

DAVID ELLIS + ART BASEL CHRIS YORMICK BOOGIE CRAOLA GREG LAMARCHE

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# JUXTAPOZ

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A man wearing a grey hoodie, blue jeans, and a white beanie is leaning against a chain-link fence. The fence is in the foreground, and the background shows a wooden deck and some trees. The man is looking towards the right. The lighting is bright, creating strong shadows.

# GREG LAMARCHE

INTERVIEW BY CALIB NEELON  
PORTRAIT BY STEPHEN SCHRÖTER



If you had introduced me to Greg Lamarche in 1992, when I was 16-years old and living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I don't think I would have been able to talk. His alter ego, SP.One, had injected some genuine New York influence into Boston's graffiti environment. Lamarche's magazine, *Skills*, artfully arranged images of graffiti (lovingly cut-and-pasted, in an age long before Adobe), and gave writers one of the few resources for photos and interviews available on the scene at the time. When I wasn't busy tracing Lamarche's pieces, I was learning about the

artists he featured in *Skills*: Twist, Reas, Espo, Giant, Mear, Cycle, and KR; and this was years before they made their splashes in the "other" art world. As Lamarche's collage work continues to evolve with the work he hangs in galleries today, I am transported back to a time when he and his coterie of Boston graffiti kids got me hooked forever. – Caleb Neelon

Medium Corner

Paper collage

8.5" x 12"

2005

**Caleb Neelon:** Your parents took you around to some pretty interesting shows when you were little – I take it they're cool?

**Greg Lamarche:** My parents were both art history majors in college, and were supportive of my interest in art. When I was young they took me to a lot of great shows and gallery openings. One show that sticks out was the Red Grooms' Ruckus New York show. There were larger than life-size installations of subway cars with loose jig-sawed floors, so that when you walked, it made you feel like you were on a moving train. You could also get into the back of a gigantic cab and be taken on a virtual tour of the city. It was an amazing show to see as a kid.

When I first got interested in graffiti in the early 1980s, it was the same time graffiti was starting to really take off in art galleries. My parents were always down to take my friends and me to a show. Between 1981-84, we went to the Fun Gallery, Graffiti Above Ground, Gabrielle Bryers, Shafrazi Gallery, and others. It was at these shows that I started to meet some of my graffiti heroes, and get them to sign my black book.

**Tell us about your early exposure to collage. And fireworks.**

My mom made a lot of the flyers and invitations for neighborhood functions and events. We worked together on these projects. I did little illustrations and she designed the layout. She also made collages,

which was my first real exposure to working with that medium.

I always collected things and would pick up of stuff from the street. Fireworks were popular in my neighborhood, and there were two brothers who sold mad amounts of fireworks to all the kids. After the Fourth of July, it was a gold mine of spent fire-crackers, bottle rockets and roman candle wrappers. I grabbed a lot of these discarded pieces, and they became the material for the first collage I made, which was about 1980. Soon things like rolling paper packaging, fireworks, and stuff I found in my desk at school (letters, notes, and doodles) became material for my collages.

**You started doing graffiti in NYC,**

around 1981, and letters, to this day, are such a huge part of what you do. In fact, in a lot of your work – I'm thinking of the "O" series – you hone right in on what any graffiti writer, or typographer, will tell you is one of the hardest letters to draw in an interesting way. What makes a good letter, and what does graffiti teach you about designing them?

For me, a good letter has to have some sort of symmetry; even if it's crazy looking with a wild style, it has to have a balance. But it also really depends on the context.

Graffiti throws all the traditional rules of normal letter structure out the window, because you create your own writing style. In a way, it has given me freedom and my own





way of seeing letters, and allowing me to expand on letterforms and create new meanings and connections. Some of my earliest letter collages are based on my tag, but then they evolved to collages of related phrases. This was then followed by abstract letterforms, such as the "O" series, which is comprised of hundreds of variations of the letter O. The "Corner" series developed much the same way; the corner is a fragment of a letter (the part where the outline meets the 3-D). This shape is then repeated to create a different composition, but still have that three-dimensional punch.

Letters and fonts are some of my main sources of inspiration, but so is New York City. The subways, streets, highways, signs, and

colors all stimulate new ideas for me. Chipping paint on a subway pole, old graffiti beginning to bleed through the buff, or overlooked areas that surround highways; these kind of things are a big part of my work. I often use discarded or unwanted material for my collages, like take-out menus, magazine inserts, deposit envelopes, and all kinds of stuff that clutters our daily lives.

**In Boston, you got into doing pieces in hidden spots, and started doing more full-day productions – what were you learning when doing these more time-consuming pieces?**

I learned a lot about doing productions in Boston. I remember mixing my own colors with two

*Magic Fingers*

Paper collage  
6" x 9"

2006

**“LETTERS AND FONTS ARE SOME OF MY MAIN SOURCES OF INSPIRATION, BUT SO IS NEW YORK CITY. THE SUBWAYS, STREETS, HIGHWAYS, SIGNS, AND COLORS ALL STIMULATE NEW IDEAS FOR ME.”**

WD-40 caps and a straw, which was popular, back then. Prior to that I was so used to doing tags, fill-ins, and simple styles that it gave me a chance to finally use some outlines I had been sitting on for a while. It really felt good to pull off some big productions, so I was hooked and more focused on doing pieces.

**Back in the early 1990s, you made a little magazine called *Skills*, which was one of the few, and important graffiti magazines. And, it was made in an era before desktop publishing made making magazines a snap. What were the big aesthetic lessons you learned from that? Have you been amazed at how far *Skills* managed to travel in graffiti circles?**

*Skills* was a very personal project,

and it was the culmination of all of my interests: Graffiti, photography and collage. Back in 1992, I didn't have a computer or anything, except some photos, an X-acto knife, and some rubber cement. The opportunity was there, and I ran with it. Considering this was a time before the Internet explosion, it was quite incredible to see how far it reached around the world.

**You've always been a very clean painter in graffiti, and that sort of precision definitely seems to transfer over to the collages you make. Why does clean matter? Who got that idea into your head in the graffiti game?**

I like things bold and crisp with visual clarity and clean lines. I guess I can attribute it to graffiti,

because with the constant competition and visibility, you really strive for perfection with your style. For me, a big part of that is the challenge to make something difficult look effortless.

This characteristic of my work has been a source of confusion between my collages and design work. My collages sometimes seem so clean that people mistake them, especially in reproduction, for a painting or computer-generated design. In fact, they are painstakingly hand-cut and applied. Nothing is stenciled, projected, traced, or computer-generated in my collages. My commercial designs are also hand-made in a way because I begin by drawing all my own fonts and letters.

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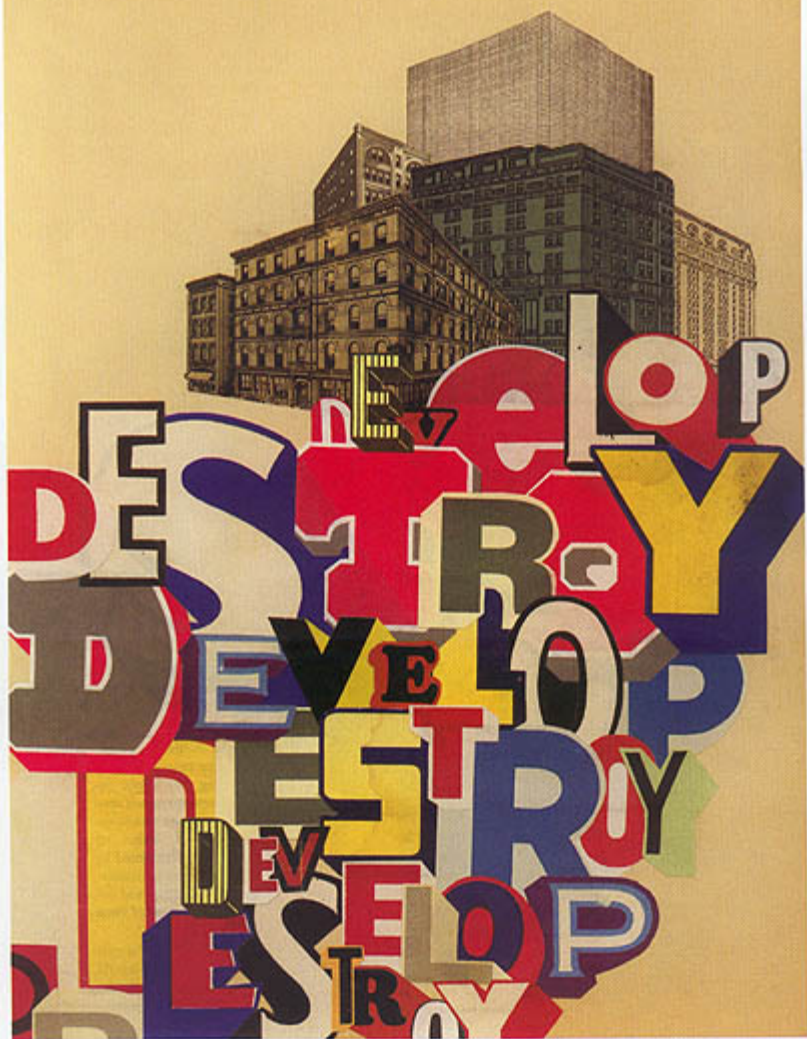
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**So when did you decide that you wanted to make collage work to sell in galleries?**

I always knew I wanted to make collages, gallery or no gallery. That's how it was for years. I made the work for me (and I still do), although I am glad to have the opportunities now to share it with more people.

**Can you walk us through the process of making one of your collages, from the way you get the paper, to the point you're gluing things down?**

I am continually looking for materials and gathering supplies. I am also always sketching ideas for collages and other artworks, and I have stacks of outlines and

drawings that are my reference while I am in the studio. Otherwise my process usually works in waves. I spend weeks just freehand cutting all sorts of letters, words, shapes and patterns with an X-acto knife. I cut and cut until my studio is completely covered with piles of paper.

Then I start to review the ideas that I've have been sitting on and start to play with compositions. I add and change and re-arrange the cut pieces, rotate and remove them like a complicated puzzle, and after a while, I have anywhere from 12 to 25 works in progress waiting to be completed. Some need more time, some morph into other works, such as paintings and installations, and some are exactly what I saw in my head.

**You used to work in a number of pretty high-end New York art galleries as an art handler. With that experience, you must have had a pretty good idea of how the audience would change for you when you took your art indoors. But what have you noticed about the change in your audience that has surprised you in recent years?**

I think it's interesting that no matter if it is graf, a collage, or commercial work, people are able to identify my style. I think my audience is still growing. People who know me know that I am serious and dedicated about both. It's an interesting time for me.

**What have been some of your favorite gallery experiences?**

**“MY COLLAGES SOMETIMES SEEM SO CLEAN THAT PEOPLE MISTAKE THEM, ESPECIALLY IN REPRODUCTION, FOR A PAINTING OR COMPUTER-GENERATED DESIGN.”**

*Develop, Destroy*

Paper collage  
7.5" x 10.5"

2005

The *Other Possibilities* show that Andrew Schoultz, Alicia McCarthy, Craig Costello, and I had in 2005 at Track 16 in Santa Monica was great because they have an enormous space and we were given a lot of freedom. I painted a mural that was 16-feet high and 40-feet long – you just can't do that anywhere. I would like to continue to do big things that relate to my collage work like the Track 16 mural, which was a large-scale representation of my series of Corners. It was exciting for me to alter the scale and return to wall painting.

The *Spothunters* exhibition I did with Monster Project, Shepard Fairey, and you, Caleb, at the New Art Center in Newtonville, Massachusetts, in March, 2006 was

another opportunity to work big and expand on some of the ideas I had explored in collage. I constructed a 20-foot high wall of found corrugated metal, signs, and metal scraps. The wall was an extension of my collage work in terms of composition but it also related to my Corrugated Corners collages.

**You've done some work with Zoo York and Seventh Letter on their clothing lines. I can certainly see your lettering work having tremendous appeal in a lot of commercial avenues. What has your approach been in these projects, and how do you decide what to take on?**

I'm open to new challenges and look forward to working with different people on a variety of

projects. I like the collaborative aspects of commercial work, but I also appreciate the freedom and solitude of the studio and my collage work. I feel very lucky to have the opportunity to do both.

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For more information about Greg Lamarche, contact [Greglamarche.com](http://Greglamarche.com).