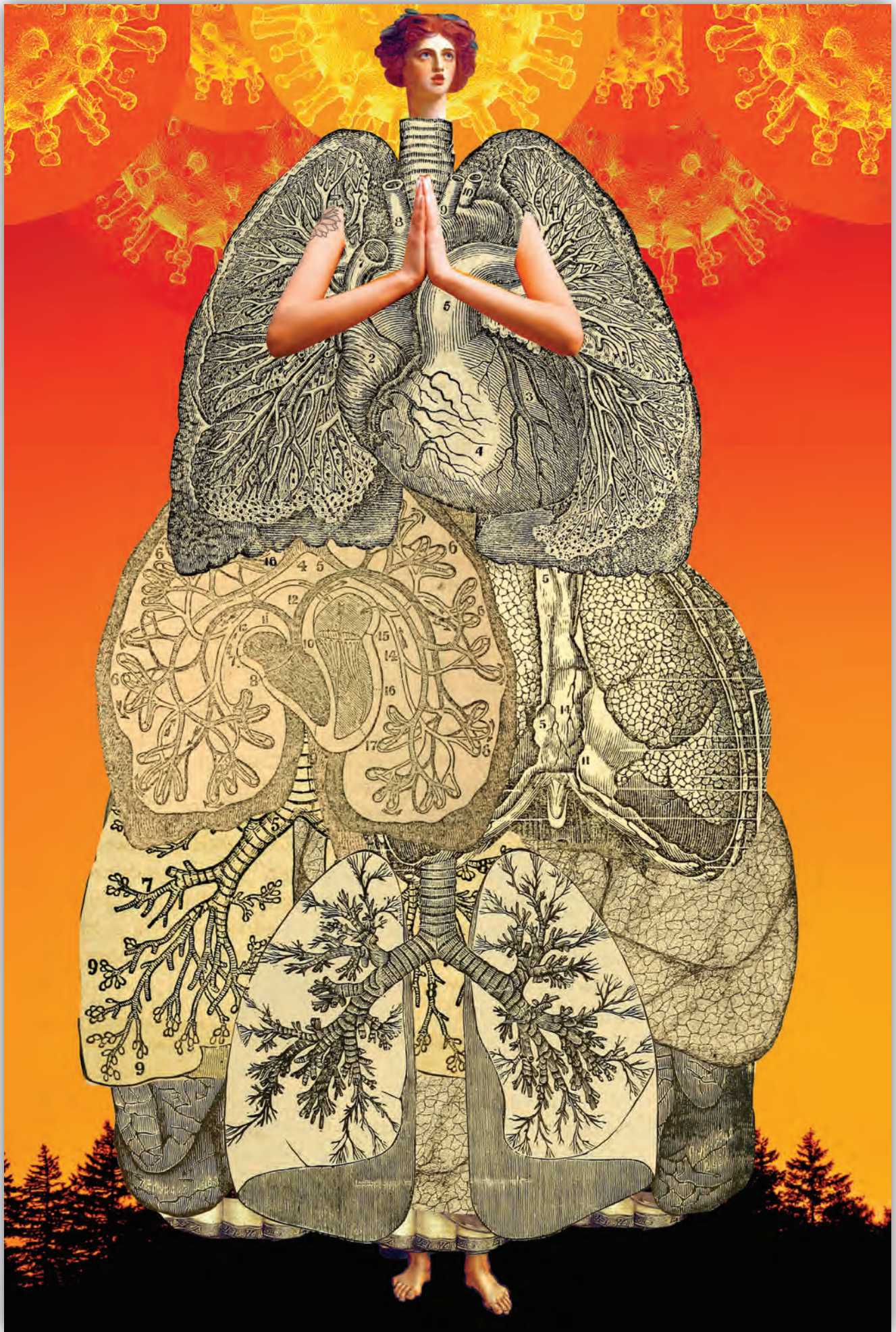












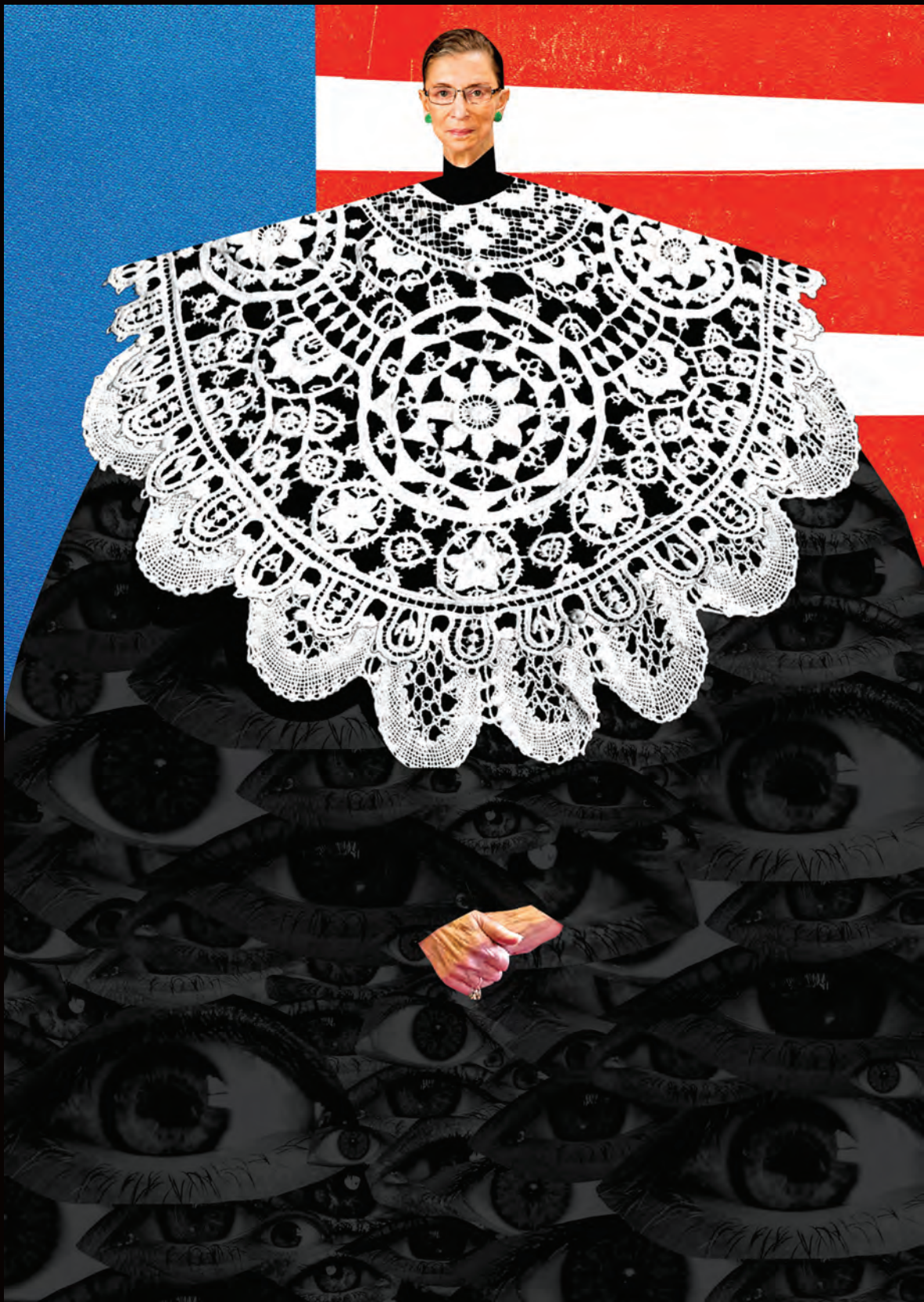




WE WORKED TOGETHER FOR ABOUT SIX MONTHS LAST YEAR ON THE PIRELLI ANNUAL REPORT. TO ILLUSTRATE THE CONCEPT OF THE HUMAN DIMENSION, JOHANNA CREATED COLLAGES ABOUT THE SIX VALUES THAT PIRELLI CARES ABOUT. IT WAS A TRUE JOURNEY—MADE IN THE MIDDLE OF A PANDEMIC—TOGETHER WITH JOHANNA AND OUR TEAM WE CREATED SOMETHING STRONG, MEANINGFUL AND BEAUTIFUL.

Teresa Bellemo  
Brand Editorial Manager  
Studio Editoriale, Milan





*I love making collages about women.*

*There are images of women everywhere you look but so few of them are interesting to me.*

*They're so often about beauty or sex appeal and selling a product.*

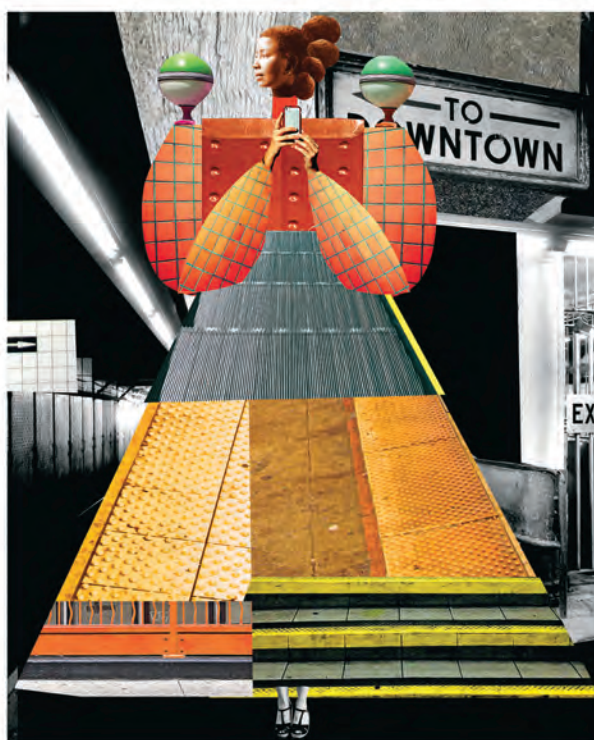
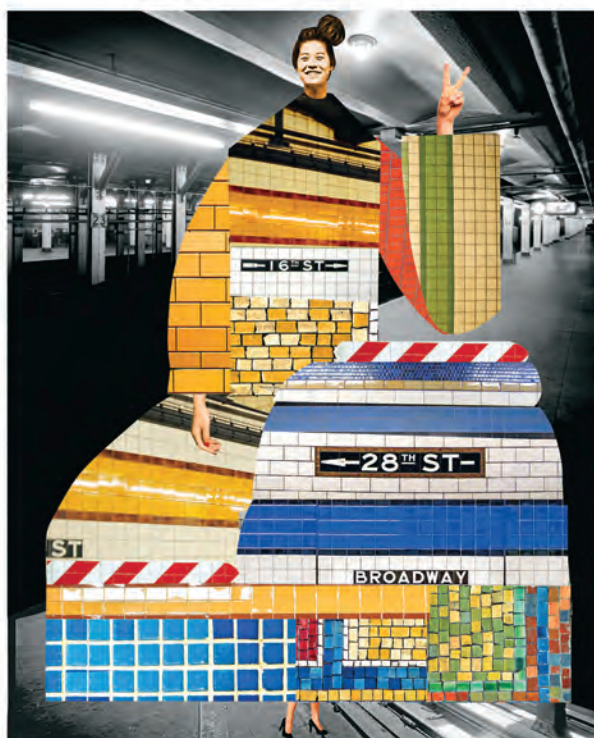
*I'm hungry for images of women that are monumental, complicated, imposing,  
unusual and solid. A different kind of beauty.*

*I'm interested in making them larger-than-life, enigmatic, radiating power, conviction and joy.*









THERE IS A CHEERFUL POWER  
IN THE PROPORTIONS AND COLOR OF JOANNA'S WORK THAT DRAWS THE EYE IN;  
EVERY ELEMENT OF A GOODMAN ILLUSTRATION EXPANDS THE NARRATIVE.  
SHE IS WORLD-BUILDING,  
AND YET, THE USE OF AN ANCHORING FIGURE IS AN INTUITIVE REMINDER  
OF HOW PERSONAL EVERY TOPIC IS  
NO MATTER HOW DISTANT,  
MONOLITHIC, OR INTRACTABLE  
IT MAY FEEL.

Jenn Boggs  
Art Director  
VQR







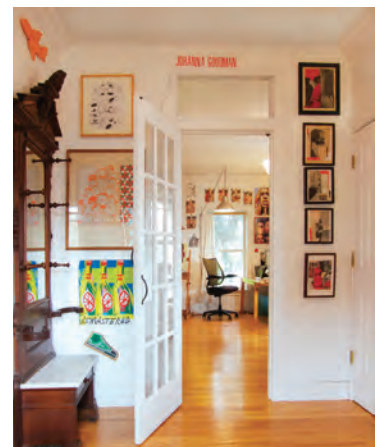
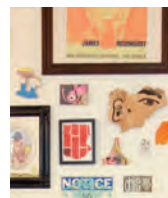
















I LOVE COLLAGE AND EVERY TIME I SEE A JOHANNA GOODMAN PIECE I WISH I HAD DONE IT. JOHANNA LATCHED ON TO A SPECIFIC ILLUSTRATION STYLE AND WRESTLED IT INTO SUBMISSION. SHE HAS STAYED THE COURSE THEMATICALLY AND HAS NEVER WAVED. HER WORK GETS BETTER AND BETTER WITH EVERY EXECUTION.

DJ Stout  
Partner and Principal  
Pentagram, Austin





I'VE BEEN A FAN AND FOLLOWER OF JOHANNA FOR MANY YEARS, AND WAS THRILLED WHEN I GOT THE OPPORTUNITY TO FEATURE HER WORK IN A HIGH-PROFILE CAMPAIGN FOR TRUTV. THE ASSIGNMENT INSPIRED OUR PRODUCTION DESIGNERS TO UTILIZE JOHANNA'S ARTWORK AS THE MAIN SET PIECE FOR A SPECIAL LIVE TAPING OF THE SHOW. AND IT ENABLED ME TO WITNESS HER PROCESS FIRST-HAND WHEN SHE MAGICALLY COMBINED ANALOG AND DIGITAL TECHNIQUES TO CREATE A STUNNING BACKDROP FOR THESE SPECIAL EPISODES.

Noel Claro  
Creative Producer  
Netflix





