

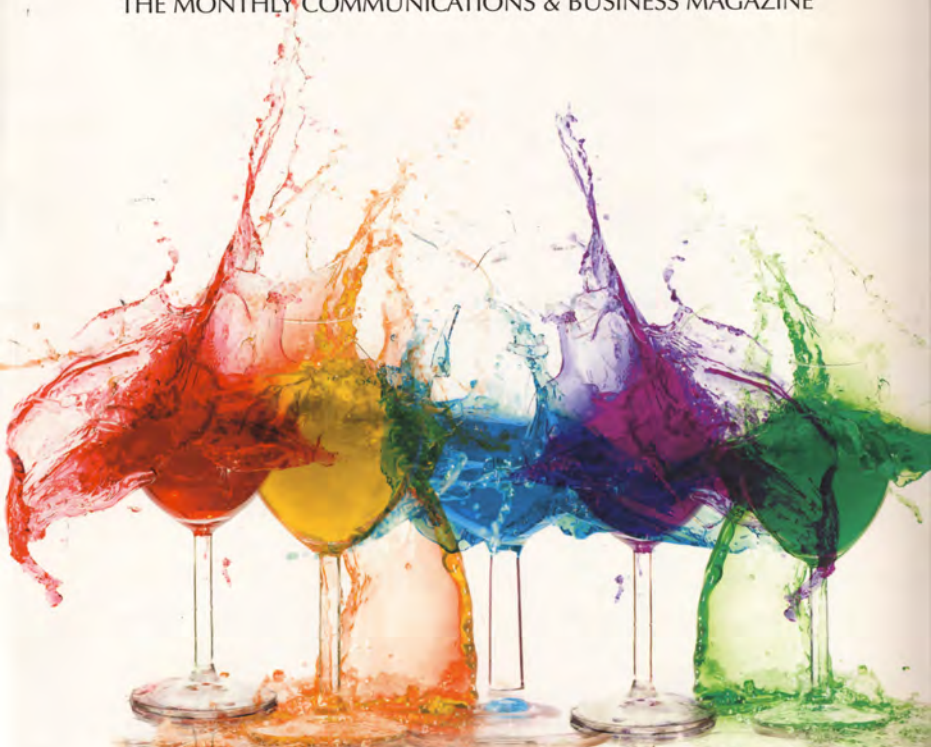
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**COMMUNICATION IN LEBANON:
SPLASHY, EXPLOSIVE**

“If you want the rainbow,
you gotta put up with the rain” *



>> **These days, just getting noticed is a challenge for most advertisers.** Depending on which study you consult, the average consumer is exposed to anywhere between 300 and 3,000 ads every day. The desire to make a mark on this world has led, some talented graphic designers, to exciting new innovations. Fertile creative minds have, indeed, gravitated towards the ad industry, realising that in advertising lies Art; it is the art of communication where ads become much more than just ads, as they incorporate artistic disciplines of all kinds to appeal to all tastes, using strong cultural signifiers that evoke certain emotions in the viewer's mind. Practiced outside the confines of conventional channels, illustration whether graffiti, airbrush, drawing, painting etc. require only time and interest by anyone. The one thing that remains clear is that it is a potent tool. What is certainly true is that there is no longer anything left which is not 'up for grabs' in a world where the need to stand out, in a visual landscape replete with popular culture, advertising billboards and signs of all types, regurgitated in the form of artistic illustration.

When you see **Hady Beydoun's** work, you can't help but think that someone must enjoy his work to get such results. Indeed, when your heart is in your work it just shows. The professional Lebanese graphic designer is a well-established tattoo artist and illustrator, who has earned a brilliant reputation in the Arab world, by blending excellence in both tattooing and illustration. *ArabAd* met the passionate young man for a lively and informative discussion.

* Dolly Parton

Hady Beydoun is the founder of Skin Deep, originally a tattoo studio, he has established in 1996. He studied graphic design at the American University of Beirut (AUB) where he took two introductory illustration courses, but he says that he's more self-taught, as he has tried manifold media, exploring all approaches, every different technique, and any medium in his field. "I think it is an ongoing process, where one constantly reinvents his/her methods and enhances technical and conceptual abilities. Illustration is a very wide field that deals with an infinite number of subjects and messages. There is always something new that comes up along the way either by accident or by method. Last summer for example, I started something new: carving on wood

logs and painting them, so I took illustrated subject from the drawing board and made it into a real physical object that you can touch." This professional illustrator offers contemporary drawing skills including airbrush, charcoal, graffiti and digital illustration. When did this Lebanese artist first decide to become an illustrator? We asked him if there was a pivotal moment that determined his artistic path. He thinks it happened gradually over the years. "It is something that has always interested me and I truly believe that illustration communicates a strong visual message as it portrays life in a more stylised fashion. "In a cultural landscape of hyper reality, branded lifestyles and 15-minute fame, one's subconscious receives thousands of advertisements a day. It is through this marketing bombardment that

passionate and talented graphic designers go on exploring innovative ways to make an impact as they aim at leaving a lasting impression on the audience's mind. Not an easy task though. Asked about his favourite creation, Hady has this unexpected reply: "There's nothing like the present. So what I'm doing now is my favourite; it is the wood logs that I carve and paint. They are everyday items or products that you see around you wherever you go; they are always advertising better taste and better quality yet they always expire, and the exterior never fails to promote power, health, and quality. I think this also applies to us when we get tired or unmotivated and we need to 'Recharge' and not 'Give Up' and always know how to 'Cut the Crap' without forgetting how to keep a sense of humour."



Beydoun draws his inspiration from music, books, art magazines; being around other artists as well, spices up his inspiration that he defines as an idea, a vision, a need. "A certain situation (good or bad) may be inspiring (like last summer's war for example) inspired me to carve out the Duracell battery and brand it with messages of hope and endurance." No wonder, since his most creative time is when "I am in a peaceful state of mind, where everything is in its right place, the mood is good and there are little or no significant distractions. I love early mornings and late nights because these are the times where mostly everything seems quiet and fully mine." His studio is that special place for creative work that helps him deviate from distractions. "It is where

I have my privacy, all my music, tools and material at my disposal." And to get him in the right state of mind to be able to create, usually "it's the smell of paint that triggers him to get in the right mood to paint!" And while working on a creative project - either corporate or personal, his favourite techniques for unlocking his brain is when blasting the most powerful music and dreaming away. Also, "sometime, brainstorming with friends who are on the same wavelength" contributes greatly in developing creative edgy ideas. Illustration has become increasingly popular in advertising as more campaigns are looking towards differentiating their approach to get the word out about the brand they are marketing.

And brands would definitely make a point thanks to an Airbrush gun for instance. Whether consciously or not, modern lifestyles require making design-based decisions, and most people recognise good design when they see it. Good design isn't elitist, rather empowering. Creating realism worthy of a photograph through airbrushing is a great way to occupy one's time. Learning to perfect this technique takes practice, but the tools are readily available for anyone who is willing to take instruction. Beydoun explained, "there is a number of international magazines dedicated to illustration which have always been a source of encouragement and inspiration to me, since my early years.

COVER STORY

They host and present a big number of contemporary artists and illustrators and feature their work along with tips on technical info and illustration tools both digital and conventional."

Artists who have mastered the general skills, needed to airbrush, often find that there is no limit to the number of projects they can do. Airbrushes are the perfect way to add poignant detail to a large mural.

Anyone who has ever seen a non-descript mural occupying an entire city block understands the dire need for airbrushing.

Asked about the achievements he is most proud of, Hady says that many small things gave him a sense of achievement at their time, like for example the first bike he custom painted or the first painted snowboard and "the first of many other small things that added fuel to his fire". Achievement, in his opinion, "is the ability to surpass oneself. It is the ability to create beyond the expected and this is the reward in itself".

Beydoun spoke about his ability to paint a 15 sq meter mural in one day, like the one's he's done in Kuwait, at the two Beach Spike events, where he had to airbrush all day, under a burning sun, on the shore, a huge canvas depicting the Beach Volley Ball tournament.

That's what is called skill and passion!

Also, he explains how he painted the 150 sq meter advertising mural, on Dora Highway, for William Lawson. It took him 22 days - perched on a ladder - to have it revealed entirely to drivers and passerby's.

Getting everything done right the first time out or being able to finish such huge and challenging project, for a multinational brand, on time is what jazzes up Hady's passion and life.

For William Lawson's airbrushed advertising mural, Beydoun was encouraged to deploy his visuals force, and spread his artistic wings, to offer an interesting splash of colours and graphics that transformed the way we experience outdoor media.



Drawing extensively on Beydoun's skills, it was for the client a successful initiative, the art of making ideas unforgettable, and naturally a unique positioning for the brand that looked trendier and hip.

The buzz around William Lawson's mural and Hady's achievement resonated for a while in Beirut, where eyes were rolled in front of such an offbeat outcome.

Designing and producing an advert in a flashy, innovative and unconventional manner is certain to generate excitement and take the advertiser message to a larger audience.

"After all, the whole point behind advertising is to communicate a message to the end consumer, who has to nod in approval, in the back of his mind upon receiving the message, before he goes out to the market to purchase the product," asserts Hady. Being aware of the substantial difference between producing graphically appealing (pretty) solutions

and creating strategic communication designs that produce results is key to successful campaigns.

"I believe that in advertising illustration, less is more."

"Advertising illustration has to be graphically appealing with style, punch and colour and has to communicate a message with little or no words at all," continues Hady.

The way Beydoun defines creativity confirms his sharp knowledge of the advertising world, its complexity and challenges as well.

"Creativity is the ability of showing the same familiar subject or idea in a quite different or unexpected features. It is the unexpected and wit that will steer the brand in the right direction." That's why Hady made his passion a delight with exactly the right frame of thoughts he needed for inspiration.

Beydoun's passion in helping brands find the deepest resonance with their audiences has led a diverse group of clients to seek out the artist unique talents of some free lance graphic designers.

The buzz about William Lawson's mural helped the brand further ingrain itself in pop culture. It is about social currency and social relevance, a key component of how to position a brand.

Did it serve as a catalyst for further similar action? That is less certain. Graffiti as well as plain sketching or drawing or even airbrush have acquired some negative connotations that have slowed their progress.

In Beydoun's opinion, commercial art isn't that widespread in Lebanon, "in large part related to the limited budget given to ad agencies and the level of awareness of the client regarding the subject. Not to mention the strict guidelines that many products have regarding their image and rules of presentation.

Photography, clip art and in-house digital manipulation of images (Photoshop) are always the cheapest, shortest and fastest ways to please the client and adhere to the universal guidelines of the product when relevant."

"There is also another reason", he adds, "and that is the nature of our Lebanese culture which has always been focused on trade and business rather than on art.

The painter has always been portrayed as the starving artist and who wants to be that?

We do not have a history and a culture based on art, music, literature, or theatre like many European countries.

Our cities and streets are not adorned with sculpture and mosaics. We do not build monuments of art, instead our architecture is focused on commercial buildings that lack both taste and style.

Even today the music and movie industry in the world is one of the biggest supporters of illustration for album covers and movie posters, the music industry in Lebanon and the Arab world focuses solely on the photograph of the singer and not the art of music which is based on feelings, emotions, art and imagination."

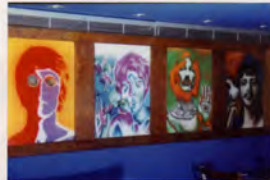
"Comic books like Superman, Spiderman, Mad, Tintin, Asterix etc.", he explains, "are an inspiring culture by themselves and this is something which is virtually non-existent in our culture."

Consequently, only recently have we begun to understand the power of commercial art and the first generation of graphic designers (like myself) has emerged from the 90s in Lebanon and the Arab world with no tradition, history or background in illustration, commercial or otherwise. The clients who hold the budgets want to make the most and fastest out of spending the least. Ad agencies do not care as long as they are securing a profit while keeping the client happy, hence the illustrator has no reason to exist."

In the end, advertisers need to understand that they shouldn't be looking at artists, illustrators as mere implementers but rather as strategic partners for their communication needs. A lot of work is still needed to be done, to present a different mind set as to what illustration is, and what it can do.

Beydoun has done quite a lot of advertising illustration in Lebanon and other Arab countries and "I tell you it hasn't always been the smoothest ride."

Generally speaking it has always been easier dealing with an ad agency rather than dealing directly with the client (of course there are exceptions) for the obvious reason that the mind set of people working in ad agencies is closer to the visual arts than the business-oriented client generally is.



Graphic designers themselves have to understand that what they do is a business.

That is often an aspect that they don't want to be bothered with; but it is in fact an essential part of being a graphic designer, and they should act and conduct their affairs as a business, like fashion for example.

How does Hady balance the artist in him with that of a businessman? He explains that this is the endless struggle where the artist knows he deserves more for his work.

But, he has to understand and accept the limitations and restricted budgets of clients.

"The balance is almost always unfair to the artist who always has to settle for less in order to get the job and it is always for the same reason: 'The Limited budget', he explains. Beydoun is currently working on a range of projects, a set of three paintings of a black and silver nude on a silver glittery background, and two wood logs in a shape of a car commissioned by an art collector. Being influenced by loads of signs and words he sees each day, Beydoun has come up with his own alter-identity.

He embeds his tag, his vision of the world - often cynical- on as many surfaces as possible, playing with the raw material readily available from popular culture, and subverting their meanings creating wrong messages, twisting logos and brands in the form of tags and pieces.

At the end of a day of work, when he sees he's made "even a tiny progress" towards a cherished goal he feels "better than good" as he likes to put it with a sincere smile.

"It means that I am focused and that is a good thing. It all starts as a little progress no matter what, and this small progress becomes the stimulus for more and bigger achievement."

Is the measure of success for Beydoun, about making a living, or is it rather about being an artist of some kind? Without a drop of hesitation, the gifted young man replies, "the ultimate form of success for an artist is to enter immortality like the great masters of art throughout history; having a name like Picasso, or Dali, or Rembrandt to name a few. Success for an artist is made of two things that go hand in hand: one is the immediate translation of effort into a financial and emotional reward and the other is surpassing oneself artistically and technically. Coming up with a great new idea or style is success. Being in demand is success, having one's name known as a great artist is also success."

However, success comes at a price and Beydoun is fully conscious that nothing should be taken for granted, even his duly acquired fame and professional reputation. << G A