

19 August 2020

Cody Hudson for 3sixteen.



Photos: [Alex Maier](#)

As longtime fans of Cody Hudson's work - both via output from his creative agency [Struggle Inc.](#) and his fine art under his own name - we're thrilled to present a collaborative project that has been almost four years in the making. We say four years because that's when Jeroen from [The Jaunt](#) introduced us in 2016 via email, after which came an in-person linkup at a risograph show in Chicago later that year. 3sixteen has afforded us the opportunity to meet so many creatives whom we've looked up to and been inspired by from afar over the years, and this project is no exception.

Cody Hudson's work has always been collage-driven, rooted in the rave flyers he was creating in the early 90's. Through self-taught methods, he was able to translate his distinct style of blocky, angular, and colorful hand-cut shapes into digital formats, but the method is always rooted in analog means. Digital art has opened doors for him to work with clients big and small - he counts Nike, Volkswagen, Red Bull, and Target amongst them - but the journey back towards fine art has allowed him to get his hands dirty once again, so to speak. From sculptures formed of wood and metal to large-scale paintings on linen, Cody Hudson has had the opportunity to exhibit his work across the world at Andrew Liner, Mini Galerie, Andrew Rafacz, Guerrero Gallery, David B. Smith and more.

For our collaboration, we were inspired by Cody's continual obsession with nature and plant life and worked together with him to develop a print pattern based on palm leaves. The work was created digitally but, as often is the case with Cody, informed by analog means. To further the handmade nature of the work, we partnered with an incredible garment producer in India to manufacture the finished product. We've produced a shirt and a bandana out of a beautiful hand-loomed fabric that was dip dyed in indigo to achieve a rich, varied blue. When we say hand-loomed, we mean that the fabric is woven on an old wooden hand-powered machine - up close, you'll see slight variations in the weave and a beautiful texture that will continue to change as the shirt is worn and washed over the years. After the dye process, the fabric is then printed - again, by hand - using a wooden block carved out by an artisan. The block is dipped in a discharge ink and then hand-applied to the fabric with a quick stamp of the hand. This ink slightly bleaches the fabric, creating a tonal pattern across the shirt with just the right amount of contrast. The nature of hand-block printing is fascinating due to the level of expertise required and we're floored that this level of craftsmanship is still present at all. India's lengthy history of textile production is something we're excited to explore in the seasons ahead, so we look at this initial project as a precursor of exciting things to come.

Alongside the shirts and bandanas, we have also produced a silkscreen print featuring the same pattern on the clothing. They are printed for us by our friends at [Vahalla Studios](#) in Kansas City, MO and are individually signed by Cody. All proceeds from the print sale will be donated to [Marwen](#), a nonprofit organization in Chicago committed to providing free art classes as well as college and career programming to students from under-resourced communities. After all the dust settled from the production work, we sat down with Cody via Zoom to catch up and reflect on the project.

The photos you see throughout this piece were shot at his Chicago art and design studio, but since the pandemic hit he and his family retreated to their house in Wisconsin. Despite all the road bumps along the way to bring this project to fruition (and believe us when we say there were a few), we couldn't be more excited to release this to the public. We hope you enjoy it too.

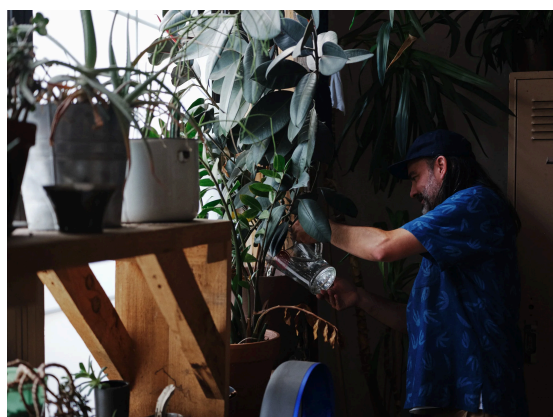


What've you been working on these days?

I've been making lots of quick drawings in the basement studio up in Wisconsin. I try to make 5-10 each night as a way to feel like I did something creative at the end of the night, and it helps to clear my head a bit. I have been working on some smaller paintings on linen as well as a large series of screen prints and mono prints for [Louis Buhl](#). I'm trying to take this time to get back into more wood-based sculptures and finding materials in the woods as well. Since I don't have many shows lined up with the current situation, I've been digging back in and doing some more commercial projects as well.

Did you just push it off for awhile?

I always had the option to do both but left to the choice of doing commercial work versus painting, I'm gonna choose painting (laughs). But I usually have some commercial work going alongside the personal work; it helps balance out the studio. There's some new Nike stuff I am working on right now that's been fun. I'm also doing all the graphics and such for the cannabis brand [Asterisk](#).





How long has Struggle Inc. - your agency - been in existence for?

Since 1995, maybe? It was the name I put on rave flyers I was designing in the 90's when I didn't want my own name on it. It got more official in 1997 and was the name I put onto all my commercial projects. The work I am doing now is closer in line with what my personal aesthetic is, so I'm more comfortable using my real name; but before when the studio was just getting started I was doing all kinds of more traditional design work: logos, patterns for snowboard companies, book designs, ads. I felt like it needed a "design studio" name attached to it, even though it has always pretty much been just me.

And how far into your agency work did your fine art career begin to blossom?

I've always been painting, drawing, and making prints; but probably the last 8-9 years are when I started to focus more time on my personal art and take it a little more seriously. For so long I was focusing on freelance work and worrying about where the next check was going to come from - and I would paint at night for myself. When the art started to attract attention, though, I was able to focus on it more. I still kept the commercial work going though, I enjoy that as well. I never left it behind.

The two disciplines are pretty different, though; graphic design is usually catered towards a client's needs. Do you feel free to do the kind of work you want? Is all the work you do personal now?

I mean it's definitely all personal, but commercial work still has a client attached, there's a brief, and there's still someone else making a final decision on whether that's what they want or not. That's part of why I started gravitating towards painting: there was no client. I could go into the studio and make whatever I wanted to, instead of saying "What do you want me to change? Do you want to see three more colors?" With art, I can make whatever I want, and I guess it's up to the viewer as to whether they like it or not. And if someone buys it, it's a bonus.

Tell us about how our print came together. Did you start with physical paper cutouts or was it done on the computer?

A little bit of both. The final print was done on the computer but it was informed by paper-cut leaf studies that I worked on to try and get the shapes just right: I wanted them to look like the leaves were splitting at the source. I kept going back and forth between making superclean shapes and more rough, jagged ones that felt more hand-cut. I like where we ended up, especially how the leaves join together into a singular point. I was into how they felt like a graphic shape pattern but also could easily feel like falling leaves or even something more tropical.

I think what's really cool about the project is how the shirt was produced, how hand-done it is. Your pattern was carved into a wood block by artisans in India and then hand-stamped onto indigo-dyed fabric with a discharge print. So what began with a very analog, hands-on effort which then translated into digital polishing ended up reverting back to a very manual process to print the pattern onto the fabric.

I liked seeing that for sure. It's funny because so much of my work does have that more hand-done feel and this pattern I worked on was on the cleaner side, but then seeing the final product and the small inconsistencies in the print made it end up being more hand-cut again. That's what draws my attention to the piece: not everything is perfect. The back and forth in the project where it goes from clean to rough and rough to clean really adds a lot. It was really nice to see that the final product wasn't just a screen print on a fabric, but that it had a really human feel to it.

