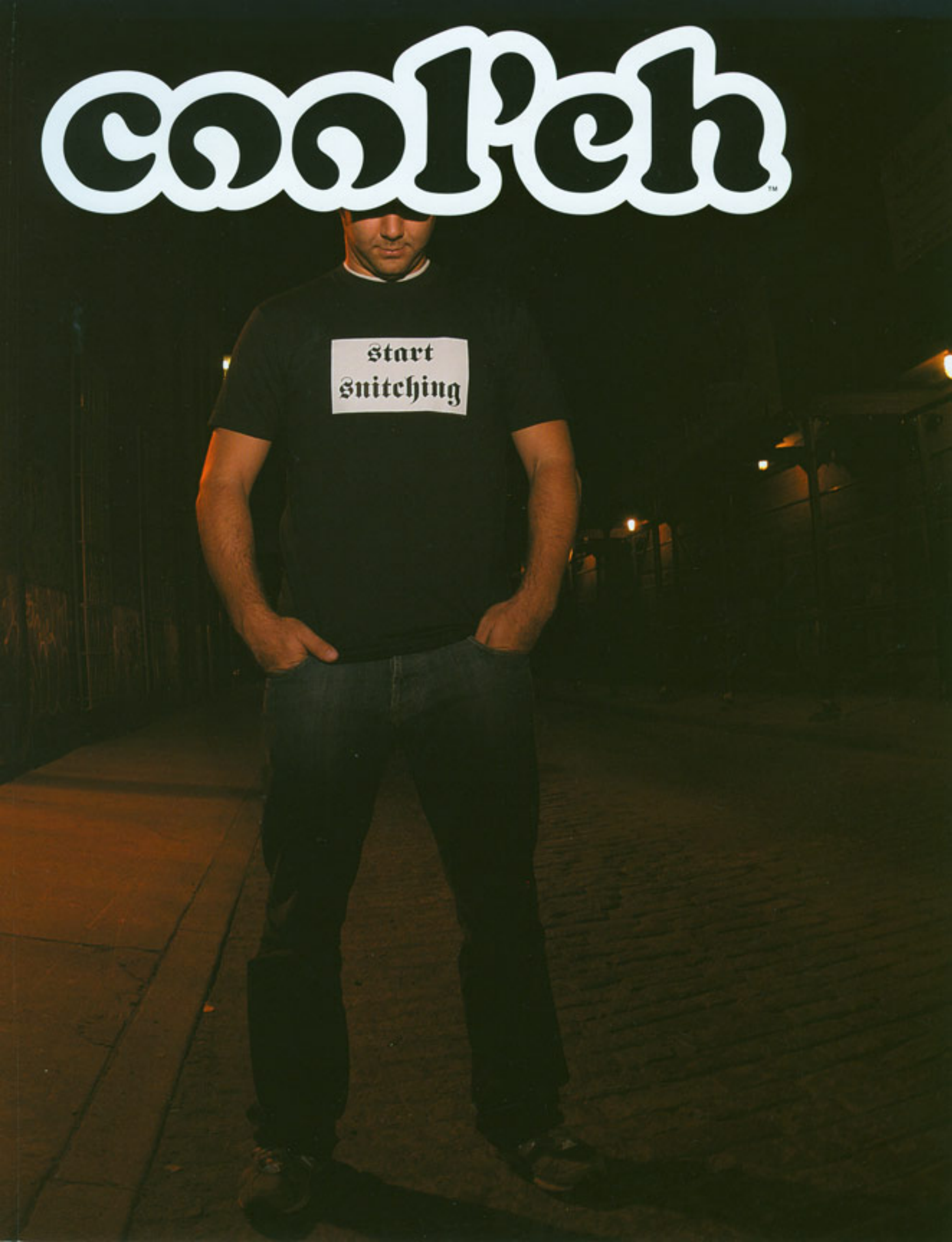


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WORDS: CONOR RISCH

EXQUISITE CORPSES

IMAGES COURTESY OF BURTON
SNOWBOARDS, ERIC BAILEY,
MARK MULRONEY, ERIK SIADOR
AND NATE VAN DYKE



Long gone are the days when one of the top snowboarders in the world would dis the first-ever Olympic snowboard competition, writing it off as too corporate. That the world famous Burton Snowboard Company suited the U.S. Olympic snowboard team in pinstripes in '06 just shows how much things have progressed. Terje Haakonsen still rides for Burton, though. And the nonconformist spirit that caused his famous boycott of the Olympic halfpipe competition in 1999 survives at Burton today. There's no better example of this than their un..inc team of riders.

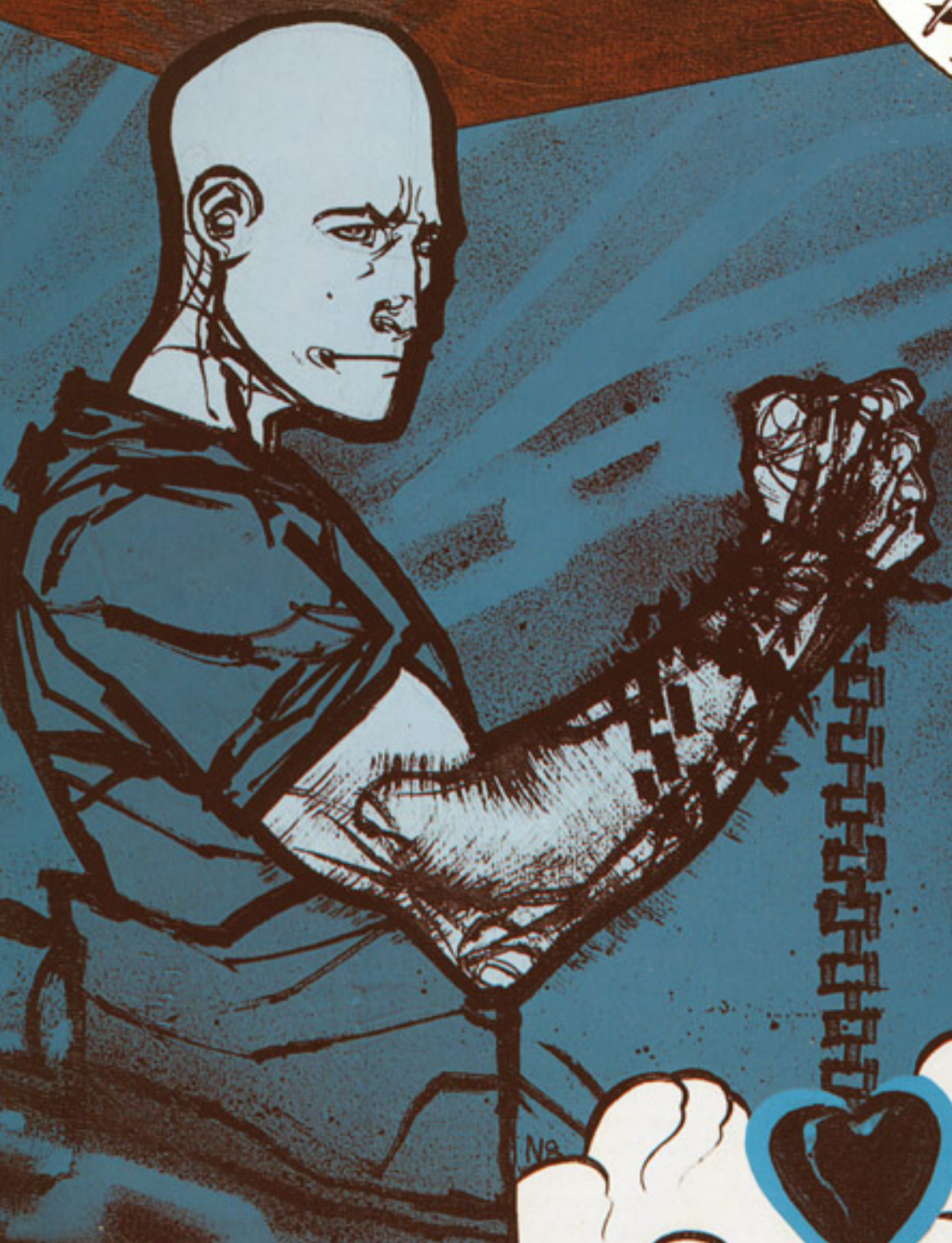
While corporate interest in 'action sports' has long since gotten annoying, Romain De Marchi, Gigi Rief, JP Solberg and un..inc squad newcomer Danny Davis maintain a throw-back low-key, anti-establishment aesthetic that holds riding with the crew, pushing each other to progress above all. They are known as a tight-knit group of dudes who just happen to shred for the biggest snowboard outfit going. Burton encourages their vibe and enables these riders to express their side of the culture. Part of that expression shows up in the graphics of their un..inc snowboard decks, which for the 2007 season prove that the anti-corporate ethos, far from old fashioned, still runs deep at the forefront of one of the world's most fluid and artistic sports.

I still remember the 1993 Jeff Brushie pro-model. I think it was a rainbow trout on the topsheet, it might have been a salmon—I can't be sure. I do know I wanted that board, but

all I got were pangs of jealousy. That fish graphic was one of many created for Burton by Burlington-based design firm Jager Di Paola Kemp. JDK has been popping out board designs for the big co. since the creative process involved little more than a few beers, some artist and designer types, and the riders lamping at owner Jake Burton's Vermont spread for a small yearly gathering that has since then grown into a massive Oktoberfest blowout. "At that time, about eighteen years ago," recalled Michael Jager, a JDK principle, "we'd be down [at Jake's house] in Southern Vermont, developing graphics kind of hanging out with riders, and we would build ideas, work with them, create different graphic studies, different approaches to what the art and the vibe could be about and just tons of experimentation. And then it was pretty interesting because in his house we would put the board graphics, the comps up, and just have them around the house and as it goes on into the night you end up walking around, everybody's drinking beers and hanging out and you just start talking about the art and that's how the line would get picked. It was just a cool, open house kind of scene—a very Andy Warhol Factory kind of vibe. To me it was the most pure development process that I've ever seen." According to both Jager and art director Lance Violette, this clean, rider-driven process still exists in the un..inc series of boards.

Violette started as an intern at JDK right out of college, where he'd soured on his design classes only to come back to them thanks to snowboarding. "It was right around '93, '94,"

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Violette remembered, "and there was this mini revolution happening in snowboarding, snowboarding colliding with design and art. And design versus art was a concept I struggled with greatly all through college, and then I saw this thing happen to snowboarding at the time...and particularly it was all happening with Burton, and every ad Burton did had a different logo on it, and sometimes it was just written by hand. I remember distinctly there was this one ad and the type was made out of tabs off of beer cans and it just blew me away. I'm sitting here and I've got this [professor] telling me don't bother creating your own font since there were so many other perfect ones that were created; I'm leaving this class and I'm picking up a magazine and I'm looking at a company who just made their logo out of beer tabs. It just showed me, you don't have to listen to any of this stuff." After a stint at a snowboard startup, Violette came back to JDK and did his first graphics for Burton in 2000. He was also involved in the launch of the un..inc series, and although he left JDK to start his own firm, he still works with Jager on the un..inc graphics. For 2007 they bit off a big project, and civilian snowboarders are just now seeing the results at their local shop.

The concept Violette and Jager came up with was to pay homage to the culture the riders build and live by asking five artists to create collaborative works unlike any that have ever been printed on a board. "A lot of what we were inviting and perpetuating and one of the reasons its relevant to

un..inc," said Jager, "is that it's all about the collaboration of the riders: it's more real than any other team anywhere, these guys are just loving life and hanging together and pushing each other so it seemed like an appropriate thing to look at the collaboration of artists and actually taking a board and passing it around and having one artist add onto another, so it was kind of like this exquisite corpse idea that built on itself to create this holistic expression that was really unique to snowboarding."

Although Violette and Jager were worried that five artists might not want to work together on one canvas, they presented the concept to Burton and to the riders and got the green light. "It's a testament to the senior management at Burton that they just give this to us and let us go, even if they might cringe sometimes at the result," Violette said of the series, which only the creative director, designer, riders and key people at the company have input on. Violette admits that the riders were skeptical about the concept at first. "I've been working with these guys for a really long time, we've had enough time to build up a certain amount of trust and I had to really cash in that trust card," he said.

Approval in hand, Violette began piecing together his team. "I pulled together a random sampling of work from artists that I have watched and I like, and then threw in some other newer guys who I maybe heard





about from friends who said you should check this guy out if you're ever doing graphics." Billy Anderson, Eric Bailey, Mark Mulrone, Erik Siador and Nate Van Dyke, all of them with different artistic styles than the next, made up the squad.

It was decided that each artist would have one week with each of the five canvases, and by day seven of that week the canvas had to be delivered to the next artist. Violette assigned a graphic theme for each board. They were: sex, friendship, confusion and pain, values and travel. In addition to contributing to the collaborative works for each topsheet, the artists also had to work on their own bottom sheet for one of the boards based on the rider's requests and ideas. As with any trailblazing, snags were eminent. One of the obstacles noted by a couple of the artists was pulling down the boundaries on their own work and invading the space of the others. "Sometimes I had to cover up parts of another artists' work and that can get a bit touchy," said Mulrone. "But I didn't get any complaints so it worked out fine." Bailey agreed: "The hardest part was just letting go and letting the other artist do what they do, cause sometimes it was like: that looks good white . . . damn, there goes that white. Changes were out of your hands."

Siador embraced the concept. "Design-wise I didn't want to see the board look like it was a divided piece,

you know, it was a collaboration piece," he said, "so I tried my best to go over someone's stuff."

Any project meant at least in part for a consumer audience is going to run into here some acceptability issues. Nate Van Dyke got the assignment for the bottom sheet of the sex board, and his work was prominently featured on the top-sheet as well. "You can see the strategic cover ups with the logo placement and all that, and that was something that just had to happen," said Violette. When I got in touch with Van-Dyke he was still a bit steamed about how much the sex deck differed from the original graphic. "Burton lets us just run," said Violette, "but if it comes to the eleventh hour, if there's something they're just not willing to let us do, you've got to do what you've got to do. I'm not happy about it, but it's a part of the job."

In addition to trying to get the artists to mix it up and making sure the graphics got approved, Violette had to juggle a number of factors. "You're not just making some cool art, you're also creating something that professionals are going to be riding," he said, "And visually they want their balance in a certain area. If you like your composition up near the nose and you look down and everything is weighted near the tail it's truly going to impact the way you ride." The printing capabilities of the factory were also of concern.

Ultimately the project was a positive progression of the





snowboard graphic, and the proof is in the pudding. "It was exciting to get the new work every week and to have to figure out how to work with what you were given," recalled Mulrone. "It is just nice to work for a different audience. I generally work in the gallery/museum world and working with riders forces me to present a different style and narrative that I don't get a chance to explore very often."

"I couldn't be happier with the result and it was worth all the effort," mused Violette. "[The riders] were stoked and that makes all the difference . . . Because snowboarding's relationship to design and art has been so strong for years and years now, it's tough to do something new." Violette hopes the riders without a pro deal recognize the work as well. "When you get so close to snowboarding it's easy to forget the people who are going to have these boards for four seasons—the kid who's mowing lawns all summer long and every bit of that cash is going to buying these snowboards. It's very important to have some longevity."

"When you work on these things you need to realize that you indelibly mark imagery in people's minds because it's some of the most potent stuff," Jager told me. "You're out there with your friends doing risky cool shit, having fun, and the graphic that you choose to ride kind of imbeds itself in your mind and in the minds of your friends, and it sort of marks certain eras of your life." No doubt these un..inc boards will be some kid's '93 Brushie pro model.

