

level.



09

9 771465 632006

LEVEL MAGAZINE DEBAUCHERY
09 JULY
AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2000
£2.50 UK

PEOPLE STYLE MUSIC FILM TRAVEL LIFE ADVENTURE ALL THINGS GOOD

OBHEY

GUMBALL RALLY CHAOS
CONFessions OF A MUSIC VIDEO MAKER
ATIBA PHOTOGRAPHY
GRAHAM COXON
NORMAN JAY
PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS
SOUTH AFRICA
VINYL VS CD
DEMOLITION DERBY
ANDRE THE GIANT

people



Andre the Giant Has a Posse

LEE BASFORD WRITER



On January 27th 1993 one of pro-wrestlings all time heroes succumbed to an illness he'd lived with since day one. In a short lifetime he created the legend that is Andre the Giant, the French born Andre Renee Rousimoff, who was told at the age of 22 that he had already lived over half his life. Diagnosed with 'acromegaly' or "giant syndrome", a rare disease which causes constant secretion of growth hormones. His head was getting physically bigger every year.

In his life he was legendary 'stories amass about the exploits of the doomed wrestler. Overturning a car filled with four people. Consuming 16 steaks, 12 lobsters, a case of beer, ten bottles of wine, finishing it all off with a bottle of Jack Daniels. It took at least two large bottles of Vodka before alcohol had any real effect on him. The "Eighth Wonder of the World" also had an acting career, with roles that included Rob Reiner's The Princess Bride, together with hit shows from the 70s and 80s The Six Million Dollar Man, The Fall Guy and BJ And The Bear. He was among the star attractions in one of the most successful sports events in history, Wrestlemania III. Over 92,000 people filled the Pontiac Silverdome to witness the undefeated Giant pit himself against Hulk Hogan. This was two months after his 40th birthday doctors said he wouldn't live to see.

Artist and saboteur Shepard Fairey has since transposed the phenomenon of this figure into the fabric of modern culture. In 1989 Fairey originally set out to create a pseudo skate posse, influenced to some extent by the emergence of gangster rap at the time; the idea of white people with a posse was too funny to be serious. In some ways it was a reaction against a lot of the mini cliques in the skateboard scene around Rhode Island. The notion that obey giant had a posse was something both cool and abstract, A small buzz around Fairey's





College campus grew at a rate akin to that of the late wrestler. This initial paper sticker, made from a photograph in a newspaper, has since expanded into something much bigger. For eleven years Fairey has played with society's worship of corporate icons, logos, or anything else aimed to steer you in a preconceived direction.

It's still not about sales; it has evolved into what Fairey describes as an experiment in phenomenology, something Heidegger (the German philosopher) explains as "the process of letting things manifest themselves." After giving the first stickers out to his friends, hitting local skate spots and stop signs, the stickers began to appear everywhere; on some guy's baseball cap at a party, on car bumpers, and more. Before long there was a local newspaper contest, where whoever could tell them what all the obey giant mystery was about would win tickets to a show of their choice. All of this was taking place while Fairey was still in his second year at college. The phenomenon began to spread outside Providence when his class travelled to other cities on field trips and when other students began mailing the stickers to friends in other states something partly to do with the infectious way some things suddenly catch on at colleges. When he went home that Christmas two of his best friends got into it, spreading the virus to New York and Georgia. It was at this point that the chain letter potential of the concept was fully realised.

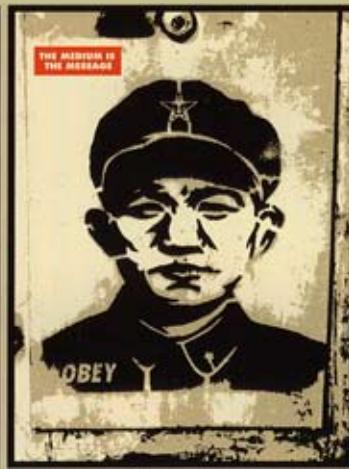
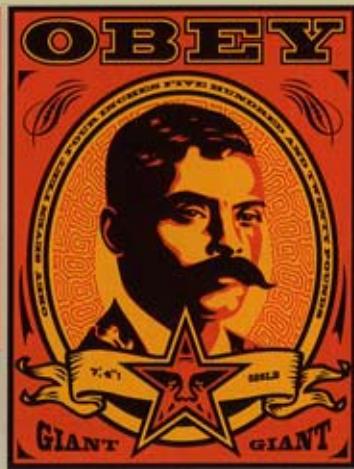
There's something about this particular form of anarchist art which frustrates a certain demographic. It stimulates the curiosity due to its professional guise and omnipresence, but it's neither selling nor advertising any line of products. It is this uncertainty which really infuriates people so used to advertising persuading them to buy something. When it exists simply for its own sake, you need to re-evaluate your sense of judgement. That, to some extent, is what the Andre the giant phenomenon is all about ' the sticker has no meaning, it exists only to cause people to react.

The word was spread much further in 1995 when Helen Stickler made a 17 minute documentary about the project which featured at the Sundance Film Festival, winning the New York Underground Film and Video Festival and receiving Best Documentary at THAW '96. Fairey himself has put together a short eight-minute film entitled Attention Deficiency Disorder, a short meditation on the capitalist world we live in. However, the powers that be, predictably,

didn't take kindly to this type of activity. Along the way he has been arrested for such bizarre crimes as "advertising without a permit", 'possession of a tool of criminal mischief' and "malicious destruction of public property". It's not about vandalism, Fairey explains, "Giant is designed to provoke thought about the mechanics of the system we live in ' not to destroy it. Everyone has to live here. Plus there are extreme individuals who wish to label all street artist as vandals and push for harsher and harsher penalties and prosecution. These people are very organised and lobby for public support. To counteract their attempts to vilify street artistry, the street artist community needs to befriend local arts councils, graphic arts organisations, and anyone and everyone with political power who could be sympathetic to artists who have no sanctioned public venue to express themselves." It's more of a voice against the mass of advertising we are bombarded with every day of our lives. It seems to be a common trait for artists with any interest in displaying their work in a public arena other than an art gallery. Futura 2000 has stated that he does have respect for property, but in a public space where people are subject to advertising from all sides, he feels totally legitimate.

Anything sold through Giant (stickers, t-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, skateboards, posters and videos) all goes back into the company to keep the movement alive. All of the Giant work is done after hours, for during the day Fairey runs a design and advertising company with a friend. Blackmarket Design is now creating work for some very high level clients all hoping to attain some of the cult magic Fairey has achieved with Andre's posse. This is pretty strange, especially when it's these type of clients who are often at the receiving end of his more specific tactical sabotage. Back in 1994 there was an advertising campaign for a new soft drink. Marketed as an underground product, this new Okay Soda used basic colours on paper stickers, appearing to be the real thing: it actually was the real thing in small print if read "Product of the Coca-Cola Company". Fairey targeted these ads with the accuracy of an assassin (there was something personal here). The posters were measured up for size, then Fairey printed his version which read AG, rather than OK, and incorporated Andre's head in to the design. They were in the exact same colours, using the same glossy stock. Any Okay Soda ads around were instantly replaced with the new versions. This type of subversive activity has continued more recently with the targeting of Sprite's

FAIREY ORIGINALLY SET OUT TO CREATE A PSEUDO SKATE POSSE, INFLUENCED TO SOME EXTENT BY THE EMERGENCE OF GANGSTER RAP AT THE TIME; THE IDEA OF WHITE PEOPLE WITH A POSSE WAS TOO FUNNY TO BE SERIOUS



¡VIVA LA REVOLUCION!
POWER TO THE POSSE





IT STIMULATES THE CURIOSITY DUE TO ITS PROFESSIONAL GUISE AND OMNIPRESENCE, BUT IT'S NEITHER SELLING OR ADVERTISING ANY LINE OF PRODUCTS. IT IS THIS UNCERTAINTY WHICH REALLY INFURIATES PEOPLE

'Obey Your Thirst' billboard campaigns. In this instance it was more a case of tailoring the ads to suite Fairey's needs rather than totally obliterating the original item. With painted sheets of paper, he covered up all Sprite information, leaving only the word "obey" (which he was already using in his work) ¹ and this was complimented with a perfectly sized Andre head. Billboards were hit in Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco. There was even one in the middle of the shopping district on Meirose Avenue, which was seen by thousands. There have been less specific but equally impressive sightings. In 1995 he hit the very first X Games, timing the security patrols, producing three huge silver and black stencils on tracks throughout the course. There have also been noted Giant sightings in movies Batman Forever, The Devil's Own and 8mm. The dead wrestler's face has been spotted in Graceland, on Jim Morrison's grave, one even turned up on MTV You'll find them in Paris, London, Tokyo, Moscow and Singapore. More recently there have been global exhibitions which all help to increase Andre's presence. The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and many others all over the United States have exhibited his work, with stories of art curators soaking the posters from the sides of buildings to add to their collections. Last year Fairey exhibited at the Chamber of Pop Culture in London and took part in Tokion Magazine's "Neo Graffiti Project", an outdoor exhibition which took art to the streets of New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle, with a series of work created by some of the country's best creative talent. He's recently exhibited in Tokyo, and on August 4th the posse hits Birmingham's Medicine Bar. This exhibition has been organised by Capsule and will feature limited edition screen-prints by Shepard, together with a selection of the more familiar fly posters he's been putting up since the early nineties. Look out for an increase in Giant visibility throughout the UK in the weeks leading up to the show...

