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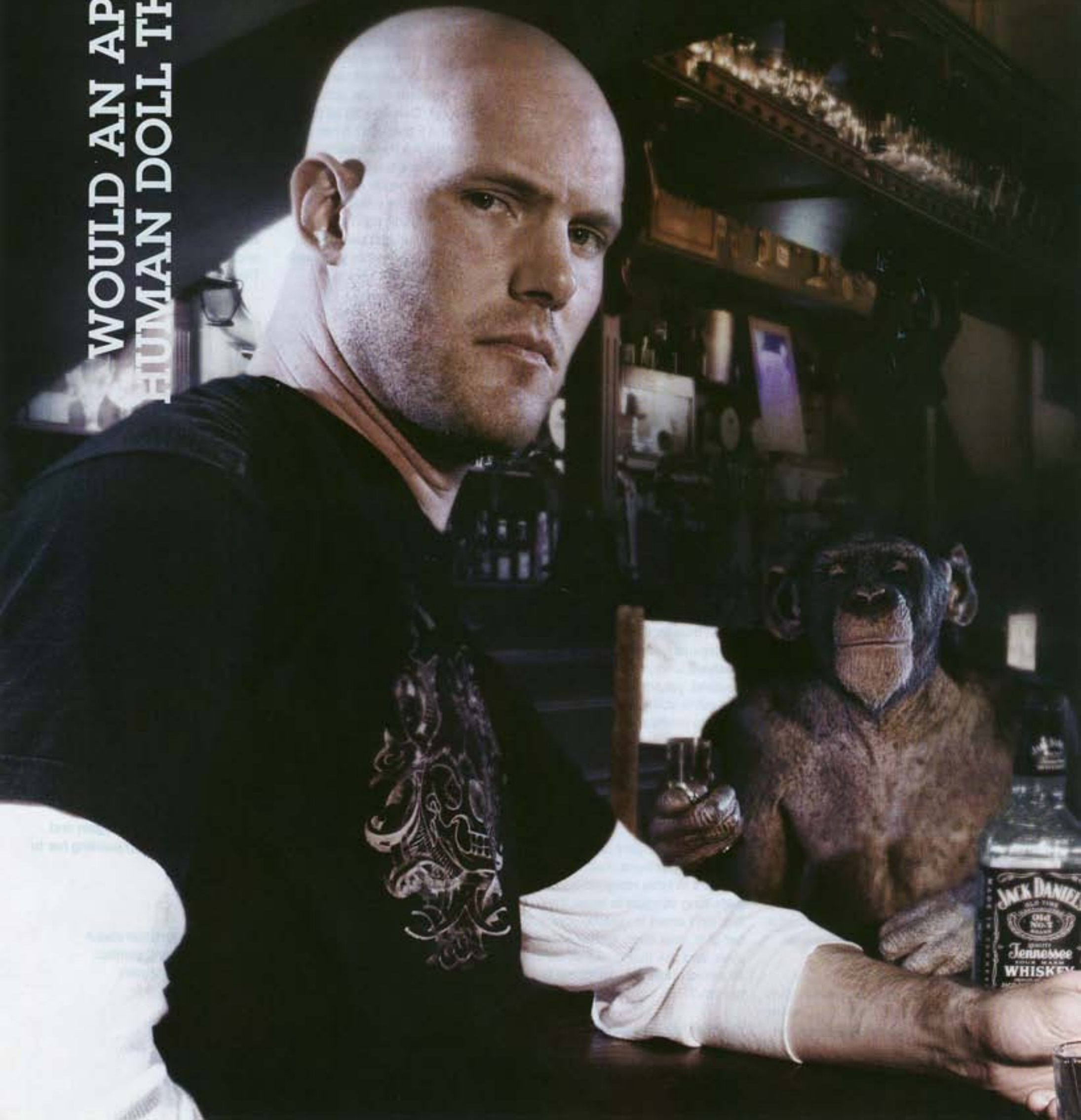
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ART & CULTURE MAGAZINE



WOULD AN APE MAKE A
HUMAN DOLL THAT TALKS?





NATTE VAN DYKE

INTERVIEW AND PORTRAIT BY
DASTARDLY LLAMAS
PORTRAIT ART DIRECTION BY
DASTARDLY LLAMAS AND CHA

For some people life's a gamble, for others it's all business. With Nate Van Dyke life is high stakes all the way, and this man is sure to clean up. Having known him for nearly a decade, the one constant has always been his unrelentless drive to progress. While most people run around sniffing art's panties, Nate is doing his best to offer her something in return and hopefully ravish her in the process. Not confined to just one discipline, he's constantly shifting from finely tuned pen

and inks to a painting style that evokes words like "gestural" and "technical" in the same breathe. Then jump over to his mixed-media illustrations. Too much to handle? Tack on 6-feet 9-inches, 235 pounds, and shoe size 17, and your girlfriend never stood a chance. I had my first beer with the guy, and the smart money knows he'll be there when I have my last. Read on and find art and loyalty. That is **Nate Van Dyke**. —*Dastardly Llamas*

A.D.

Ink on antiqued paper
11' x 14'
2008

(pages 120-121)

I Hate Cabbies

Mixed-media
25' x 17'
2006

Dastardly Llamas: What's your name and what do you do?

Nate Van Dyke: Nate Van Dyke. I doodle.

What was growing up like?

I remember GI Joe's, sand boxes, and *Star Wars* cereal.

I was wondering more what family meant to you.

That's a good question, because I don't think people have these *Leave it to Beaver* families where people are best friends with their brothers, sisters, and cousins. It's naive. You don't get to pick your family, your brothers, cousins, or whatever. I think family is more like something you create. You're a great example.

You've recently begun reconnecting with your family after being estranged for a while. Have your views changed? Are you seeing things any differently now?

Yeah. I think having gotten back in touch with my family after skipping out for 10 years I came to realize, after having some time to breathe, that my parents may have messed up here and there, but who doesn't? What I actually figured out was that if I had a family, kids, and all that responsibility, I would fuck up like a congressman. As you get older you end up seeing that you have to figure it out as you go along, you don't get *Cliff Notes*. Also, you get to the point where your parents are older. Your dad's not the He-Man you grew up with; he's human. Holding on to old shit

is a waste. It's a horrible thing to do to your family. I'm trying to be a better man about it.

What was your happiest childhood memory?

I remember lying on a rug as a little kid, on this furry rug, and my mom getting down on the ground to take a picture of me. I'm a little kid, like two or something and I'm playing with this old wooden toy with all these springs and things. She got down real close to take a picture and I remember being lost in that toy, that moment, just figuring it out. We don't do that anymore. We think about taxes and the best time to leave work so you don't get stuck in traffic. You don't get that bliss anymore.

You work as a video game concept artist during the day and do your own thing on your free time. Do you feel a difference between your commercial work and personal work?

I usually don't like my commercial stuff as much as my personal work. It just feels forced. I've done pieces where I feel like I'm losing before I even begin. With personal work you call your own shots, and you get better work.

Was there ever a time where you lost confidence in the work you were putting out?

All the time. I'm never satisfied. I don't see what I did right; I see what I did wrong. That's all I see.



NO
VIN D'ARCE
2008





NB
VAN DYKE
2006

Do you have any one piece now that you look at that just really sucks for you?

My portfolio, my whole website, pick something. Close your eyes and fucking throw a dart.

Recently you made a significant change in the subject matter of your art. It seems to be infused with a heavy sense of mortality. What brought this about?

I think what happened is a life changing experience in a way. I recently got a real human skull and started drawing from it. I've drawn a million skulls before but there's something about having a dead man's head on your shelf. You looking at him, him looking at you, and drawing from it, knowing

that you've got the same thing on top of your shoulders, it's just something weird. A lot of people are scared of death but I think seeing death in the form of that skull, being able to embrace it, you gain some understanding of it. Then I watch my mom being sick, the cancer that she's had. You realize just how fragile we are and we aren't here all that long so you might as well have a good time while you're at it. I think it's a getting older thing. You know you're not a kid anymore. I'm just trying to celebrate it. Life's beautiful. Death is beautiful.

So you think the change in your art was connected to your mom being sick.

I think it definitely was, because it

sounds like a selfish thing to say but you don't want your parents to die, you don't want to see anyone close to you be weak or frail.

My mom's had cancer since I was in seventh grade. I had this weird moment where I realized she's had breast cancer for most of my life. She's had so many bouts of it or she's had it and got it taken care of, but it came back; now she's on her third bout. I think I just got pissed off because I realized that it's such a horrible thing to go through. Just to be sick and to start knowing everyone at the hospital.

Why is it selfish to want your parents and loved ones to be healthy and safe?

Because if you had it your way all

your friends would stay at the bar all night and we'd all live long and have great lives. But shit happens along the way and losing people is part of that. I think as you get older you see more of it. What completely wrecked me was seeing both of my parents in separate hospitals for separate reasons—on the same day. I saw my mother in the morning at one hospital and then my dad going in another for open-heart surgery later that afternoon. I kept my shit together during the visits but afterwards I went to the bar and I just sobbed. That's where it gets selfish, because you don't want anyone you care about to hurt. You want other people's parents to die, not your parents. The only way I can express it rather than going crazy is drawing. It seems to be the safest way to do it.

“I’VE DRAWN A MILLION SKULLS BEFORE BUT THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT HAVING A DEAD MAN’S HEAD ON YOUR SHELF.”

You're working out your issues with your art?

One issue at a time. I could write stories about some pieces that people would have no idea that's what they're really about. They're just like, "Wow, that's a cool fucking monkey cutting someone up." Sometimes it's a comment on society, something I saw that day, and all that twisted art snobby shit that people thrive on. But it's my poetry that no one can really read or comprehend. They only see the surface.

What was it like to finally work with a live chimp, Jake, while shooting your portrait?

I was nervous as hell. But I knew the first time he looked in my eye

that I'd melt, and sure enough I did. He acknowledged me, and I don't want to get all mushy here, but there was this weird understanding like he got it. Being with Jake was spiritual. It's weird, like here's this animal I've drawn a million times and to see it all of sudden in real life I just realized that I've never done a drawing that has done chimps justice. It's all been a bad representation of the real thing. Hanging out with him and when he first held my hands—time froze. And time never freezes for me. It just stopped. It made me feel like I have to start doing them better justice, like my drawings have to get better, tighter.

Working with Jake really seemed to push you then.

Yeah, I want to go deeper. I don't want to do little stupid chimp drawings anymore. I don't want to draw random pieces in my sketchbook. I've got to figure out how to do them justice.

Speaking of sketchbooks, you have a giant collection, right?

Yeah. I think I'm on number 25 or 6 or 7 or 42 or something. It started when I was in high school, with those basic black sketchbooks that everyone gets. I started doing them, and then I got on this fix for so many years where I had to draw in them everyday. That was essentially my school. I didn't go to class or anything but I had to draw in that thing everyday.

Burning building; do you save your

The Beast In Me

Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2007

(page 124)

Pool Hall Brawl

Ink on paper
18" x 24"
2007

baby or your sketchbooks?

Burning a baby or my books?

No. Saving.

Oh, saving. Fuck the kids. I'm saving the books. I'm burning myself with this shit.

Is there a reason you only use Photoshop in your commercial work?

I use it for certain jobs and my concept work, mainly because it's a hell of a lot quicker than getting a bottle of paint. A lot of it is just efficiency.

I can't imagine ever doing a digital piece for my personal shit. I see all these guys who do digital stuff and



NB
VAN DIKE
2007



10
2007



MB
VEN KUIE
2008



they're lazy. They don't even have a drawing table at home; they have a Wacom tablet. It pisses me off that people don't draw anymore.

You don't hate the digital artist, though, right?

It's the 100 percent digital artist. I understand it as a job, but just go home and draw something! I do digital because it's quicker and because that's what they expect and that's what they want, but even though I see my digital stuff getting better there's no pride in it like the traditional stuff. I love going onto an artist website that does amazing digital work and then you look at the sketches section and it looks like they outsourced it to a high school kid. It's like they're lying their way through life.

Where does your comic book work stand for you?

I loved comic books as a kid, that's all I ever wanted to do. To this day I work in video games and I don't even have a video game system. But comic books are a childhood fantasy. Plus, I like doing it on my own terms. I write, draw, ink, and color everything myself because I'm a control freak. I don't want anyone else touching my stuff.

Any thoughts about experimenting with any new mediums?

Film. I'd love to take a try at making a film. But that's more of a team effort and I don't like team efforts. You realize how many people need to be involved and I can't have that.

What was it like selling your first piece at a show?

I wanted to apologize. I felt like someone was wasting their money. I'm still amazed when somebody buys a piece. I'm like, "Really? You want that? Why?" I get it because I've bought art, but to think people like my work enough to buy it, I'm just kind of dumbfounded.

As an artist, what's something you like to hear?

"You're really tall." Actually, I guess the biggest compliment I've had is from people that have literally never drawn or maybe used to draw back in the day who are getting back into it because of my stuff. I think that's the highest compliment: to inspire.

How goes the war with Yellow Cab?

Cabs and I don't mix—and they're all fucking Yellow Cab. They feel like they own the fucking place and drive like laws don't apply to them. That first cab nearly ran me down when I was crossing the street on my green fucking light, and he ran it, skidding through a red. I wasn't having it so I ran him down and jumped on the cab when it stopped and kicked the windshield out in front of the DNA Lounge in San Francisco. Those bouncers looked at me like "that guy's on crystal meth. I'm not touching that guy." I demolished that cab and some girl was trying to get in the back saying, "Stop, I want to go home!" I just kept kicking and told her, "You're not going home in this cab."

(page 125)

Hamburger Hill

Mixed-media

14' x 19'

2008

(left)

Vic is Dead

Ink on paper

15' x 20'

2008

"IT PISSES ME OFF THAT PEOPLE DON'T DRAW ANYMORE."

The guy nearly ran me down so I improvised.

Our friend Boston told me you jumped off like nothing happened and started eating your hoagie.

Yeah. We just walked home and crashed.

You recently got to do a live painting tour with Saber and Dave Choe.

Some other artists had to pull out of some spots and they had me fill the gaps on the tour. Live art forces you to go big and balls out. I actually get really nervous around people, even making phone calls. For me to turn around and see a bunch of people waiting to see what I'm going to do scares the shit

out of me. Even though it was great hanging out with both of them, I felt like I had diarrhea the whole time I was out there. Seriously.

What artists are inspiring you right now?

Dude, there's one guy that's making me hate art right now. He's making me absolutely hate myself. All you've got to do to hate life and realize that you aren't an artist is go to a museum. I just went to the Met in New York City, and when I walked through that place there's stuff I never thought to try in the 29 years I've been alive. The guy that I'm actually looking at right now is Jean-Léon Gérôme. I'd tell you to Google it, but it would crash that whole fucking thing. Jean Gérôme. That guy, although he has passed,

makes me want to change my profession right now.

Anyone else?

Frazetta, Bisley, and Travis Charest. Those are the first three names I think of constantly. I think Bisley pushed Frazetta's work, took it a bit further. I've always admired Bisley, and then to be in a place where I've become friends with him, it's awesome. You meet these guys you admire and become friends because you've got this common bond.

And then you drink a lot together and bench press each other in hallways.

Yeah. Those are the guys, though.

Time travel, what lays in the future for Nate Van Dyke?

I've got shows in London and Portland; those are the big ones right now. I've also got some toys coming out, more beer, and just trying to make more art. Hopefully some stuff that doesn't suck.

For more information about Nate Van Dyke, contact N8vandyke.com or Loserwithadream.com.