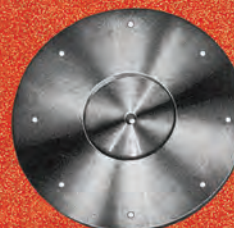








Here is one of our best S steel blade with solid shank. 48 inch long. 434 F 5728—No. 1. Size



Pressure Pounds	1 1/2" No. 60	3/4" No. 61	1" No. 63	1 1/4" No. 64
10	475	825	1360	1910
20	650	1150	1725	2315
30	800	1375	1985	2650
40	900	1575	2220	2950
50	980	1725	2425	3200
60	1050	1850	2600	3425
70	1140	1975	2775	3680





THE DREAM to WORK for MARVEL COMICS IS a SOMEWHAT UNLIKELY AVENUE to PURSUE AS an 8-YEAR OLD GROW-  
 ING UP IN a SMALL TOWN IN MARYLAND—A KIND REJECTION LETTER DIDN'T DETER HIS DESIRE. THE PURSUIT of  
 VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS at COLLEGE LED to WORKING IN a PRINTING PLANT, THEN a GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDIO for  
 FIVE YEARS WHERE THE INFLUENCES of CHWAST, RAND and PICASSO MELDED TOGETHER to FORM a MARK-MAKER  
 WITH a REMARKABLE RANGE. A 10,000 SQ. FT. STUDIO IS WHERE HE SPENDS HIS DAY ILLUSTRATING and DESIGNING.

NO.88

D A V I D  
 P L U N K E R T

INTERVIEWED BY MARK FOX PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAVEN REYES

WHEN SURVEYING THE BREADTH of David Plunkert's work as illustrator, designer, and art director at Spur Design in Baltimore it isn't apparent that his original intention was to become a comic book artist. "I remember being in a barber shop as a seven-year-old and finding an old Jack Kirby comic, *Iron Man vs. Sub-Mariner* (*Tales to Astonish* 82), and that blew my

mind." Later David would spend his middle and high school years making comics and at seventeen paid to print one so he could send it to Marvel Comics. "I got a very nice rejection letter," he recalls.

But that printed comic did yield David a part-time job at the offset printshop where he worked in a darkroom and bindery. (At a later job he learned to operate a Heidelberg Windmill letterpress.) These experiences deepened David's appreciation for ink on paper—meanwhile, his attraction to comics never slaked.

"Comics made me think in terms of commercial art without really knowing what that was," he admits. "I thought that commercial art was a way to 'get into' cartooning." Thanks to this misunderstanding David started looking at design programs at MICA, University of Maryland, and Shepherd College in West Virginia.

IT WAS AT SHEPHERD that David "fell in love with graphic design." But it was a particular corner of graphic design, one defined by the idiosyncratic and illustrative approach of Push Pin Studios in New York. "If you talked to my instructor, he didn't like illustrators, but he loved Push Pin. His name was Mike Nuetzel, and his work looked a lot like his instructor from

the University of Florida whose name was Robert Skelley. And his work looked a lot like Robert Crumb's." Robert Crumb is notorious as the LSD-fueled cartoonist who launched "comix" like *Zap*—and created a libidinous (and very hairy) cast of characters. This was clearly not the graphic design of Armin Hofmann.

"AS A COLLEGE STUDENT my exposure to methodology was kind of narrow," he admits. "Looking at Push Pin seemed like the way that graphic designers worked, but it tripped me up when I started working. I remember doing a brochure for the insurance company USF&G and coming up with a concept that Seymour Chwast might have done—where a guy is sitting in a chair holding a pipe and a lightning bolt is moving around him. And I remember the art director that I was working with was like, 'What the hell! This is insurance!'"

David eventually started working with collage "because you're selecting elements and moving things around—it felt more like design than illustration." In time, though, he realized that the visual language of collage was inseparable from its Dada, antibourgeois roots. "The thing that hit me about collage is that there is always the element of 'the underground' in

it. Collage is more 'leftist'—it's never in the center. I thought by creating the Block-Style I might be able to develop a better language for communicating to a broader group."

WHAT DAVID REFERS TO AS HIS BLOCK-STYLE are illustrations that hew to the Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots school of drawing: forms are reductive, flat,

PLUNKERT  
 IS ONE  
 OF  
 THE  
 SHARPEST  
 MINDS  
 OUT THERE.  
 HE  
 BRINGS  
 A GRAPHIC  
 DESIGNER'S  
 SENSIBILITY  
 TO HIS  
 ILLUSTRATIONS.  
 IN HIS  
 HANDS,  
 EVEN  
 SPOT  
 ILLUSTRATIONS  
 HAVE  
 THE  
 STRENGTH  
 OF A  
 POSTER.

Nicholas  
 Blechman  
 Creative  
 Director  
 The New Yorker

*I get compared to Terry Gilliam sometimes because his collage work is what Americans are most familiar with. I think drawing is more immediate, at least the way I try to do it—a more universal language. I don't try to draw well, I try to make it interesting.*

typically geometric, and in limited color palettes that suggest cheaply printed two- or three-color ephemera. David cites Pablo Picasso's Cubist period and contemporary illustrators Brian Cronin and Phillippé Weisbecker as points of reference, as well as the minimalist, often primitive ethos of early twentieth century avant-garde toys. "Toys that Italian Futurist Fortunato Depero would have played with," he explains.

THAT SAID, I WOULD HAZARD A GUESS that the photomechanical aesthetic of '60s comics has seeped into David's Block-Style via prepubescent osmosis.

These illustrations are almost fetishistic in their evocation of the materiality of ink on paper: misaligned

or overprinted elements, uneven textures, contaminated colors—as if someone failed to clean the press after the last print run—and imperfectly-formed Ben-Day dots. In reality, the genesis is "all pencil work" that David scans and then manipulates digitally.

"I'll do the complete drawing, bring up the contrast, drop my color in, and then eliminate the lines where colors butt. It's one of those weird things where my drawing gets better when I eliminate lines." To achieve his textured or dirty backgrounds David may ink up a piece of plywood and run it through his circa 1910 Potter proofing press, or he may make a monoprint which he can then scan to add "noise" to color.

IN AN EARLIER INTERVIEW with Steven Heller, David said, "I still think of myself as a graphic designer and not really an illustrator. 'Mark-maker' is probably more accurate." I ask David to elaborate. "I think there's a distinction between the way Saul Bass, Ben Shahn and Paul Rand approached a drawing versus Norman Rockwell or Rockwell Kent. It's a question of emphasis," he notes. "The idea and the symbol made up of simple shapes and lines are of more importance than the technical élan. Thinking like a graphic designer means I tend to reduce a picture down to the essentials."

IDEATION IS DAVID'S FAVORITE PART of the illustration process because "you can kind of tell if it's

going to work in the pencil sketch. If I've got something where it's like, 'I don't know, maybe I can make it cool in the final,' it's not going to get any better," he laughs. Later, he adds, "I always feel confident about the sketch; I rarely feel as confident about my final execution. The sketch is where I'm at my best."

For the Baltimore Theatre Project posters that David designs and illustrates, the finished work rarely deviates from the sketch. "For theater projects, if the sketch works, I'll clean it up a bit, but if it works great in black and white then I'll keep it black and white for the poster."

THE PROJECTS' CONSTRAINTS NECESSITATE

an immediacy from David that precludes overthinking or overworking. The print budgets—typically two inks, only—are well served by David's spare mark-making, a strategy that derives its graphic impact from articulated silhouettes and a knowing exploitation of positive and negative spaces. The requisite looseness results in lively forms that contrast with the structure of set type. A good example is David's poster for the production of *Gone* which features a rather crude drawing of a bed on a warm red background. The silhouette of a girl sprawls across the textured black mattress, but her presence is delineated by her absence—by her subtraction from the illustration. The ends of her pig-

tails form small, wraith-like claws that echo the fingers of her hands and scattered drips on the sides of the mattress. The effect is disquieting.

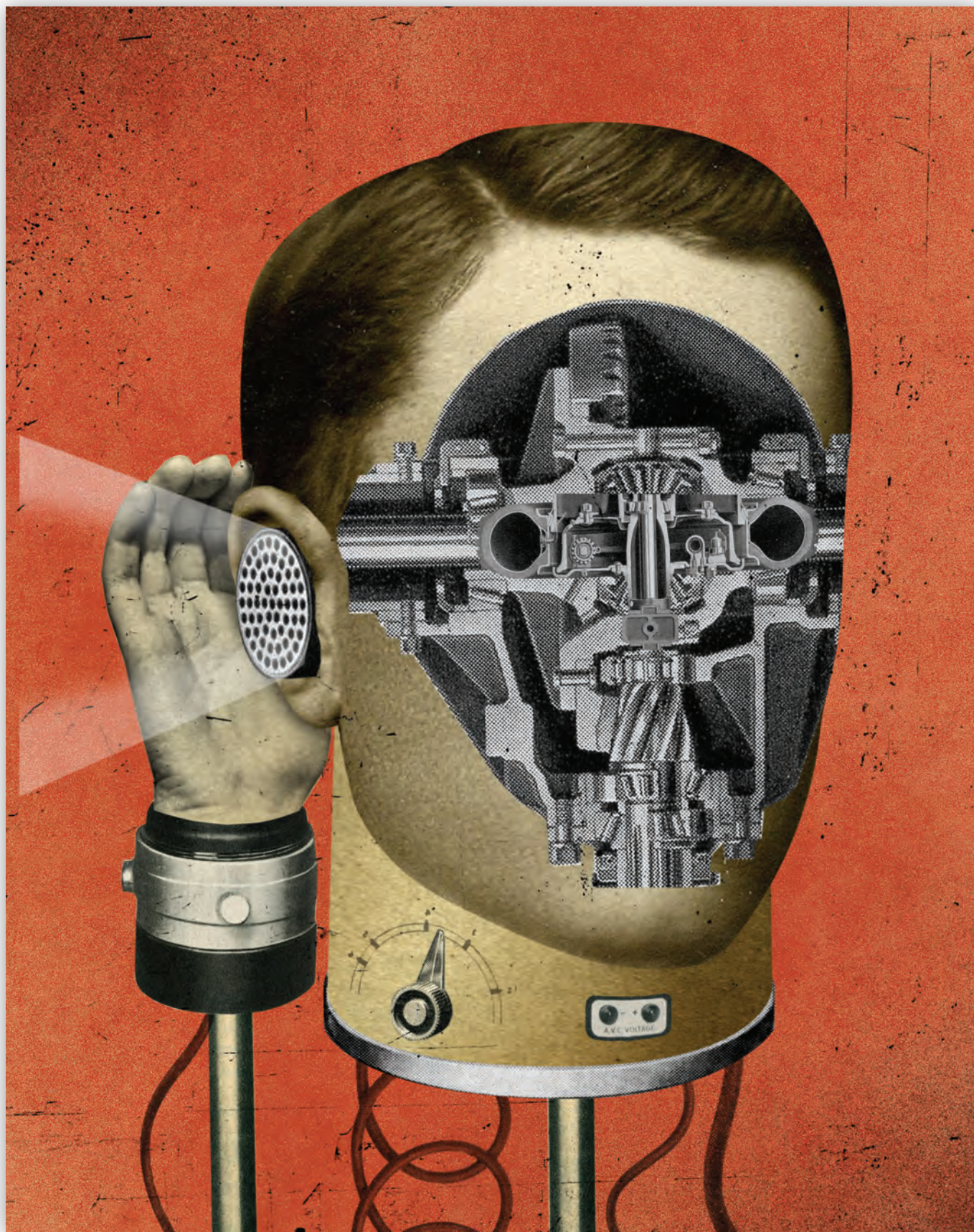
THE ABILITY TO SEE CREATIVE potential in nearly any topic is one of David's strengths as an illustrator and designer, and it seems tied to his no-nonsense work ethic. "Doing this work is more like being a baker than a rock star," he argues. "You need to get up every day and make the donuts and the donuts have to be consistent, but also varied and sweet. There has to be a resistance to thinking of certain projects as beneath you because they're 'dull.' Lots of things are dull," he offers. "It's up to the artist to make them interesting."











HAVING COLLABORATED WITH DAVID ON EDITORIAL PROJECTS, WHAT'S NOT LOST ON ME IS WHAT A TERRIFIC VISUAL EDITOR HE IS. IT SEEMS LIKE EACH ILLUSTRATION IS LIKE A VERY SHORT FILM, WHERE THE INVENTIVENESS OF HIS IMAGES ARE ABOUT IMPLICATIONS RATHER THAN LITERAL INTERPRETATION.

Richard Baker  
Creative Director  
Inc. Magazine



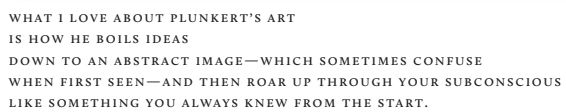




DAVE PLUNKERT IS ONE OF THOSE ARTISTS WHO NEVER STOPS SURPRISING YOU. HE IS A VISUAL POLYGLOT, ABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN A DOZEN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES WITHOUT LOSING HIS OWN SINGULAR VOICE.

Eric Skillman  
Art Director  
The Criterion Collection

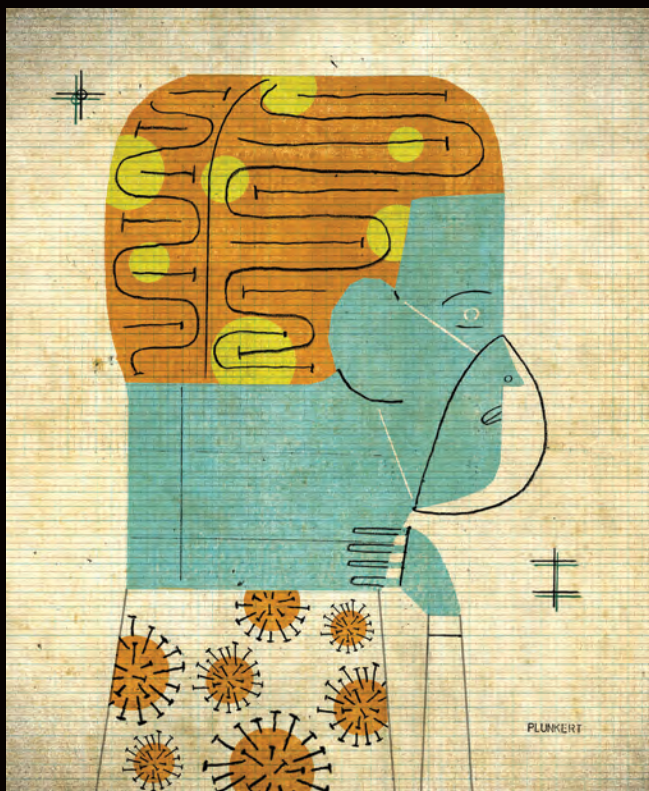
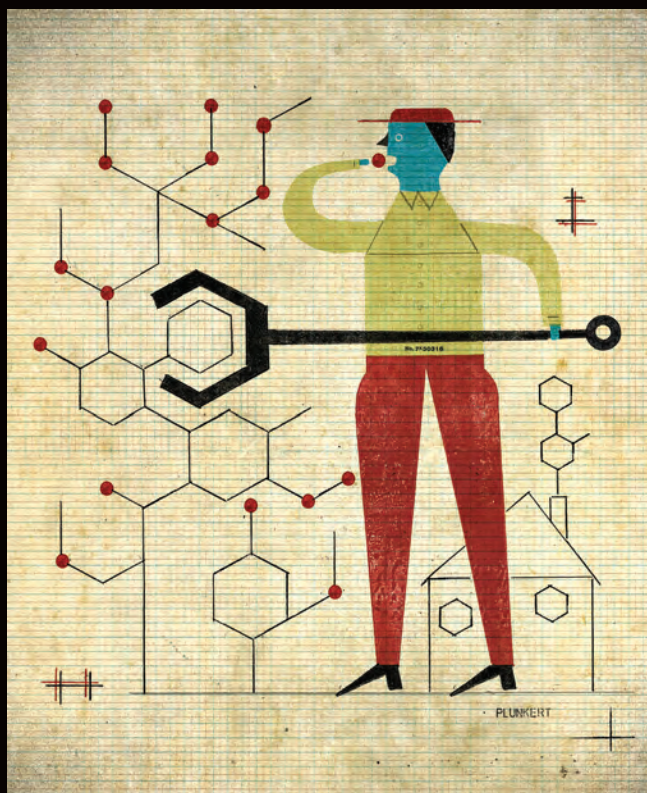
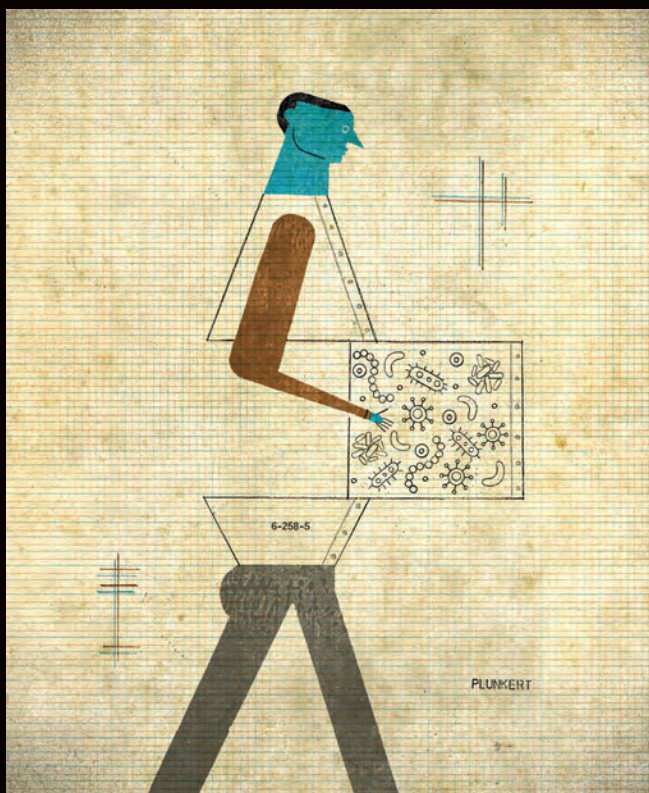












On the future of illustration:

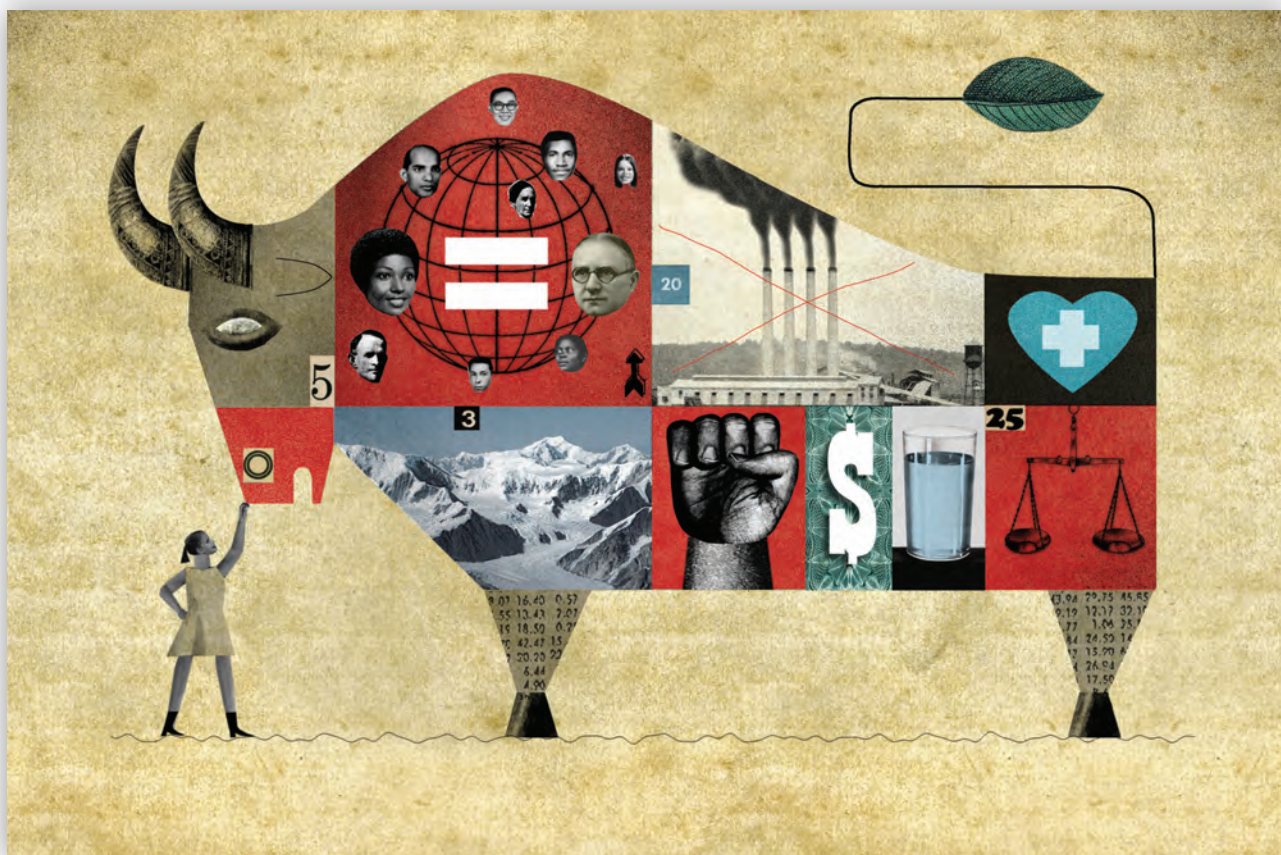
*I think young ponies will*

*find new fences to jump and they're going to have to.*

*I think it's tougher to break into editorial these days since the free city papers  
have gone the way of the Dodo.*

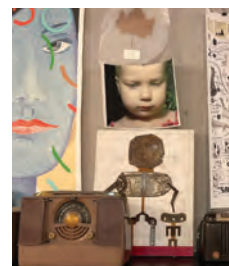
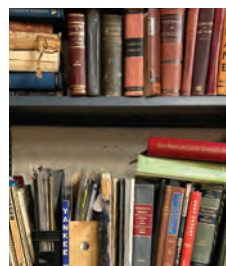
*Books are still strong but I think the future of illustration is  
likely animation and games.*



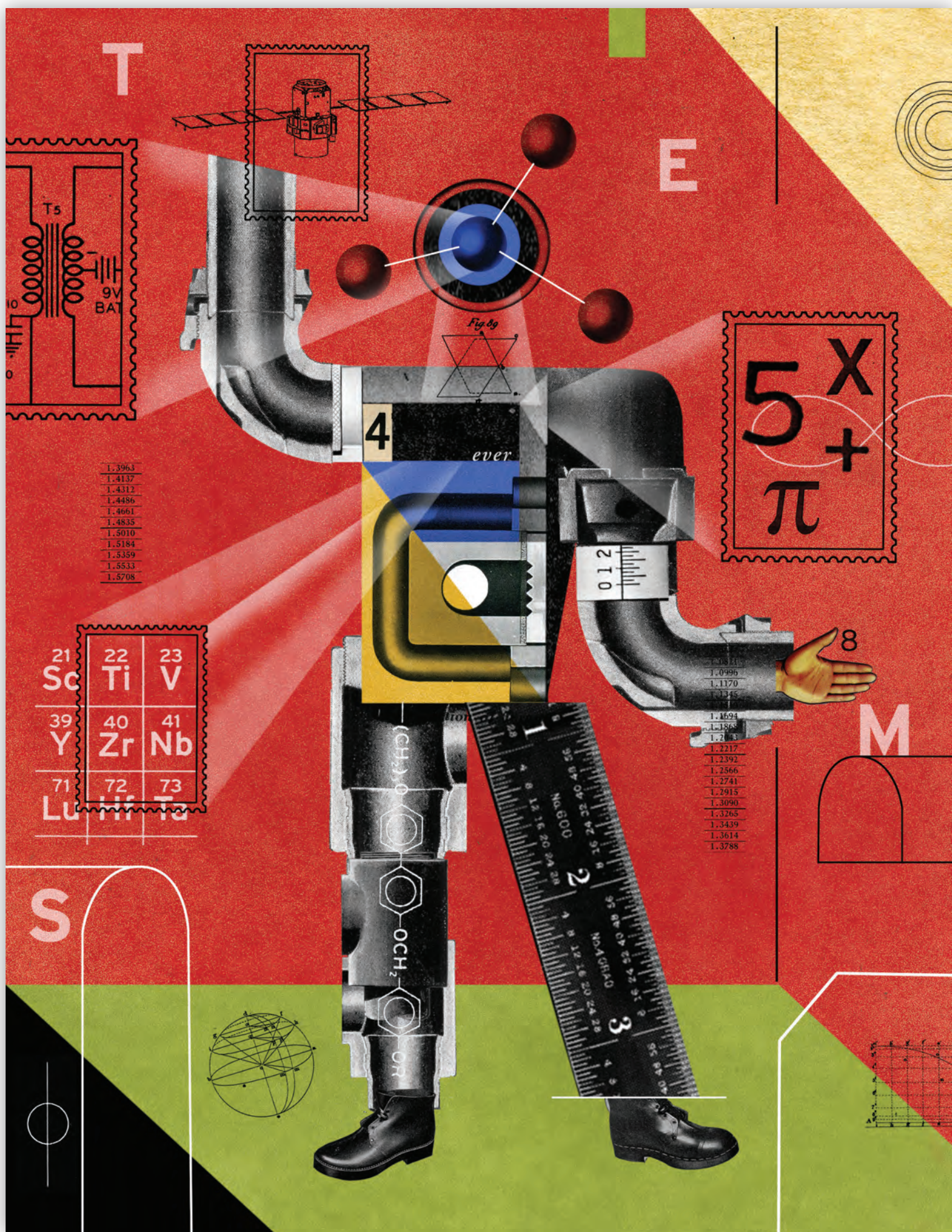


I CAN ALWAYS EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED FROM DAVID PLUNKERT. SMART CONCEPTS THAT CONNECT TO THE EDITORIAL AND HIS EXECUTION AND COLOR PALETTE ALWAYS PLEASES MY CLIENTS.

David Armario  
Creative Director  
David Armario Design





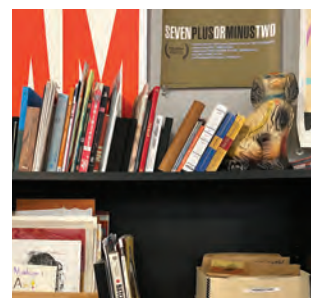






THE GREAT THING ABOUT DAVE PLUNKERT IS THAT HE IS AS BRILLIANT AN ARTIST AS HE IS A DESIGNER. LAST YEAR, I GOT AN ASSIGNMENT TO CREATE A PROMOTIONAL BASEBALL CARD FOR AUTHOR HARUKI MURAKAMI, SO THAT IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S A MEMBER OF A JAPANESE BASEBALL TEAM. I HAD NO IDEA HOW TO GET THERE. THE ANSWER: DAVE. HE KNOCKED IT OUT OF THE PARK, SO TO SPEAK!

Chip Kidd  
Associate Art Director  
Knopf Publishing















PLUNKERT IS THE VERY RARE COMBINATION OF AN ARTIST WHO UNDERSTANDS THE EMOTIONAL POWER OF FINE ART AND THE SPARK AND IMMEDIACY ONE FINDS IN THE BEST OF ILLUSTRATION. WHEN PLUNKERT REFERENCES MID-CENTURY AESTHETICS, IT IS NOT A STYLISH REFERENCE OR PASTICHE, IT IS A TRAMPOLINE THAT HE IS JUMPING ON TO REACH SOMETHING NEW.

John Flansburgh  
They Might Be Giants













DAVE PLUNKERT'S ART IS SMART, VARIED, APPROPRIATE, INSIGHTFUL AND COMPELLING. WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE USPS STAMP PROGRAM, HE PERFECTLY CONVEYED THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE STEM DISCIPLINES, WHILE NAVIGATING MULTIPLE LAYERS OF REVIEW AND APPROVAL, AND ALL IN A ONE-INCH BY ONE-INCH SQUARE!

Antonio Alcala  
Owner, Art Director  
Studio A

