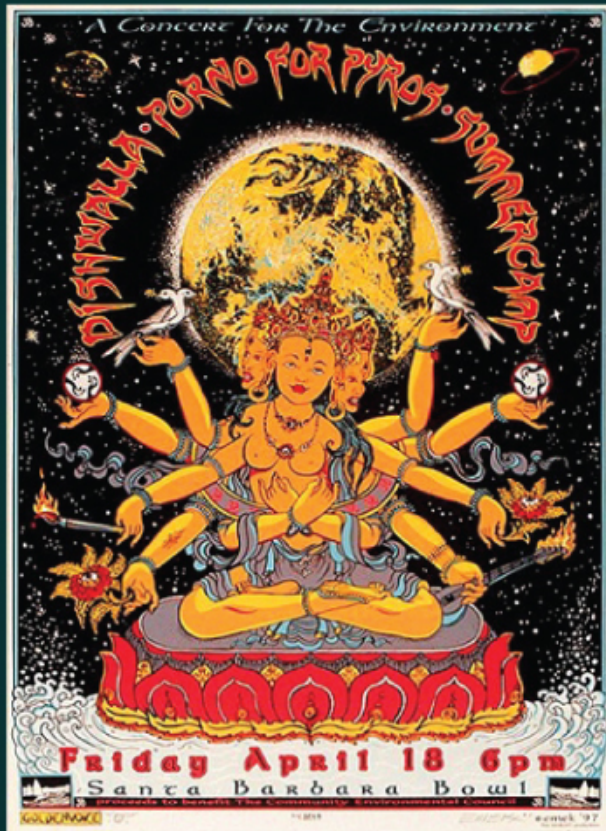


Emek

Interview



with Michael Erlewine

Emek

Interview

by

Michael Erlewine

INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design.

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Interview with Emek

By Michael Erlewine

[Emek is IMO among the tip of top of the younger posters artists, both as an artist and a human being.]

Interview: 19 February 2003
sound recording.

BEGINNINGS

Emek. March 27, 1972. Israel.

Michael Erlewine: And what was the given name?

Emek: First name is Emek. E M E K

Michael Erlewine: But to start out with what I'd like know is how you got into art, what kind of training you had, and as a kid did you do stuff?

Emek: Sure. Well I guess the umbrella answer is that my mom and my dad were both artists. They both had art studios.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Emek: ...and I grew up in their studio. I have one brother and one siste; they're younger than me and they're both artists as well.

Michael Erlewine: What type of art do they do?

Emek: My brother has done everything from large public murals to... he was an art director for a couple of dot-coms.

And he's done like... he worked in Oakland doing public development of turning public... abandoned public space into like community centers, where people could do gardening or learn art themselves. Now he is at M.I.T. and he's a student there, but he's also working on some very interesting programs, but I'm not really allowed to discuss them.

Yeah, and my sister she... I mean everyone in my family draws, paints, sculpts, does photography.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Emek: My training was growing up in my parent's art studio, but I also went to college and got a BFA.

Michael Erlewine: In what?

Emek: Mostly illustration. I guess, that was the main focus.

Michael Erlewine: Wow. And as a kid, I mean like through high school and grade school, were you doing...?

Emek: Oh yeah. I mean I was always getting into trouble, because instead of taking notes I would doodle on all my pages. Now, the fact that my parents were artists kind of made me want to do something else in my life.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: I was always trying to take other classes and, for awhile, I was an English major in college and just doing other things, but I just found it's in the blood.

It's in my calling and I couldn't fight it anymore, so about halfway through college, I changed my major and just decided to go for it.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool. And how are you doing? I mean... I've talked to a lot of artists, right? Michael Erlewine: A lot of the older artists are having a terrible time making a living. Hopefully you're doing better. Younger guys. I mean Jermaine seems to be doing okay.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Talked to him and Kozik of course is cool. He's really got the money trip together.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: What are your thoughts on that?

Emek: Well you know, my girlfriend criticizes me for not thinking too far ahead, but I just think of it as the work is coming in. It keeps me busy. Every year is better than the previous year. Every year, I get more high-profile jobs and more people find out about me and more people hire me. So, I don't know what that will mean when I become the age of a lot of the older people that are struggling now.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: But, I know for me right now, things are good.

Michael Erlewine: Good.

Emek: I feel very fortunate that way.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that's good.

Emek: I'm getting a lot of work and it's a lot of diverse types of work, like all things that are interesting to me, which is the most important thing.

Michael Erlewine: Yep, sounds right. So through school, were you doing pictorial art or cartoony art or?

Emek: It was mostly like, editorial stuff, geared towards... like 60's political cartoony.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Emek: I mean that was my passion, having grown up in my parent's studio. They were both like very socially active and always supporting different political causes. I mean social causes.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: I want to say political, but...

Michael Erlewine: No, I hear...I know exactly what you mean.

Emek: So, you know I always had that kind of slant toward my work, where art should make some kind of statement. I never was really into music related artwork at all, until...

Michael Erlewine: So like fine art?

Emek: Yeah, I did a lot of fine art and I did a lot of political cartoon stuff. I did a lot of paintings and sculptures.

Michael Erlewine: What about when you finally decided to go into art. How did that morph into gig posters and stuff like that?

Emek: I always had friends in bands and I was always interested in music. I just never thought of it as kind of anything more than...you know... I have friends in bands that have no money and they asked me to do artwork for free, so it was just a hobby, but... I found out about Kozik and a lot of the 60's artists and I just started showing my portfolio to different promoter's and record companies.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool. So... I was trying to get at how you transitioned into... So you started doing stuff you liked for bands that you knew.

Emek: Yeah, I mean I'd always done that since junior high school. And then I just built up, just through doing, just for fun. I kind of had a portfolio of flyers and, you know, just artwork I had done in general, which could have lent itself to music without me knowing it. I was kind of doing that style and just started showing it to promoters and companies and getting work. And every job was just word of mouth and kind of would lead to another job. It was slow going at first, because I felt like every poster has to, you know, make a statement, so I put all my fine arts

sensibilities and all my ideas into each particular poster. It was all hand done, hand drawn, hand color- separated, hand printed. It was very labor intensive and my output was slow, but I was hoping that my quality at least would eventually speak for itself.

Michael Erlewine: S,o you did your own silk screening?

Emek: In the beginning. In fact I didn't really know anything about silk screening and I didn't know how to do overlays or printing. It was one of the few things that I'd never really studied growing up. My brother and I would make our own t-shirts to wear to school and stuff but it was very...you know one, two, colors -- homemade silkscreen prints on a t-shirt.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: I actually went to a Zap Comic Book show and I saw Moscoso's...

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Emek: Originals. He had his original pen and inks framed on the wall, but next to them he also had the Rubyliths, like because...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: Rubiyith was all hand cut and very intricate.

Michael Erlewine: I know.

Emek: And I said that's: what I want to use, from seeing Moscoso's stuff framed on a wall. I said I kind of figured out how to do better quality silk screens.

Michael Erlewine: So you had all those little swivel knives, to cut Rubylith...

Emek: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Me too, I've done a bunch of that.

Emek: Yeah it is, especially when your just working in red and black and white, and trying to imagine what color goes on top of what, and try to make other colors and blends and overlays.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool.

Emek: Yeah, but Moscoso...

Michael Erlewine: Did you meet him? Emek: Yeah, I've met... I mean now... Michael Erlewine: Everyone probably.

Emek: I've met everybody. But I remember at that time I met R. Crumb, Victor Moscoso, Robert Williams, Wes Wilson. It was great.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well Moscoso is quite a guy. He's very sharp.

Emek: Yes he is.

Rick Griffin's Influence

Michael Erlewine: I did a nice interview with him and he's a character. Okay, so... trying to think where I am at. When you were coming up, what artists, poster artists were you aware of, or who influenced you? I mean who did you think was beautiful?

Emek: Well, I mean, without really knowing it, Rick Griffin. My parent's friends, when I was really young, had all the Grateful Dead album covers, like 12 x 12" size, great artwork, and I would stare at these things for hours and never really played any of the music. I just would look at

the artwork for years, and I remember feeling one day, like...I finally got my own record player and I put on a Grateful Dead record, I think it was Aoxomoxoa. The music to me was not at all what I expected. This is like some mellow hippie's music and I was expecting skulls and I was expecting something totally different.



Rick Griffin's Aoxomoxoa

Michael Erlewine: That would go with like the artwork, like no relation, right?

Emek: I mean, now I can see a relation, but at that time I was expecting... The artwork to me was so fantastic and the music was... and I've heard this stuff before.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: Yeah, I didn't even know what to expect. I didn't think that it would going to be this... slow old-time type music stuff.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well that's Grateful Dead, right?

Emek: Yeah. No, and I have nothing against the Dead, they're cool.

Michael Erlewine: No, I don't either, but it's not my personal favorite music. I like blues and jazz.

Emek: But I just remembered a shock. I first felt when I... after years of staring at these album covers. So yeah, Rick Griffin was a big influence on me as far as poster art. But you know growing up in my dad's studio, my dad has had shows all over the place and I've met all kinds of artists and been influenced by art history since as far back as I can remember. I remember it was very important to my parents that we have that kind of upbringing.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, sounds cool.

Emek: So, there were so many different influences. My dad himself was a major influence of me.

Michael Erlewine: I would bet. I would hope so.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: With Rick Griffin, what particular pieces did you like? You mentioned Aoxomoxoa. Any other particular ones? Of course that's a classic thing, right? That's like the essence of him.

Emek: You know a lot of the surf comics that he did, he would have a main story, but then he would have all kinds of other things in the borders and little small details. To me that was... and also Robert Williams and the whole Zap Comics. There was a main story line, but then there were all kinds of other small detail that corresponded to the main story line or was it's own separate story line. I was never really a huge fan of comic books. I liked just kind of more the paintings, where it's just one panel. You can look at it and get your story out of one panel, as opposed to telling a

whole story. Because I felt like comic books are more like books, and I wanted to create something that could be hung on a wall.

Michael Erlewine: Right, and of artists, more modern artists which ones do you feel a kinship to or do you particularly appreciate or feel effect you?

Emek: Well...

Michael Erlewine: I mean, not... up to the current ones.

Emek: Yeah. Robert Williams, definitely. Mobius, French kind of a comic book artist.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, yeah my kids have that.

Emek: But I love the bold Russian constructivist styles and some of the Bauhaus elements, I love Japanese wood-block-prints. I love German expressionist art, that rough woodcut look, such powerful expression, you know in only a few lines. It's just... there's Bernie Wrightson. I guess a lot of my influences are comic books, even though I never wanted to be a comic book artist, but there are a lot of artists.

Talking about the Posters

Michael Erlewine: I'm just curious. You just seem to have tried many styles you can... I think there's one that kind of looks like a Coop.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Things that stand out for me, because I'm an old-fashioned guy, you know. The Mirror Ball one you did.

Mirror Ball

Emek: Yeah, I did that job in like a day and a half.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I think that's really beautiful and one of my favorites is the Mercury Rev thing... the skeleton.

HUM Mercury Rev

Emek: Oh yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's just an incredible nice piece. I have a daughter who loves your stuff, too. She's actually going to work on the site. And she's a singer/songwriter, about 21. But she thinks your stuff is cool and she loves Jermaine as well... She's introduced me and I haven't collected this stuff heavily, the new stuff, just because I'm 61 years old, right? I played at the Fillmore and played at the Matrix and played at all those places. I am an old hippie.

Emek: Cool.

Michael Erlewine: That was the art that I grew out of...

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: But there must some younger artists that you'd recommend that you think are...

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: They're not just doing a few, but they're going the route you went, which is... their putting their blood and life into it.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Their determined.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: These guys ought to be given a break. And Kozik's new organization I think is a wonderful idea that will help... but what you need is some kind of community and some kind of way of...and what hopefully I can bring to it is you have to catalogue this stuff. These posters have to be documented. Nothing is collectible before it's really been documented. It's been true in the history of collectibles.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: You don't get collector's going after stuff that they don't know the beginning, middle and end of, or at least the beginning and the middle, right?

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: We have to figure out... You have to help me update... Is there anyplace that all of your images are available anymore? Like on a website.

Emek: Well, there's my website.

Michael Erlewine: And how much stuff's on it. I haven't looked at it recently.

Emek: I don't know. I think I've done over a hundred posters and there's probably 80 something on the website.

Michael Erlewine: And what size are the images?

Emek: They vary, but, you know, I can always send you another disc as well.

Michael Erlewine: I think you should because I'm going to show images at 250 pixels, the long side.

Emek: Okay.

Michael Erlewine: Which is not too big anymore, as they get bigger screens, and they start to look like postage stamps again. But to begin with, I need an image big enough that I can go in and get the details of there...you know. I have to be able to read the fine print.

Emek: What I can do is I can just send you master scans and then, from that you can make them smaller.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, yeah. I know how to do that. I'm a programmer; I don't know whether you know that, a systems programmer. So I know how to do all that stuff. I've got about maybe 30,000 posters that we're going to put up on the site.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: Which is quite... going all the way back to the mid 1960s.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: And boxing style too. Also I'm really working on Texas stuff, because I feel the Texas guys have really been given a short-shrift and they deserve some attention. Because I love that Texas art.

Emek: Micael Priest was really good.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, all those guys, like you know who Ken Featherston is?

Emek: No.

Michael Erlewine: He's one of the best of them.

Ken Featherston Poster for the Armadillo

Emek: I know Jim Franklin.

Michael Erlewine: Right. I just interviewed Danny Garrett, who is one of the...

Emek: Oh yeah Garrett was great.

Michael Erlewine: And you know Nels of course.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: All these guys are sending me their stuff. Kerry Awn is sending me 400 pieces, his entire work.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: What I do is photo- document them.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So we have a big vacuum table that just sucks them up and I have a 6 megapixel camera that does a pretty good job. It's just a lot of work.

Emek: Yeah, it is.

Michael Erlewine: But I've done almost all of those. Anyways, I'd love it. If you have large enough images, I'm sure it's fine, you know...

Emek: Yeah, I do, because I mean that it's the same disc I send to magazines, when they want to do articles.

Michael Erlewine: Okay, and that's good enough for them.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Because I just shot all the Fire House stuff. They sent me all their posters, and I'd sent them back of course.

Emek: Wow. Thing about Firehouse and my work, and some of the other guys is to see it in person. It is amazing and when it's shrunk down to a postage stamp, well...

Michael Erlewine: I know.

Emek: ...Can't see the hand done quality of it.

Michael Erlewine: It's the truth, but, what would you suggest? I mean...

Emek: There's nothing else. What your doing is a good thing, so there's no other way to present it.

Michael Erlewine: Anyway, enough of me talking, let's go back to you talking. I apologize for that.

Emek: No, that's all right. I want to know about you too.

Michael Erlewine: I want to fill you in. I just want you to know what I'm doing. Okay, so what about collaborative work? Have you ever worked with other artists to produce posters?

Emek: I work with my brother. My brother's really a good artist. He does all kind of work, I mean.

Michael Erlewine: What's an example of one you might have worked with him on that I might know or possibly have in the database?

Emek: We did the Henry Rollins spoken word, the very first one, where it's Henry Rollins with his arms crossed.

Michael Erlewine: I don't know if I have it.

Emek: And he's spitting lyrics out of his ears. Henry Rollings, Spoken Word Michael Erlewine: What year was it? Emek: 1998.

Michael Erlewine: Although, for you, for some reason, I have very few years so we need to clear that up.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Hopefully we can just do that, I find a Beastie Boys from 1998, a wonderful one.

Emek: Thanks.

Michael Erlewine: With the Madonna.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's very cool.

Emek: That's a funny story behind that poster too.

Michael Erlewine: What is it?

Emek: The Beastie Boys were doing these 'Free Tibet' festivals, fundraisers.

Michael Erlewine: Oh well yeah, I remember them.

Emek: Yeah, and they are also very much into the Tibetan cause.

Michael Erlewine: Well, so am I. Do you know that?

Emek: I didn't, but that....

Michael Erlewine: I've been to Tibet and so forth, for sure I'm totally...

Emek: Well, I've been to Dharamsala and I've been to Nepal and...

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Emek: Yeah. And my mom. My mom has been to Tibet.

Michael Erlewine: So have you met the Dalai Lama?

Emek: We were going to meet him and he was sick.

Michael Erlewine: I belong to another group that's like the Dalai Lama. Our leader is called the Karmapa, and I've been doing it for 25 years. I'm deep into it, so...

Emek: So is my mom. She's good friends with Pema Chodron.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah? Well, Pema Chodron is more in my lineage. She comes from Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, whom I met in 1974.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: And, anyways, we have a whole center that I've run for years, with a big shrine room and you know

what a stupa is? I am sure you do if you have been to Nepal.

Emek: Of course.

Michael Erlewine: We built a good- sized one in our back yard.

Emek: My mom was (I think) in Colorado and Sting, the musician. He has like a private helicopter drop him in the middle of one of their... I guess it's like some monastery. And so Sting landed on this helicopter and donated a bunch of money and wrote a song.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really.

Emek: To help raise a stupa.

Michael Erlewine: Probably yeah, the Rocky Mountain...

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, that's probably the Great Stupa, a big stupa.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: My group built one in Crestone, Colorado, which is maybe 40- feet high. It is at about 7,000 feet elevation or something. Anyway, we're getting side-tracked here, but yeah that's cool.

Emek: Yeah, no I think it's all very cool. Well, my original idea for the Beastie Boys was to take some kind of Tibetan Deity and do a very Tantric modern.

Michael Erlewine: Like a thanka?

Emek: Yeah, but like a psychedelic, a little bit more of a psychedelic rock and roll version of that.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: Then they objected to that. They said "oh that's making of religion, that's not cool."

Michael Erlewine: Who objected?

Emek: The Beastie Boys. I don't remember exactly who...

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, no, okay, I'm with you. I didn't know... thought maybe the Buddhists might object.

Emek: Well, I think that was one of their concerns.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Emek: I just heard from them that is was making fun of Buddhism. So then I just changed it to Judeo-Christian motif and ...

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: they go "Oh, that's fine."

Michael Erlewine: Everyone makes fun of that [laughs], right?

Emek: Yeah, exactly. So you can make fun of that, that's no problem.

Michael Erlewine: Not minorities though, right? Can't make fun of minorities, right?

Emek: Well, I wasn't really making fun of...

Michael Erlewine: No, I know. That's a joke.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I think you have a wonderful ability with skeletons, like I think your Everclear thing is like incredible. Like I've never seen this poster in person, but I would like to see the real thing sometime, because I think that's a...Everclear

Emek: That one to me was a little bit of a disappointment, because it was an early piece and I work in black and white, and I'm trying to envision how it's going to look in color. But because of the deadlines and because your cutting Rubylith and your... I'm thinking to myself mentally, like this layer of Rubilith I want to come out yellow, and this layer I want to come out red, but when it all comes together, you don't really see how it's going to look until it's finished.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I'm only seeing a postage stamp, but to me it looks very cool. You also did a Balzac thing? Balzac

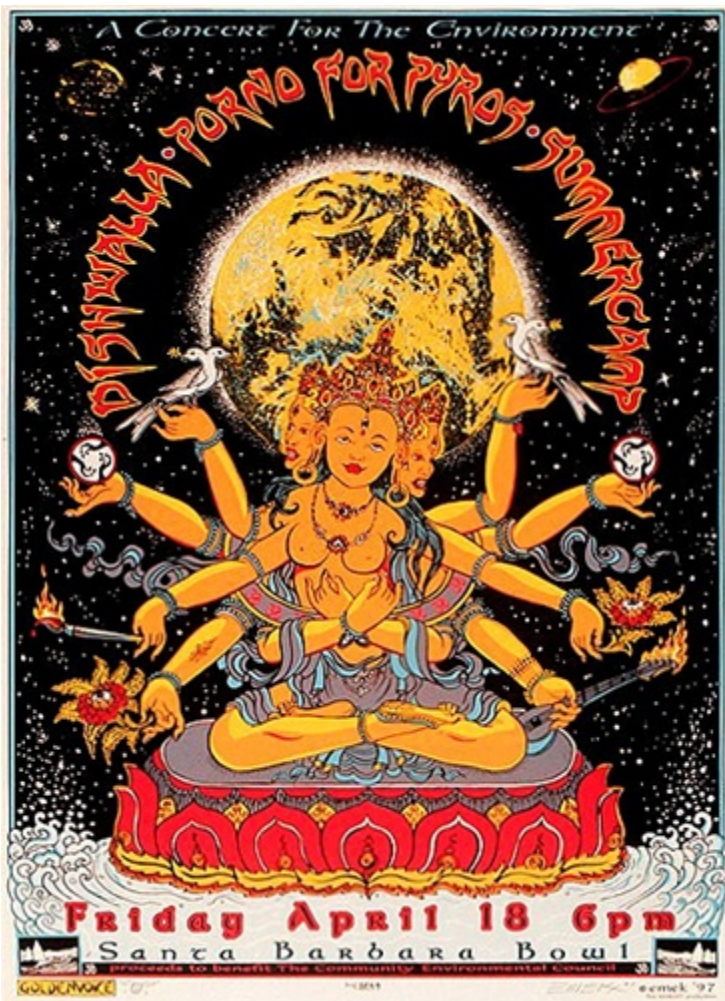
Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's very cool.

Emek: Thank you. That again: I was working with a band and they're very like punk rock, so they wanted something very punk-rock. So, within the confines of what they wanted, I was trying to make it something that is a little bit different. There are certain limitations, because your working silk screen, so your limited to the amount of colors.

Everything you do almost has a certain flat or comic book feel to it, just because of the nature of silk screening. I'm always trying to, within the confines of what the band wants, to try to bring a sense of my own concept.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, no you did, Porno for Pyros I mean that's a Tibetan type, or Tantric type deity of some type.



Porno for Pyros

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'm not sure what your model...look likes a Chenrezik (Avalokiteshvara) or something. But, you know, many armed...

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: There's an 11-armed Chenresik that is a famous one and a four armed one, and a thousand armed one. I don't know. How many have you got? One, two, three, four...

Emek: I got a lot [laughs], I don't know.

Michael Erlewine: Eight, nine, ten.

Emek: See, my mom is always criticizing me, ike that's not right.

Michael Erlewine: Well, she's correct, it isn't right, but...

Emek: But its just art.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, no I hear you. That's very cool. Anyway, you did one for The Weapon of Choice with... Primus, Weapon of Choice

Emek: Primus.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, Primus. Now that's not typical of you for me, for my understanding of you.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: But there's the skeleton again too, right?

Emek: Yeah, you know it's basically for me. I mean, and this is how it's been since early childhood, it's always about the concept first. So I get an idea in my head and then I figure, or I try to play with how am I going to present this idea. What's the best way to get across the concept?

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Emek: So sometimes its more of a clip- art or manipulated Xerox art and other times its hand-drawn. It's just to me, the important thing is to start with the idea and then, by the time I'm finished, it might not necessarily be what I started with.

Michael Erlewine: I see. I hear you.

Emek: But that's my motivation and for that image. It's like it's the Coppertone girl.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: But on the one hand, it's kind of a sexist image.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: So this is my way of saying she finally gets her revenge on the dog. So the dogs pulling down her shorts, but she's got her little laser gun and she's blasting him and electrocuting him.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: So for that image, I didn't want to hand draw it as much as I wanted to give it kind of the feel of like an old postcard.

Michael Erlewine: Oh you did, but then you put a skeleton in there, which is like shocking kind of.

Emek: Yeah, because that's what it is. It's shocking. You see the cute little girl and then, but you see she's finally getting her revenge.

Michael Erlewine: So, in some ways you have an affinity with Griffin, in the sense of religion, which was very important to him. Because everyone I've talked to says he converted, re- converted, to Christianity when he was older, but he was still deep into trying to puzzle out the universe. Like the Prodigy thing you did, I think is very cool. The one with...

Emek: Yeah the samurai's and...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, they're getting the multiple arms, right?

Emek: Yeah, well... that's kind of like Prodigy... My original concept, because I always come up with a concept really fast, just...

Michael Erlewine: First thought best thought is what Trungpa, Rinpoche used to say.

Emek: Yeah, I don't know if that always applies to me, but my first thought was Prodigy's a very... at the time they were one of the largest techno bands, and I was just thinking what represents technology and I thought you know: Japanese.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: So then I wanted to do something that was very old and traditional, but also very modern, so it's a samurai and he's commanding all the elements. He's got fire and water...

Michael Erlewine: I know, it's beautiful.

Emek: ...Music and he's got.

Michael Erlewine: Well the Stone Temple Pilots is another skeleton. There you have another.

Emek: Yeah, the skeleton kind of like showing the dark side of a corporate logo or just...

Michael Erlewine: That Stone Temple Pilot's thing is very cool and the wings especially, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Very, very neat. I think that's kind of like a theme in your... at least for me just a look.

Emek: Oh yeah, in my other art too I was always interested from an early age in the structure of things, what's beneath the surface. A skeleton always amazed me as a kid to think that that's inside of every person, that behind the skin it's like blood and guts and a skeletal structure.

Michael Erlewine: Right, I know.

Emek: But it was never to me about the gore, it's not like...

Michael Erlewine: No, no, no and I understand, right?

Emek: It's just about the beauty, in the way that Stanley Mouse and Rick Griffin would do skeletons and the Grateful Dead.

Michael Erlewine: Amen, that was...

Emek: There's beauty in it. Michael Erlewine: It's LSD right? Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Your probably too young for that, but back in those days that were... and then the Verve poster that you did?

Emek: Which? I've done two.

Michael Erlewine: The Japanese one. Verve

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's just beautiful.

Emek: Well, again it was a struggle for me, because I have this idea, the name of the album was Urban Hymns.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: The song was Bittersweet Symphony's, so I wanted to do something that to me was urban and bittersweet.

Michael Erlewine: So you have those smoke chimneys in the background and then you have this classic Kabuki-like, whatever it is, I don't know.

Emek: Yeah, it's supposed to be like some kind of a robot and what she's doing, she's touching some greenery.

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Emek: And the greenery is turning he back into a human, like everything that she's touched is becoming flesh, and she's in shock, because she's this cold robot.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, so I didn't see all that.

Emek: It's very hard to see, but that was my original concept, and then it was really hard to render it in only a couple of days because of the deadline, so...

Michael Erlewine: Cool and the smokestacks are just really something back there, I mean to bring that whole other element, you know, of whatever.

Emek: Yeah. The modern world.

Michael Erlewine: Modern world, pollution...

Emek: Pollution.

Michael Erlewine: Like the film "Koyaanisqatsi," which I imagine you've seen.

Emek: Oh yeah, I love that film.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, and "Pawaqqatsi," the sequel to that film. You've seen that too? Yeah, those are very cool.

Emek: I've seen Anima Mundi and then there's the new one that just came out last month or, but I haven't seen that one.

Michael Erlewine: It's in theaters or something?

Emek: It's was in limited theaters, and then it'll be the video soon.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I'd like to see it. I saw Phillip Glass perform "Pawaqqatsi" live... It was great?

Emek: With Phil Glass? Michael Erlewine: Yeah. Emek: Wow. Cool.

Michael Erlewine: It was cool. He hangs out in Ann Arbor in a lot, which is where I grew out. There's a Tibetan center that he's connected too. Okay, well cool. I'm trying to think of some of these stories we'll put in, and we'll show a little image so people can follow it, because I think that's one of the best ways is to look at art right?

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: And to talk to the guys who did it.

Emek: Yeah.

API: The American Poster Institute

Michael Erlewine: Find out about it. Let's talk just about this thing that Kozik and Nels are doing. Are you connected to that at all? This new group, the API, American Poster Institute or whatever it is?

Emek: A little bit because of, through Jermaine.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, so your friends with Jermaine. He's very nice.

Emek: He's not very nice?

Emek: No, he's very cool.

Michael Erlewine: And he's very good at emulating Kozik in the sense of trying to be out front and a businessman and selling himself. I think that's a good element. More people need to learn how to do it.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'd think they'd make more money that way.

Emek: Yeah, that's true. Art and commerce.

Michael Erlewine: Yep.

Emek: You have to do it.

Michael Erlewine: This whole artist group I think is a probably good idea.

Emek: Well, we're having a meeting. I mean I they already had a lot of meetings, but I'm going to be participating in a meeting with them in a couple of weeks.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Emek: So I'm going to find out more about it then, because I'm just here in LA and I'm just swamped in my work.

Michael Erlewine: So you're busy? You have a lot of work?

Post Neo-Explosionists

Emek: Yeah, yeah, actually Jermaine Rogers and I and another friend of ours, Justin Hampton.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, I know Hampton's work.

Emek: We kind of formed our own design team.

Michael Erlewine: I didn't know that.

Emek: And we're called the post-neo- explosionists.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: We've just came up with a name tongue-in-cheek because people try to label things, so we labeled ourselves before anyone else could.

Michael Erlewine: That's cool.

Emek: So we just got hired by a band that's pretty big right now as far as like new bands go.

Michael Erlewine: What's the name of it?

Emek: Queens of the Stone Age.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, I know them.

Emek: They're going to be headlining Lollapalooza This summer and their getting a lot of good press and major...

Michael Erlewine: Well, they've been coming up, yeah, for sure.

Emek: So we got hired by them to design their entire US tour.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Emek: Which means a different poster for every stop of their tour.

Michael Erlewine: How many? Oh, wow, how many stops?

Emek: I think it's over 30.

Michael Erlewine: Whoa.

Emek: So we've just been super, super busy doing all these different posters for them.

Michael Erlewine: What will you get sets of all of them.

Emek: There will be sets available.

Michael Erlewine: I might be interested in one.

Emek: Yeah. I think Jermaine will be getting some sets, I'll be getting some sets and Justin will be getting some sets.

Michael Erlewine: You might want to put me in touch with Justin, if he's interested. I should probably look into cataloguing his work.

Emek: Oh yeah, he's done some classic pieces as far as the modern, the whole 90's posters go. He's done some very good ones.

Michael Erlewine: Oh absolutely. Would he be up for an interview do you think?

Emek: I'm sure he would be. I think he just gave two different interviews last week.

Michael Erlewine: Cool.

Emek: So I think, I can't imagine an artist saying no.

Gigposters.com

Michael Erlewine: I think that the time is now. I mean places like Gigposters.com, the fact that Grushkin is going to do another book. All this points to, hopefully, an increase in interest in posters for everyone. And we all cooperate and I interviewed the guy who runs gigposters, his name is Clay.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And he's really nice. Oh so I'm going to do an article on him and try to get as much traffic over to him as we can do. Because, we're all in the same boat. Hopefully I can provide a catalogue for folks who want to go and look at every Emek, right? They want to go see your development and not just the current things, but look at the history of what you did. I think that's useful.

Emek: Yeah.

Flatstock

Michael Erlewine: Are you going to Flatstock?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And is he going to that? All you guys. God, I don't think I can make it.

Emek: We're all going to be together.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I think that's cool. I'd like to go, but I think I'm trying to get this site up and I think it's going to just take all my time just now to do it and if I'm there, I'm not really an artist, but I could go and meet people that would be nice.

Emek: Yeah, I think that Grushkin makes the rounds.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah.

Emek: A lot of people go that are just into....

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, he's got a new book coming. I'm supposed to do an interview with him this afternoon.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I'm just an archivist. I'm trying to think of what other questions I have. I think I have enough for a good beginning. I want to try to write a little something about you and your work and then have sections of this interview with little images and stuff so people can read about. Read and then look at what you've done.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: For each artist, I'm going to pick out a main image. if you have any special poster. you can think about which one you might like. But there will be one large one. Not large, I mean 250 the long side, and then there will be five small ones that they can click through.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: And show users something instantly, so they can find what they like and then they can go deeper.

Emek: Yeah, I mean I'll have to think about it, because all our posters look really nice in person...but when they're shrunk down...

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: ...they don't have the same amount of pop.

Michael Erlewine: Well ,I'm willing to also show some larger if you wanted, you pick the ones.

Emek: Well, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So you could send me a new ROM with images.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's really important and I will go through and put them all in again. I have most of them in, but I see a lot of information is missing, so I never finished it or something.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Do you have any, are there any things you want to tell me that?

Emek: Well, you had asked me earlier if I had ever done any collaborations and I had mentioned I have worked with my brother.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: But now, I've started this design team with Justin and Jermaine. So we're sort of working together. We're all

exchanging ideas, but we haven't actually shared one piece of artwork that all three of us have...

Michael Erlewine: Is that what it will be? Is it a consortium or is it like you'll actually work together on a piece?

Emek: Well, it's more of a consortium, only because of the deadline.

Michael Erlewine: Okay.

Emek: We definitely want to work together on a piece. But as soon as we got this job from Queens of the Stone Age, we all just, three of us, broke up the dates as for who's doing which venues.

Michael Erlewine: I think that's great.

Emek: And then we've just gotten to work and we've just been so busy.

Michael Erlewine: You must be working like a crazy person.

Emek: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Because that's a lot.

Emek: That's in addition to doing illustrations for a bunch of different magazines and CD covers, and the normal work that comes in as well.

Michael Erlewine: That's great. I'm glad you have the work.

Emek: Yeah. But we defiantly do want to do a collaborative piece. We actually had a big show in Seattle, the three of us, an art exhibition. And for that we collaborated on a poster and we printed it as a 40 x 60 silk screen.

Michael Erlewine: No kidding.

Emek: Which was very cool.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, send me an image.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And also a list of any shows that you've been in. One of the things that I'm interested in documenting is art shows, because I think that's a good sign of people's interest. So if you have a list of the shows that you've had stuff in, or poster images from those shows, you know the main ones, that would be cool. That's something that I'm interested in: art shows.

Emek: Yeah, well I've done like 30 shows.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really?

Emek: But a lot of them are group shows, you know.

Michael Erlewine: Oh that's okay. Group shows are fine. Do you have a handy list of them or did you never do that?

Emek: I kind of just made a piece of paper that I wrote. As I have a show, I just write them on a piece of paper, but I have to organize it a little better.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, well you could organize it or Xerox it and send it along or something. I'll organize it, then you'll have it. It will be in one place finally, where people could look at it, because I think that's an important index of... to see how people are doing. Anything else that you can think of and we can do this again sometime? I think I needed to adjust what I've got and I'm sure I'll have some questions. I'll realize I didn't ask you this or that.

Emek: I don't know...a lot of the other things I would add are just salesman techniques, like what's my passion and what drives and I don't know if that's...

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, what is your passion? No, I'm totally interested in that.

Emek: I've been always drawn to art, but the fact that my dad was an artist when we were growing up, my parents made a consensus to throw the TV out of the house, and they said no television, but we'll buy you any book you want. We'll read to you and get you any art-supplies you want, anything you want to learn. We'll teach you the etching press; we'll teach to paint with oils.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Emek: We'll work with fiberglass, Plexiglas, whatever you guys want to learn. It was always very famil-oriented.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, this is cool.

Emek: I didn't know that it was different than the...

Michael Erlewine: Regular people.

Emek: Yeah, we were poor, but we were not creatively poor and we didn't even realize we were poor, because we felt like we had so much.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's right.

Emek: But then there were times when my dad didn't sell any art and things were tough. I mean my parents did their best to keep it from us, but I do remember going through some rough spots. Growing up, I always wanted to figure out a way where I could do my art, because I realized that it was my passion. But, figure out a way to make money.

Michael Erlewine: Where did you grow up?

Emek: Just in Los Angeles.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, in LA. Your parents still living?

Emek: Yeah, yeah. They are both living in LA. They are not together, but they see each other all the time. They might as well be together. It's very strange.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: Because one of the things that attracted them to each other was such similar values and interests, so their always doing things together.

Michael Erlewine: And are you single or married?

Emek: I'm actually getting married this summer, so I'm...

Michael Erlewine: Oh cool.

Emek: I'm single for... Well, I'm not really single now.

Michael Erlewine: Well, congratulations.

Emek: Thank you.

Michael Erlewine: I've been married what, 32 years.

Emek: Yeah, wow.

Michael Erlewine: That's a long time. I've got four kids.

Emek: My fiancé, she's a sculptor.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, cool.

Emek: My brother's girlfriend, she a sculptor and painter.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of philosophy are you interested in? What kind of spiritual things? Obviously you have some spiritual element, because you can see it in your art, just of all the different things you, you know, the skeletons and stuff like that. It's a sign of some kind of, something like that. Is there any particular direction you're going?

Emek: Umm...I would say that a lot of different religions interest me, but it's not like I adhere to any particular religion myself. It's just the mechanics of religion and what they set out to do and how different people respond and react to them. More like what are the universal tenets and truths that all religions preach and yet how they've become so...

Michael Erlewine: Well-organized religion is tough, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: It's hard to organize something like that.

Emek: Yeah. You know it's the opiate of the masses.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, that's what they say.

Emek: And modern religion is television and there's a certain time of the day when it's all soap operas and there's another time of the day when it's all people suing each other on TV.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: And talk shows and it's like, if you just watch TV and the whole dynamics of what's being advertised and what's being shown. And at night it's just all teenagers dating each other and getting upset, it's just the whole consumer culture.

Michael Erlewine: Well, it's kind of like a modern form of meditation believe it or not, that people sit still for...

Emek: It's kind of like the Hindu version, where it's not about transcendence, it's just about a blessing out. You get so numbed, that it's the absence of meditation...

Michael Erlewine: That's right.

Emek: It's meditating on instant gratification, it's umm...

Michael Erlewine: Relaxation therapy.

Emek: Yeah. But it's also based on fear, you know. It's like: be afraid and the only thing that will make you to get over your fears is to go out and shop and consume.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] That's true.

Emek: So it's the two-fold.

Michael Erlewine: Well I live in a little tiny town. There's not many distractions here, I'll tell you that. We have a Wal-Mart, that's about it.

Emek: That's scary because you can just see the people.

Michael Erlewine: The what?

Emek: At least in L.A., when I go to a Wal-Mart, because my friend and I we go there just to do our little cultural anthropology analysis.

Michael Erlewine: Sure.

Emek: The lowest common denominator, the status quo, very interesting.

Michael Erlewine: Well, you'll find it everywhere, right? I mean you've been to...

Emek: Oh yeah, and that's the whole other thing, it's like...

Michael Erlewine: You've been to Katmandu, right?

Emek: Every little town looks like every other little town, because they have their McDonalds and their Wal-Mart.

Michael Erlewine: You say, you went to Katmandu, right?

Emek: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: Isn't that a trip?

Emek: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs].

Emek: I mean I see everyone on bicycles and their wearing their little air filters.

Michael Erlewine: They have to.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, the garbage is just in the streets.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: They don't [laughs] have garbage collection.

Emek: And big trucks and...

Michael Erlewine: I know it.

Emek: Yeah, but I've been all over India.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, India is different. I mean Tibet is very different; it's very clean.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: Because it's high up and nothing rots, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Everything is well preserved; it's very beautiful.

Emek: No, I mean Katmandu is beautiful too.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, totally. Totally too.

Emek: I wish I could go back.

Michael Erlewine: Well you can, but it is dangerous right now.

Emek: Yeah, well, that's what I mean these emergencies...

Michael Erlewine: Well, Tibet is really nice. I went on a pilgrimage there and went to all the shrines, all the temples, not all I mean, all the ones from my lineage that I could get to.

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And climbed up to the caves and all that kind of stuff.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: Just about died. They had to carry me out at one point., I was too high and I couldn't breath.

Emek: Yeah. I mean, I saw a lot of altitude sickness when I was there. When we were like, going on treks and stuff near the Everest region in Nepal.

Michael Erlewine: Exactly. So you've been up in the mountains, then?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's very neat.

Emek: You have to acclimate, but a lot of tourists they come and they land right at the higher airport, and as soon as they get off the plane they think...

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, I know. I took my whole family there, which was a trip, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I home schooled my kids and we had home birth, and I'm an old hippy, right?

Emek: Cool.

Michael Erlewine: So we were all into alternative communities ever since... Anyway, it was fun to take the whole family there and try to keep them alive and get through all that.

Emek: Yeah, but at the same time because it's just such a different world, one of the things I thought was amazing, was when we would take a taxi or a rickshaw or whatever we would take.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: Sometimes we didn't have... we would always negotiate the price first.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: But, we sometimes they didn't have change and then the driver would speed away, and but then he would come back five minutes later with our change. Like he could have just left us there stranded, and say, "Ah stupid American."

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Emek: But, so many times they would leave and then come back. Or you'd rent an all day taxi and you'd say pick me up in an hour, and theoretically if we wanted to...

Michael Erlewine: I hear you.

Emek: We could use the guy for ten hours and then disappear and not pay him.

Michael Erlewine: Oh no, it's a different world.

Emek: There's a certain level of trust that in America people would just take advantage of it, and there it's just part of the cultural institution.

Michael Erlewine: Oh I agree. I can still remember in India the funniest thing is that you'd be paying somebody a bribe, right?

Emek: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Baksheesh

Emek: [laughs] Baksheesh.

Michael Erlewine: While your doing that, your slipping him the money under the table and your talking about the loftiest philosophy at the same time.

Emek: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: It's just incredibly...

Emek: My brother was really good at that.

Michael Erlewine: [laughs] That's funny. Well, I've also had a guest house here for years, where I've had swami's and Sanskrit scholars and Buddhist scholars, so you know eight people at a time, so I've just had an enormous amount of... We ran a Tibetan... translation center for a long time. I have learned to read Tibetan script, but I'm not a good translator or anything. I have to use a dictionary.

Emek: Wow.

Michael Erlewine: I'm very into Eastern philosophy, right? Or, religion, basically, but not organized, you know, just the psychology basically.

Emek: Sure.

Michael Erlewine: From acid, that's where I came out of acid trips and trying to figure out well: what is that? And then, Buddhism seemed to know what it was.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Anyways, I'm wandering. Okay, I think we've got a start. I will send you my address in case you don't have it.

Emek: Yeah, you can e-mail it to me.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, I'll just e-mail it to you and I'll look forward to getting those images and I'll process them right away. We'll bring your section right up to date. Which I really always meant to do before, because you were one of the few people that really responded well at the beginning, right?

Emek: Cool.

Michael Erlewine: You always gung- ho right? Which I think is cool, because that's the way I am. Any other questions for me?

Emek: You know I probably will have some, but I just.

Michael Erlewine: If you want me to talk about that I can, I can write a little thing about that.

Emek: Yeah, I mean I think all three of us are very proud of it.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: Because we all feel like we're at a certain point in our careers. You know, that's the thing with a lot of the... I don't know what you want to call them, subcultures or movements or whatever, where there's a lot of people doing what we're doing, but there's so much competition to get the work and everyone's feeling like desperate, or I need to get this job, so there's always some backstabbing and....

Michael Erlewine: Is there? See I'm totally not connected to that. How is the community of... I mean are there lots of young artists now?

Emek: Yeah, you know it just seems like...

Michael Erlewine: But you're not a young one. I mean you've been there for quite awhile.

Emek: Yeah, I've been doing it for a while, I still feel it's young and everything and I'm considered young to some people.

Michael Erlewine: Oh yeah, but, not in the poster community. So you know, the people I talk to, you've arrived, right?

Emek: Yeah, I mean, that's kind of like Justin and Jermaine and I decided to start this little thing. It's because we all three of us feel like we've kind of been working our butts off for a long time, and this is a way for us to get a little bit more recognition, kind of like to announce our arrival, to create, this thing.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah.

Emek: Because, on the one hand, a lot more young people are familiar with rock posters. It's something that's kind of infiltrated youth culture in a sense. So every small town, anytime some local band is playing at a bar, some local artist is making a flyer for it.

Michael Erlewine: Well, we hope so.

Emek: I think that's a great thing. Some people feel that because they've done a few flyers and sometimes there are like exact duplicates or rip-offs of work that has been previously done. There's not as much consideration for the artistic integrity; it's more about just getting out some quantity.

Michael Erlewine: Well, some people just don't know how.

Emek: Yeah. But in their minds they consider themselves to be on par with...

Michael Erlewine: You realize that the pyramid of posters we've only seen is only the tip of the pyramid, because the gigs happened everywhere in all major cities, but you realize that the posters from those smaller or other cities have never been documented.

Emek: Right.

Michael Erlewine: And there must be just hundreds of thousands of them.

Emek: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: There have to be.

Emek: Yeah. But you know, there is also that line, like what is commercially made just so that the venue can make money and what has artistic value?

Michael Erlewine: Of course, boxing style or whatever. No, no, but there are the people that love and collect them.