

STEVE BROUWERS



I N T R O D U C T I O N

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

To me, creativity is everything; it is playing, it is breathing, it is in all of us, it is life. But the fact is that only some of us have the opportunity to make a living out of being creative.

I have the good fortune of being able to live off my creativity every day. Finding innovative ways to give brands exposure on television channels, both on air and online, is what I do. Often this entails finding the right balance between the wishes of the advertiser and the content maker, which is how I've come to perfect my skills in 'creative compromise' and 'meet-me-in-the-middle solutions'. That can be frustrating at times, because it always leaves you feeling like an idea hasn't been utilised to the fullest. Add to that a serious case of imposter syndrome, causing me to think that I'll wake up one day and people will have figured out that I have no skills, that I'm only pretending, and that the jig is up.

In recent years, I have given talks at many international innovative marketing conferences. I have spoken about creativity in all its forms: 'Fail Better' and 'Creativity, fake it till you make it' are just a few of the titles of my talks. I've shared the stage with the world's greatest creative thinkers of our time, and decided to ask them if they could spare an hour to talk to me about creativity. I also drew up a wish list of my personal heroes and contacted them via email or social media, asking them for an hour of their time. I started each interview with the same question: "What is creativity to you?"

The list of people you will find in this book is a personal list of my favourite graphic designers, illustrators, photographers, painters; all of them artists who inspire me and whom I have followed and cherished for years. Artists who will undoubtedly inspire you and challenge your thinking as well.

In the beginning, this was a one-man production, including the photography, but that turned out to leave the picture quality somewhat lacking. So, I decided to invite my best friend and photographer Joost Joossen to join me on this adventure and to take care of the portraits and behind-the-scenes images. Together we travelled by car, boat, train, underground, taxi, and plane, across different continents. Time and time again we were warmly welcomed into the artist's universe. It was crucial to me to have my conversations with the artists face to face, as I was on a personal quest, trying to find an answer to the question of how to find your place in the world as a maker and a creative.

Of course, not everyone said yes. Here is the email reply I received from Magnum photographer Martin Parr:

"There is no real creativity, in my case, so the premise of your book doesn't work for me. I just wander out and shoot lots of photos, it's that simple. It's just the whole notion of creativity that is pretentious, through my eyes! You just have to show up and do the work. Greetings, Martin Parr."

That's also what my wife, gallery owner Sofie Van de Velde, has taught me. She is a big inspiration to me and encourages me to face things head-on. She is the 'why put off until tomorrow what you can do today'-type. And I am a procrastinator. That's why making this book has been such a gift.

Looking back on the conversations I had with the artists, I realised that everyone deals with the same fears. The fear of failing, of not being good enough, the never-ending quest for an unattainable perfection. Some of them work because they worry that if they stop, everything stops. That the creativity will fade away. They walk to clear their heads, and they often have passion projects to help them escape their daily routine. It has been so enriching to talk to so many great minds, who have challenged me—as they will soon challenge you too—with their way of thinking and questioning life and creativity. Each conversation has been a gift that I'm happy to finally share with you.

Navid Nuur even created an artwork exclusively for this book. You can discover it on pages 212 and 213.

The only artist who seemed to be free from insecurities was art director George Lois. He said: "Fuck failure, I am what I am. My work will be remembered, and I will be remembered as one of the greatest." Maybe wisdom comes with age.

George Lois also said: "The seed of all groundbreaking creative ideas is asking 'what if?'. This piece of advice led to graphic designer Paul Boudens agreeing to both be featured in the book and to design it, and to Marc Verhagen from Luster publishing it.

I'm so proud of and pleased with each of the 44 creatives who agreed to be in this book. The inspiration they provided was addictive and made me want to keep going, but budgets and deadlines can get in the way, as you know. In any case, there will always be more people whose brain I want to pick.

It is what it is,
It is time to let it go out into the world
For you to enjoy reading it
As much I enjoyed making it.

Steve

Do you prefer big or small works?

I really like the intimacy of small works. They invite the viewer to get up close and discover details, where, beyond the geometric forms, evidence of the process is revealed. For me, as a painter, it is extremely satisfying when one small work can have the power to hold an entire wall on its own. But I also like to make larger works and murals. Sometimes it's just a matter of blowing up a small work and discovering that it still works. At the same time, I also want to make large, fragile, softer works, with thin lines in pastel shades. This as a counterbalance to the robust small works—it all has to be in balance. Big or small, busy or quiet, hard or soft, dark or light. I also like to combine different sizes. Scale can be a funny thing; my larger paintings require me to take a completely different approach, in the knowledge that the viewer will relate very differently to them.

Is there meaning behind your paintings?

Although my paintings are abstract, I always start from an existing urban reality. The study of signs is a theme that runs through my work. This connection with the present distinguishes me from the abstract art of the past century, which aimed to evoke an ideal world free from reality. In my work there is always a reference to everyday life, to the here and now. One of the best comments I ever received was from a young French artist I met in Spain. He said: "I feel the street in your art", and that is exactly my intention. To absorb the things I see in the street and then translate them into my work.

Do you want people to pay more attention to the world around them?

Yes, I want them to discover the beauty of the everyday, not only the natural landscapes, but the man-made forms and signs. They are the traces we leave behind as human beings. Making art with them blurs the boundaries between culture and subculture.

Who inspires you?

I could say that all those trucks on the highways give me the biggest buzz, but you probably mean which artists do I look up to? I like a lot of different stuff. I can look at a self-portrait by Rembrandt for hours or enjoy a Fernand Léger or, closer to my work, a Piet Mondrian. What I would very much like to have on my wall is a small work by Philip Guston. Among the living I love Carmen Herrera, if only because of her life story. One of the pleasant aspects of being an artist is that we occasionally swap work. That's so great!

How important is colour in your work?

I am very careful with colours. Now and again, I use three colours on a painting, but mostly only two. I use a lot of black and white, and a lot of blue—I'm a big fan of blue. Sometimes I also use yellow, to contrast with the blue. The things I see in the street are often blue and red, colours that seem to make things more official. That's why road signs or national flags are often blue and red.

Do you give titles to your work?

No, never, but I do give them a number. Finding a good title for a show is usually something that keeps me awake at night. So, I keep a list of suitable titles—words and fragments of sentences that I find match what I do or want to say.

How important are social media for you?

They're OK. And it's always fun to get good feedback and compliments. My paintings work very well in miniature, they stand out clearly against the clutter of images and graphics, which helps to attract followers. Once in a while I discover the work of other artists and a conversation starts spontaneously. Social media make the world smaller again.

How important is failure to you?

I've become more and more critical when I make new work. If I am not satisfied, I put it away for a while and then look at it later with a fresh eye. If I am still not satisfied at this point, I paint over it. Then it serves as a nice background for a new painting.

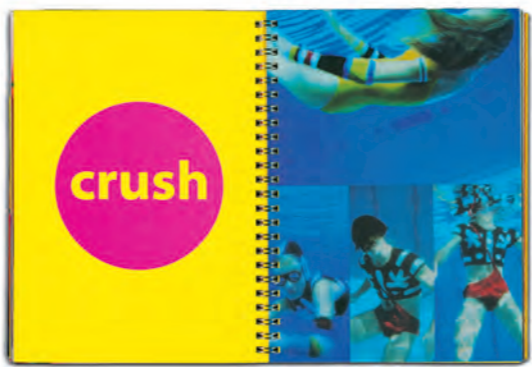
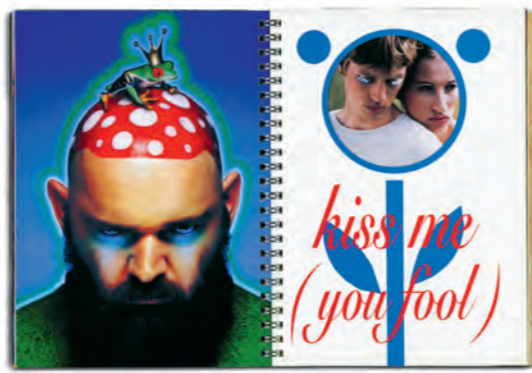
How has the Covid-19 pandemic influenced your creative process?

At the beginning of 2020, I was preparing a solo show in Paris. It was supposed to take place mid-April, but because of Covid-19 it finally happened at the beginning of September, between two lockdowns—I was very lucky. I hear that some of my colleagues are very active at the moment, but I sometimes struggle with the situation and it can affect my desire to paint. I need fresh air and a good walk.

What is some good advice that you have heard and will repeat to others?

I often go to shows that don't make a lot of sense to me. I mean, you have to read a lot of information to understand them. It's usually interesting, but sometimes I just think: oh boy, this guy needs a shrink (*laughs*). A good friend told me: "Just make that fucking painting". That's more my thing!





T O N Y G U N M

I am wild and I am excited about that.

How would you introduce yourself?

I am an artist in learning. I have always loved and believed in the notion of learning, whether formally or informally. I always want to be learning and I don't want to officialise something that I believe I am not ready for just yet. When I feel I have graduated from this process of learning, I'll define myself as an artist.

What kind of childhood did you have?

I had a very pleasant childhood. I grew up in kwaLanga, in Cape Town, with my mother Mothiba Gum, my late father Mzwandile Gum and my two older brothers, Senzwa and Mseki. I moved from this neighbourhood, which was fun, warm and close-knit, to a predominantly old, white suburbia, where the houses were far and wide with signs of frightening dogs illustrated on the fences. It was the complete opposite of what I had been exposed to before. It affected my childhood because in some ways I found myself feeling super lonely and disorientated. I had to adapt to this new environment, and fortunately I was able to get access to this without limitation (other than the bandwidth reaching its cap): the internet became my new 'playground', my new space to have fun and feel safe.

Did your childhood influence your way of creative thinking?

My childhood definitely influenced my way of thinking and my creativity. I needed to learn to understand myself in this new dynamic where I didn't feel as though I belonged. I became more aware of the racial difference of my environment, which made me notice the same in what I was viewing on the television, on the internet or in print: that people of my likeness were rarely depicted. As a reaction I started placing myself in front of the camera. My interest in self-portraiture departed from that place, plus, I quickly realised that since my little cousin (slash photographer, Siphon Gum) wasn't going to be around as often, I only had myself to be of aid. I enjoyed fashion as a tool to get into character, to help me visualise and understand myself through the photography. As I thought it through more and more, I wanted people to gain a little more context from the images other than just receiving something pretty to look at. To create or to expand a story. That's when the self-portraits transcended from being a depiction of self, to displaying an idea of a 'people' through using myself as the medium/subject. All in all, my childhood was impressionable.

What does creativity mean to you?

Creativity is complex. It can mean a safe place for the imagination to run free and yet that very imagination can be the same place that frightens you. It also means making many mistakes, in an attempt to complete an idea.

What kind of circumstances have to be fulfilled for you to be creative?

I am still figuring out what my routine is and what I'm comfortable with. What I've learnt recently is that the best thing for me is to just start working, whether I feel inspired or not. I've always thought that having a neatly packaged idea suddenly spring to mind was the essence of being creative, but that hardly ever happens. I used to think to myself: it will just come to me, I'm gifted; but so is everyone else who wakes up early in the morning to work towards their goals and ambitions. Those who harness their skills and their craft, as well as their gift.

I believe that in order to get to that pinnacle creative point, one needs to start; one needs to go through the daunting, tiring, difficult stuff until it eventually becomes easy or at least enjoyable. And once the completion of the creative point arrives, don't fight it.

Where do you get your inspiration?

People and everything.

What kind of things prevent you from being creative?

Laziness and fear. Laziness in the sense that I have a skepticism towards starting something new. And fear that I won't perfect the idea that's in my mind.

Can you tell me about your work process?

I am a very visual person, so I think in pictures. I'll start to doodle the ideas and see which metaphors and nuances speak through the images. After those drawings are done, I'll have a narrative in mind. Then I'll speak to my writer, friend and curator Lungi Morrison. We bounce ideas off of each other and give it weight. If I'm not just working with her, I'll obviously need to do some research and speak with other people. Eventually, after all that is done and pre-production is complete, I'll get into the process of production. This means gathering a team together for the shoot: make-up artist, camera assistant and a producer. Thereafter I'll sit with the editor in post-production and we'll make the final selections. Works are framed, and then we're done!



What about your personal work?

I love the process and the experimentation and the knowledge I gain from my private work. When I'm working with new materials, I love to fail. It's not about the final piece, it's really about the whole process: having the thoughts, rethinking them, making them clearer and then suddenly producing something and later maybe doing another version of it. In the end you might show it digitally or put it in a gallery. I really want to invest my energy into doing things that are just for myself. I could even decide not to show the result at all, just because I enjoy the process so much. Of course, at the same time I'm also trying to test things and show them to people to gauge their reactions. I can use a lot of the knowledge I've gained from working in the graphic design field in my personal work, so it's all connected.

What is your relationship with typography?

I especially like written words. Each typeface has its own story, like when it was created and why it was created, so choosing a certain typo gives your message a specific direction. I chose a typeface that is quite neutral in its character, Helvetica. Whatever I say or communicate will always be written in the same typeface, so it becomes the container of my information, without being too prominent. I don't use a typeface that already gives my message a specific direction, because language itself is a code that divides people. Language has a lot of power: you can use it to say 'I love you' or to start a war.

Is failure important for the creative process?

It's important to get out of your comfort zone. If you stay inside it, you will always repeat the same strategy you used to solve a similar problem, but you will never explore a new way. Leaving the comfort zone means taking a risk.

Has the Covid-19 pandemic influenced your creative life?

Covid-19 has impacted my whole life, including the creative part, like it has for everyone else on this planet. I miss a lot of things that are important to me, like cultural events, travelling, and meeting friends, but we are also collectively experiencing a global crisis that you cannot describe the depth of, or even imagine the scale of its impact on our society. At the same time I'm very aware of my privileges.

What's the best piece of advice you have heard and repeat to others?

Don't listen to advice. You have to go through the shit by yourself anyway, so be brave and do something good while you are on Planet Earth.

Does your creativity have to create a better world?

I believe that creativity has the power to change things. If you actively use your skill as a citizen-activist, you can make a difference. I try to have an impact on my surroundings in the way that I work with people, the way I treat people, the way I show people who I am and try to give them the chance to shine. I believe in the power of a very small-scale impact, and it feels like it has already worked. I've worked with more than eighty people in my studio. How you treat people has an influence on how they treat other people. I think my legacy is not the work, my legacy will be the way I work with people. That impact is much bigger.



MORAG MYERSCOUGH



Make happy those who are near,
and those who are far will come.

How would you introduce yourself?

I'm a designer, an artist and a maker. I would actually describe myself as a polymath, which means that you do lots of different things. I don't like labels, so I prefer that people decide what my work is rather than saying what it is myself.

How did your childhood influence your creativity?

I was born in London. My father was a classical musician, he played the viola. He was a session musician and played with The Beatles whenever they used an orchestra in their songs. My mum was a textile artist and my great-grandfather was a clown, so I come from quite an interesting family.

My grandmother was French, my great-grandmother was German and my mother was Scottish, so I only have a little bit of English in me (*laughs*). I would absolutely say my childhood influenced every part of my creative life.

What does creativity mean to you?

That's a big one. I think creativity is life, isn't it? Creativity happens on every level, it's vitality and expression, and it's life.

What kind of circumstances need to be fulfilled for you to be creative?

The most important thing was to find a place where I would be able to do anything I wanted. I always felt like an outsider—I was a middle child and never had my own space—and when I found this building suddenly everything came together for me. My studio is a place where I can be the most creative because I can do and make anything I want. It gives me the space I need for my brain to think and also space to physically do things.

When it comes to negative circumstances, I don't like to be put on the spot. Like in a meeting, when suddenly you're meant to just (*snaps fingers*) 'come up with brilliant ideas'. It doesn't work like that for me. I have to think about things for quite a while and then let it sit. I don't even know when something is going to happen and then something happens, by doing a sketch or drawing something on the computer or making a model or a painting.

What does an average day in the life of Morag Myerscough look like?

My day looks quite dull from the outside. I start quite early in the morning—I think mornings are good. I get up and I have a cup of tea. Then I work on projects on my computer in my kitchen upstairs. I listen to the radio, I work a bit, I take the dog out and then I work some more, which could be any sort of thing, painting or working on the computer. Then I make lunch and work into the evening. But I stop at around eight or nine o'clock.

I don't really like having loads of meetings, I quite like just being in this building all day making things. The day seems to be a lot longer then. I usually work every day, even if I have a bad day. I'm not really addicted to anything else, but I'm totally addicted to work and to the highs that making such varied projects gives me. It uses all the different parts of my brain.

Where do you get your inspiration?

When I was younger, I would go to every film, every gallery show opening. I lived in London, so there was a lot to see. I looked up every book and everything else I could look at. I was a sponge, and all that stuff is still inside me and gets all mixed up.

Travelling for me is also a big, big thing. Two years ago, I went to Mexico and it was as thrilling as I thought it would be. I'd be scared to live in the countryside because I like going out in the streets and seeing changes, seeing people and looking at their clothes,... The everyday inspires me.

Who inspires you?

I really loved Andy Warhol and pop art when I was young. Memphis was also a big influence. Maybe less because of what they produced and more because of what they believed was possible. That's basically what I based my whole life on: the fact that you shouldn't be restricted by education or anything. If you want to do something, you should try and do it.

When I was in college, I saw a David Hockney exhibition called *Hockney Paints the Stage*, where he made theatre sets. That just blew my mind. I was making theatre sets at the time, and I loved this transformation of a place made up of just four walls into a magical space. My French grandmother inspired me in the same way. She was a very elegant woman, and when she moved to Holloway—which isn't a very elegant place in London—she transformed her living room into a French salon. I am fascinated by this idea of temporary escape; how you can walk into a space, and it can completely change your feelings, if you get it right.



Your subject is often a human form in an isolated environment, mostly in nature. Where does this fascination for nature and the everyday person come from?

I am deeply fascinated by sunrises and sunsets, and the reflection of the sky on puddles in the street, to a degree that I don't observe in the people around me. I'm fascinated by anything that changes the everyday into something very unique and particular, those small switches that can shift your entire perspective in an instant. In my work I build this shifted world, this strange perspective, this unusual setting for my characters to live in forever. This is their everyday moment, a setting in which they feel alive. I feel like that is the theme I pursue.

What prevents you from being creative?

Everyday life is a struggle. Ideas have to build up inside of me until they get to a point where I can't ignore them any longer and then I make them happen. But obviously real life goes on, you need to go shopping, you need to clean your flat, you need to make sure that you're properly insured and stuff like that. So, I actually feel like the everyday maintenance that comes with occupying a physical body constantly gets in the way of creating.

Does your work have to be provocative?

I never set out to be provocative and often when people do feel provoked, I'm very surprised by it. I do set out to make work that challenges me, that isn't just entirely comfortable the way it was when I started out, when I was making work that made me feel at ease and that made me feel lighter afterwards. I've started to dig a bit deeper into my psyche and I now try to make work where just making the work disturbs me and makes me uncomfortable, and not just physically. So, I guess I'm trying to provoke myself.

Does your creativity have to create a better world?

Oh, God. I know that through creating, I've made myself better as a person and that has had a direct effect on the people around me as well. I guess to a certain degree it does make the world better. In a way, the work that I want to be making is work that I should have seen when I was a child. In that respect, I do want to be making work that changes something. I want my work to be honest and to say something that isn't just purely aesthetic, but actually holds a personal meaning. I'm not necessarily setting out to change the world, but I am filling a gap in the public sphere.

Is colour important in your work?

Colour is definitely important in my work. I think it's very interesting how our moods or our feelings correspond to visual things and how that translates into imagery. I love playing with sad imagery that looks very bright and colourful, or dark imagery that is rather colourful, and having that contrast in there.

Who inspires you?

A lot of people inspire me: artists, but also a lot of people just living their own life in an open and brave and honest way. And pretty much anyone who is passionate and has a way of going about their life like it means something and making sure that they leave something good behind in the world.

When I started out as a thirteen-year-old boy, I discovered a few young photographers who were making work that really blew my mind. For example, this German girl named Laura Zalenga who was also making self-portraits—very clean, powerful and vulnerable work. There was also an American photographer called Alex Stoddard making self-portraits at the time. It was almost like a movement of young people who were turning towards photography and post-production to turn their vision into real life. As soon as I started to delve deeper, I discovered more established photographers, like Gregory Crewdson and Tim Walker, who both do amazing set design and manage to build actual physical worlds.

These days, everybody is a photographer. How do you stay original in a world that's already so full of images?

By being ridiculously tough and selective when I am making work. I try to really listen to my gut and then if I end up making work that looks like someone else's, that might be the case. Sometimes people are on similar wavelengths and that's alright, but once you let yourself explore and make a crazy amount of work, you'll start to feel what you're attracted to and what you're not that into. That's when you'll begin to develop a language that feels like your own, that just completely makes sense.

ALL CAPS.

ZILCH
TUMM

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