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## The Intimacy of Fine Art

### Graphic artist finds artistic inspiration in Africa

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By Talia Page

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AN ARTIST'S SHELL: Graphic designer Egon Zippel finds his artistic roots in this sketch of a shell on a beach in The Gambia, Africa. (Courtesy Egon Zippel)

Egon Zippel champions the "hand of the artist" with a postmodern return to the direct experience in his ballpoint sketches. In sharp contrast to his training and practice as a professional graphic artist, his drawings abandon all reference to carefully considered digitized designs and instead offer a sense of intimacy and insight into the dynamic creative spirit.

Shifting between the commercial and fine art worlds requires Zippel to focus intensely on physically communicating his raw expressive energy and intellect through mind-eye-hand coordination. His artistic vocabulary, however, retains a connection between his two working paradigms. Zippel calls his ballpoint sketches "Polaroids" because they are made on the spot. The difference, of course, is that Zippel himself acts as the camera, the filter, and the viewfinder.

Not surprisingly, Zippel asserts, "It's a challenge to create something that defies your education and training. I have been doing hand-made Polaroids for twenty years now, and I am more than ever intrigued by the simplicity and elegance of it."

As someone who is accustomed to time-consuming constructions using complex technologies, the human mechanics, and basic tools involved in creating an artistic "final product" is of particular interest to him. "Cameras can be manipulated, so of course they are subjective, but I find that there is greater flexibility with pen and paper. I can give immediate life to abstract ideas, thoughts, associations, and words as soon as they come to me. It is always an honest portrayal—nothing can be covered or distorted with expensive equipment, or betrayed by technological glitches and shortcomings."

In a world of affluent technical possibilities, Zippel relishes the challenges of a return to the simplicity that is implied by ballpoint pens and index cards.

In early May, the artist opens his Polaroid-filled studio to fellow travelers and cohorts. Selecting from twenty years' worth of work, he has chosen to show those created in Ethiopia and Gambia, because these third-world countries are kindred spirits to the notion that complicated, personal experiences can be faithfully shared with the most rudimentary of tools.

Zippel explains, "The Polaroids contain my artistic universe; they are the graphic essence of my daily experience. They are both a point of departure, an art diary that carries in itself the nuclei for all my other work, as well as finished works which stand on their own."

Combining the universal and the personal, Zippel's sketches recall the intuitive nature of Jackson Pollock, the small-scale poetics of Paul Klee, and the radical conceptualism of John Baldessari, replete with a contemporary global twist.

Writer and art enthusiast Talia Page has written for several New York publications.

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