

**Tell us a little bit about your artistic background: what inspires you, when did you realise you wanted to pursue art as a career?**

I was that kid who spent much of their free time huddled over the desk in their room, doodling, drawing, making. I wasn't a pasty outcast shut-in; I had friends, a dirt bike, plenty of cracked roads to navigate, wooded areas to conquer and streams to splash and fish, in any of the small Iowa towns where I grew up. But I've always been interested in making things; and when given the choice between spending the day outside or making stuff inside, I often chose the latter. Choices lead to habits lead to obsessions... which brings us neatly to present tense.

What inspires me: music (unapologetic snob in this category: Radiohead, Portishead, Grizzly Bear); art (Dave McKean, Henrik Drescher, Ted McKeever); movies (David Fincher, Wes Anderson, Darren Aronofsky); books (Tom Piccirilli, Seb Doubinsky, Michael Marshall Smith); and random observations of the broken, jumbled – yet oddly magical – world around us, via the numerous portals available.

And I realized I wanted to pursue art as a career both 27 years ago and yesterday. My art career hasn't technically arrived, but then it feels like it's always been right there, just below the surface, bubbling and churning. And I wouldn't be able to bring any of my bumpy nonsense to life without the support and patience of my pretty wife and clever daughter. Also: Thank you Mrs. Shipman!

**A lot of your work is mixed-media, and you use a lot of found objects: what's the reasoning behind this - and what's the most surprising thing you've found & been able to incorporate so far?**

What a great question! Why mixed media? I've always had a fascination with objects (usually old and broken), found paper (usually faded and stained) and junk (usually rusted and bent). I'm also an avid collector of STUFF; drawers and containers FULL of it. The hunt is certainly an important part of the process, and I'm a process junky. My wife thinks I'm crazy when I pick up abandoned bits of scratched plastic and rusted metal from the ground. And the people at the antique store? Pretty sure they think I'm a batshit loon. Recent purchase for Andy Duncan's *The Pottawatomie Giant and Other Stories* (PS Publishing, February 2012): chicken squeak toy, wee metal alien, sepia photo of a boy surrounded by chickens, rusty railroad spike, toy train set, salt shaker and printer's drawer. Will that be, um, all sir? Yep! Wrap it and bag it!

And my most surprising – nay PERFECT – find? Shuffling and rummaging through a local thrift shop, I stumbled upon an old desk calculator; a hulking beige dinosaur with an endless paper tongue. One of the keys – dull grey and clunky – read FEED... perfect for a piece that eventually became a two-headed mixed media monster called Robot Zombie. That FEED button fit quite nicely near the stomach area of our brain-hungry metal friends, Moan and Groan. Yes, I named them both.

**You've produced a number of book covers - including work for PS Publishing - and you recently illustrated Helen Marshall's "Skeleton Leaves", which has just appeared on the preliminary ballot for the Stoker Awards. Talk us through the process of creating a cover or an illustration. What are the specific challenges involved in this kind of piece?**

Where the artist discusses the importance of his swell pals Luck and Happy Accident...

Iowa boy meets Canadian girl at WHC 2011 in Austin. What a wonderfully random "love" story! Who'd've THUNK that chance meeting would have led to the e-collaboration that became *Skeleton Leaves*? And that *Skeleton Leaves* – the little poetry book that could – would land on the Bram Stoker preliminary ballot? My swell pals Luck and Happy Accident, that's who! And do you think I show them the door when it's time to start making art? Hell no! They're with me in my cluttered office until the bitter end.

But seriously, I'm never 100% certain where any piece – personal or professional – is going to push/pull/drag me. Never 60% certain, who am I kidding? With *Skeleton Leaves* I read it (and it's brilliant by the way!), took a handful of visual notes (I rarely sketch), then started the Gathering of Stuff phase of my process. Then blurs and streaks of blades and paper and junk and various glues and tapes. Flashes of pens and crayons, pencils and paints. And let us not forget that fun-filled stage that I like to call Drying Time! I'm SO impatient with my materials! DRY DAMMIT DRY! And once I've done all I can do with my hands, and my work table is sufficiently destroyed, I grab my digital camera, head outside and SNAP SNAPPITY SNAP. Then into Photoshop and walk the plank and Bob's your uncle. WOW was THAT boring!

Honestly the only challenging bit I can detect in all of this rubble is my grinning nemesis Time. Luck and Happy Accident are the best friends a guy could ever want. Time... he's an asshole. Always barging through my office door, tap-tap-tapping me on my aching shoulder... are you done yet, are you done yet, ARE YOU DONE YET? So there's that.

What was the question again?

Also: Too many congrats and thanks to count to Helen Marshall, my cheeky Canadian con chum!

**Mixed-media obviously creates strong, physical artworks, but an increasing number of artists (such as Vincent Chong, who provided our Winter 2011/12 cover) are choosing to work almost exclusively in digital media. Do you think this requires a different mindset or attitude as an artist, and what impact do you feel a particular medium has on the resulting piece?**

What a tough yet marvelous question. Vinny and I had an engaging and rad chat about this very question... so I'm told. Really wish I could remember more of that chat, but copious amounts of alcohol and nicotine were ingested, and sleep just wasn't in the con cards. I'll try to keep this answer as short and diplomatic as possible.

While I certainly pitch my tent (giggle!) in the mixed media camp, and Vinny his in the digital, I think it narrows down nicely to Preference and Aptitude. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't make covers like Vinny makes covers. We're just very different monkeys, banging on hollow logs with very different hands, poking things with very different sticks.

Loose and messy lights me up. Every bit of exposed paper, every raised piece of metal, every scratched and sanded area of acrylic paint... flips my switch, makes me grin and hum. There's a glow that my process leaves behind. So many ghosts: half of them hiding in the cracks and crevices, half of them hiding in plain sight. So much to SEE. So much to TOUCH with your eyes. Which is NOT to say Vinny's covers are cold. His is simply a different warmth. A glow born of a different process. HIS ghosts. HIS magic. MY ghosts. MY magic.

Setting all of that aside – monkeys and ghosts and cracks and sticks – the art chooses the artist as much as the artist chooses the art. Style is such a loaded word. I don't enjoy corners and I loathe cages. Mixed media artist. Digital artist. Bizarro abstract hobo artist. There's room for all of us on the many covers of the many books by the many authors released by the many presses, big and small.

The art that chose me tends to befuddle most publishers. Not surprised. Not worried. I've had a BLAST making covers for amazing books by amazing authors released by amazing presses; and I make every cover like it's my last, because you just never know. Never fret or fear though, I'll keep making stuff whether it lands on book covers or ends up collecting dust in the closet in my office.

Many thanks to Luck and Happy Accident; to Pete and Nicky; to Seb and Scott; to Helen and Vinny and Lou! And Time... you can piss right off!

Chris Roberts, Dead Clown Art  
<http://deadclownart.com/>  
[deadclownart@yahoo.com](mailto:deadclownart@yahoo.com)