

From headpieces for Lady Gaga to bizarre covers for Kafka novels, **GARY CARD'S** image-making travels in many different directions. **ZOE TAYLOR'S** rich interview with Card reveals an illustrator alert to the possibilities of improvisation

GARY CARD'S

SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION



Evolution of Lady, 2013, courtesy of Fashion Illustration Gallery

Painting made for Luis Vinyals, *The Printed Day magazine*, 2015Saint Laurent AW15 for *SHOWstudio*, 2015Evolution of *Lulu*, 2013, courtesy of Fashion Illustration Gallery

Turquoise musclemen with giant zip-pulls for heads, Italian hares dripping in fluorescent mink, morphing geometric mutants – Gary Card’s fashion images are otherworldly and bizarre. “I want to startle people,” he told *The Times*. “A passive reaction is worse than a negative response for me.”

The multidisciplinary artist studied theatre design at Central Saint Martins, but the fashion world, with its appetite for strangeness and novelty, was quick to discover him. For the past few years, he has been in constant demand by both luxury and high street brands, as well as publications such as *Dazed & Confused*, *ID* and *Vogue*. He has designed headpieces for Lady Gaga and Comme des Garçons; drawn the latest collections for *SHOWstudio*; painted live murals for Joseph; designed props and sets for immersive shoots, windows and in-store displays for clients ranging from Hermes to Topshop; and made print designs for clothing. He has also made personal drawings such as his *Evolution of Lulu* series, which showed at Osmani in 2013.

The idea of an *Abandoned Amusement Park attraction* – the one he gave his first exhibition of personal work – encapsulates the effect his often ad eyes with his set design. Every detail is chosen from a place that suggests darkness and places that add drama to the clothing. *Dazed & Confused magazine’s* Chloe Sexton has aptly observed how Card – inspired by comics, sci-fi films and artists such as Paul McCarthy and the Chapman brothers – ‘distorts well-known iconography into something unnerving, while maintaining a playful innocence’.

He brings his visions to life using basic materials such as cardboard, masking tape (he used 300 rolls of it for one project) and plasticine, which he particularly likes, drawn to its texture, immediacy and nostalgic element. It’s this coarseness that adds a sense of subversion and spontaneity to the imagery; he is interested in exploring ‘the juxtaposition between the lightness of the cartoon subject and the darkness of raw materials I have used to construct them’.

Card has talent for manifesting the bizarre, but it’s the dramatic lighting, the use of props and the interplay of sculpture and playful approach that has applications beyond fashion – the first commercial use of his work was for Penguin’s Kafka series, a context that highlighted the more sinister and absurd elements already present in his work.

20E TAYLOR: In 2007, Penguin Classics illustrated the covers of its Kafka series with some photographs that Jacob Sutton took of you with cardboard structures on your head, but you didn’t originally make them with this purpose in mind. How did the photos come about?

GARY CARD: We actually made that shoot when we were very young. I was 11, I think, and had just graduated from Central Saint Martins. I was working for a magazine and seemed to transcend both me and Jacob’s naivety and look on a life of their own when applied to the Kafka titles. It’s interesting how the themes of the books come out through each one of those covers, even though we had no idea what we were making at the time. We made them in Jacob’s bedroom for a student magazine. Somehow one of the Creative Directors at Penguin saw them and requested to use them. We were thrilled. It was my first commercial job and was also the beginning of a design philosophy that would model my entire career.

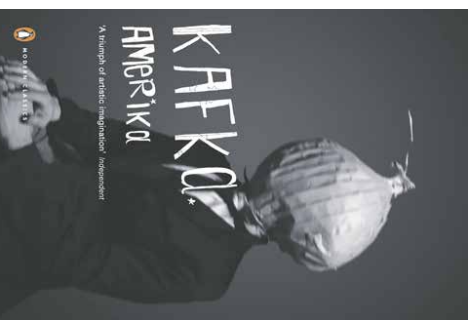
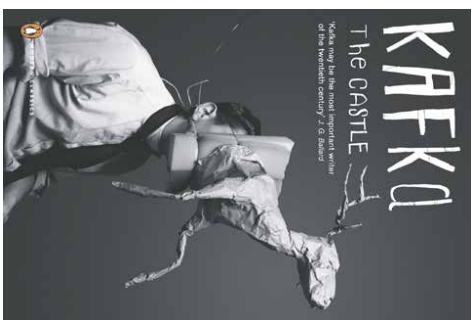
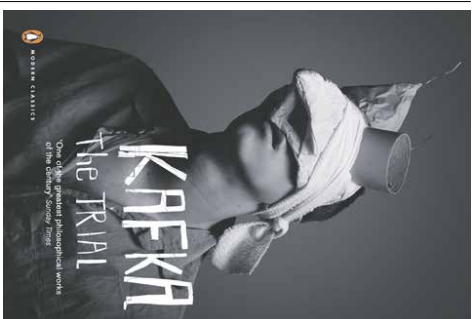
21: Your work definitely embodies a playful spirit. What’s your working process and how does it involve play?

GARY CARD: Play is not only important, it’s essential to what I make. If you don’t have fun, the process has to be fun. Good things rarely come from a bad work environment. When I work with my team, whether it’s my set-build team or my assistants, there’s a feeling of hanging out. We’re all working hard and we’re happy to be there. It’s important to remember that it’s a fun job and I’m lucky to have it.

22: Where do you think your curiosity about materials and textures comes from?

GARY CARD: I’m a builder’s son, so I grew up on building sites. I always loved the feeling of industrial things: sand, cement, grit. Now, it’s about taking that curiosity and applying it to a grander scale. “A whole room set covered in sandpaper, what would that look like?” – that sort of thing.

23: Are you surprised to be working predominantly in fashion? How did this come about?

Kafka, *Modern Classics* covers, Penguin, 2007. Photography by Jacob Sutton

A whole room set covered in sandpaper, what would that look like?



T-Shirt designs and plasticine installation for Dever Street Market, London, 2014

6c: I'm no longer surprised, but it was a bit of a shock when I first started. I was suddenly thrown into these massive, ghastrous photo shoots with all these gorgeous, flamboyant people around me and I would think, "How the fuck did I get here?!" Sometimes, I still think this, like I've tricked people into having me on-set. The older I get, the more I realise that actually everyone feels like this to some degree.

7c: A lot of bizarre characters appear in your work. How do you come up with these and what are your influences?

6c: The comics and cartoons of my youth mostly. They are like memories – the older I get, the more warped and distant they become. I think I've been influenced by the fact I make like a satirist feeling I just love drawing making insane clowns, massive, gaping, dribbling farts and bulging eyes that are far too far apart. This seems to be a recurring theme.

7c: What are your biggest comics influences?

6c: I was obsessed with a character called Madman when I was young. He was sort of emo, a wide-eyed innocent, bewildered by the bizarre and threatening world around him. I related to that idea. I was a bit of a weirdo loner. My favourite illustrators are all comic book illustrators, even now: I love Dave Cooper, Daniel Clowes, Jim Woodring, Seth, those guys.

7c: Have you ever made your own comics?

6c: I made comics when I was a kid. It was always my dream to do it professionally and I'd still love to make one. The thing is, they take months, sometimes years. My work is far more immediate than that. I just don't have the patience.

7c: And your favourite costume designers?

6c: My favourite costume designer was always Elko Ishida when I was young. She had a profound influence on my work, not so much now but certainly at the beginning of my career.

7c: Now I'm referring to your fashion drawings – what's your process? It looks like you enjoy leaving elements to chance with bleeding inks and splats...

6c: Exactly. I spend a great deal of time doing a really accurate pencil drawing, then I pour ink over it and see what happens. A lot of the time I ruin the drawing, but that's the important part, the risk, the element of surprise and danger!

7c: How did the painted character Lala emerge?

6c: Lala was an idea I had about an ageing, heinous to a crumbling estate. I've always loved cracked beauty, crazy splinters, Miss Havisham, so I thought it would be fun to illustrate a dark, sad and impossibly elegant woman at different stages of her life. The vibe was mine but I looked at a lot of vintage film photos to capture the silhouettes. I illustrated the entire show in one night.

7c: What are you working on right now?

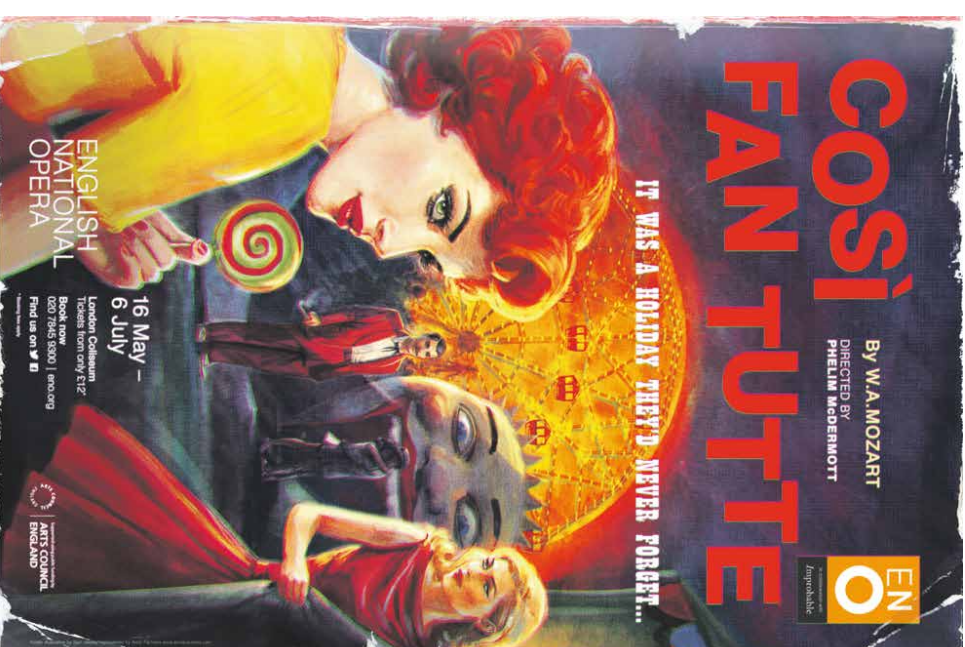
6c: Strange that this is your last question because I'm currently revisiting the Lala concept, only this time turning it into a fashion story for *Così Magazine*. I'm raising my game for this one. I'm taking pictures of east London legend James Jeanette and illustrating them. My mate Anna Trevelyan is styling it, too.

instagram.com/garypyard

I'd still love to make a comic – I just don't have the patience

DRAMATIC play

English National Opera (ENO) frequently use illustration in their promotional imagery with the aim of making opera open and accessible to anyone. Claire Round, Director of Marketing and Brand at ENO says, "Appealing and engaging illustrations that capture people's attention are certainly one of the methods that we use to communicate that message." Varoom online shows the ENO posters created for **COSÌ FAN TUTTE**, **THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE** and **THE PERFECT AMERICAN** and asked the three illustrators involved, Sam Hadley, Toby Leigh and Dylan Hewitt, about the poster commission and how play comes into their work. Their responses, along with more comment from Claire Round on the creation of ENO's marketing visuals, can be seen online at ao.com/varoom-mag



Così fan tutte, Sam Hadley, English National Opera, 2014