

WINTER 2017

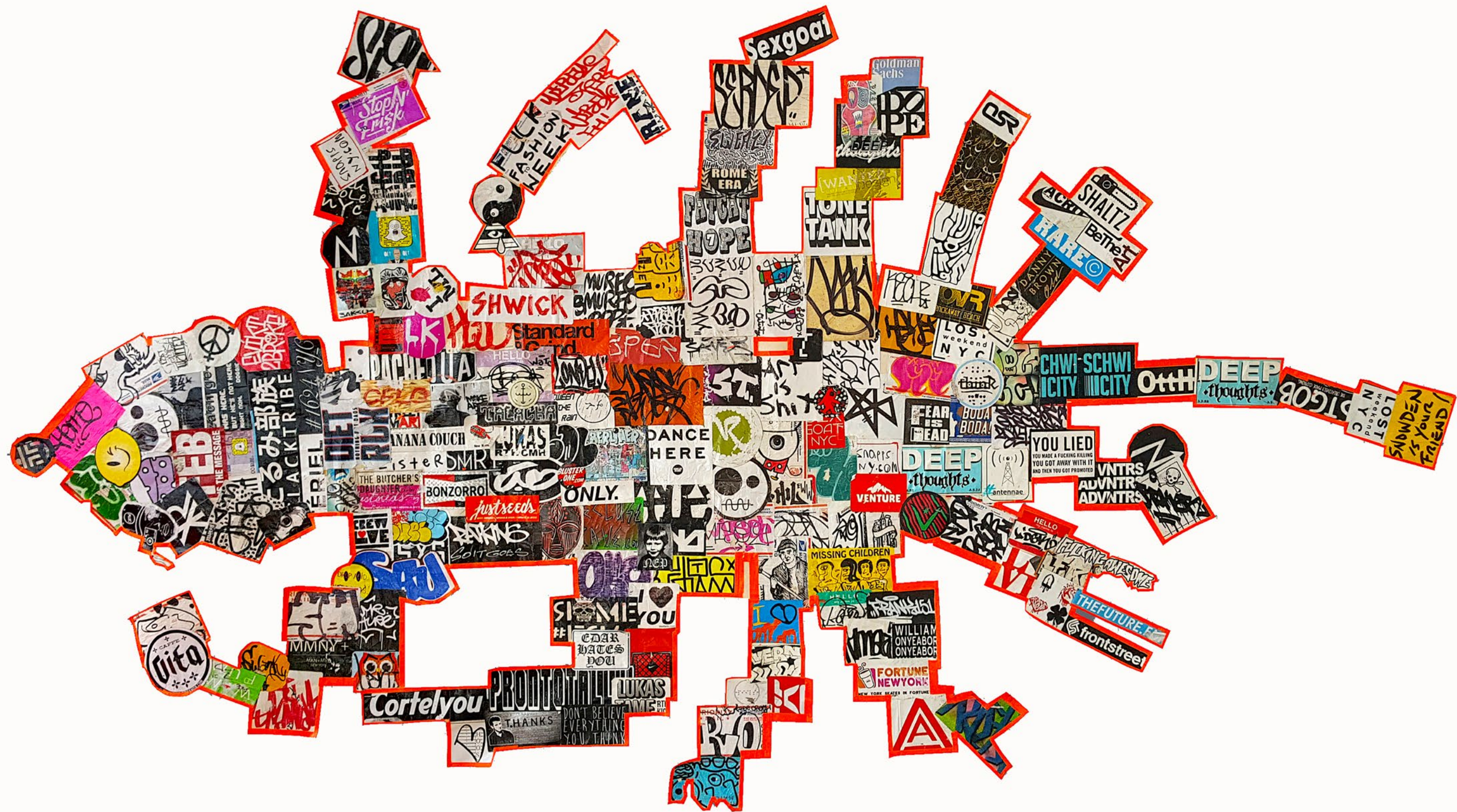
ART VOICES

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EGON ZIPPEL

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EGON ZIPPEL

BY NOAH BECKER

Sexgoat
50 x 84 in., original stickers and signaling
tape, taped together on back, 2016

Imagery from the street or the wall shows the vitality of the city, it really fits with my nature to use whatever I see on the street.

Egon Zippel, (German, born 1960, Romania), has lived in New York City for over 20 years. His studio is a 4th floor walk up [well, there is a freight elevator] in a historic building on New York’s Lower East Side. The building houses several galleries on the floors below and above Zippel’s large studio.

The first thing I noticed upon entering his space was that his kitchen spoke of a cultured and organized individual - one who cooks with specific spices, understands the human senses, and relishes in the opportunity to excite. Zippel’s space resonates with creative energy in all corners. Zippel ushered

me from the kitchen offering me lemon water as we started to discuss his process and his history. After viewing several of his works, Zippel launched into a description of his methodology for producing art.

“When you live in New York it’s unavoidable to see things like graffiti and graffiti stickers,” Zippel says. I noticed his collections of objects and stickers found around New York’s walls and streets. Zippel’s habit of collecting street culture reminded me of artists Dieter Roth and Michael Anderson. “I keep lots of notebooks of things I see and I apply this research to my work, it’s ever-evolving,” Zippel states. He keeps thousands of pages of ballpoint pen drawings on small format paper - his so-called “Polaroids”, with text and images scrawled upon them. “I’m painting logos and I work with them on computers and manipulate them in different ways,” he announced. I then asked him for more detailed information about his complex process, which involves computer-manipulated logos made into programmed non-



(top) **Hope, Entangled**
48 x 48 in., original stickers and signaling tape on canvas, 2014

Advntrs
20 x 20 in., original stickers and signaling tape on canvas, 2016



Dirty BK
20 x 20 in., original stickers and signaling tape on canvas, 2016

repetitive animations and into paintings.

“Imagery from the street or the wall shows the vitality of the city, it really fits with my nature to use a lot of the imagery I see on the street.” Surely the history of New York art can be seen through the lens of Basquiat and his interaction with walls or even through the way workmen paint unintentional abstract expressionism on splattered subway construction areas. But in 2016 it is perhaps a good moment to leave the Warhol, Basquiat and Haring references alone when talking about Egon Zippel - we can even leave the abstract expressionist references alone. These artists represent market manipulation now. I enjoy some of the historic work but it has nothing to do with the purity I was seeing in Zippel. This kind of purity is rare and I was enjoying the discovery of such a person. The contemporary nature of Zippel’s “de-vandalizing” as he calls it, or reverse vandalization, makes comparisons difficult.

“Sometimes I find (and use) not only a single sticker but a whole assemblage of them in places like Berlin or Rome or Addis Ababa as well,” he says. The grit and grime of major cities and the textures rendered by the crush of people and the flow of information continues to inspire artists like Zippel.

You can see this influence in the work of street artists like Shepard Fairey (a less market damaged artist) JR and Banksy to name a few. As we touched upon earlier, Zippel is not a street artist at all, but calls what he does “de-vandalizing,” - a way of accomplishing the opposite of street vandalism through a reductive artistic process of removal and re-contextualization, but Zippel takes a different road with these ideas as evidenced in his surfaces. “I always like to use unworthy or neglected things from daily life,” he says. Indeed, the everyday, the common scenes and occurrences of urban life can take on a different resonance in places like New York and Berlin. “For years and years I collected my “checked-off” post-it notes and I also do things with my “endless flow” of to-do lists (I call them Self-Fulfilling or Self-Creating Drawings): It links in with my hunter gatherer aesthetic.” Zippel has moved from the street to the studio making the found objects he works with function in a more intimate way than one would encounter them in their habitat. His varied practice has made it a necessity for Zippel to work in several different streams. The post-it notes are one long term project and the work with stickers another stream. “I have different streets I follow in my work. I do little drawings in ballpoint pen - again, my Polaroids - and have

been doing these small drawings for 30 years. It is immensely rewarding to limit myself - in a world with an abundance of technical possibilities - to a very restricted format. The “Polaroids” are always drawn with a blue ballpoint pen, using the same size paper of 4.1 x 2.9 inches.” Through time and effort and non-linear thought, Zippel finds new ways to manipulate his work within an urban context. Post-it note ballpoint pen drawings inform his process, which has taken time to articulate. Texture plays a role in this and one can see that he likes textures and uses texture carefully. Zippel is comfortable in large-scale on canvas and equally comfortable in small scale on paper in this way. “Surface is important to me,” Zippel says. He is not mimicking the streets and the walls of cities but he’s taking elements’ from the streets finding new meanings, new textures and new surfaces.

“I’m very much inspired by surface and not so much by depth. I like the paintings of Peter Schuyff, he inspires me,” His inspiration may come from the fact that Schuyff has the sensibility of an inventor. Zippel also has the quality of an inventor and someone who knows how to play the long game with the mind of a scientist. “I like to keep my work un-scientific, I don’t have a certain plan or a certain anal way of developing my work.”

Zippel rebels against stereotypical art-making practices and finds that investigating opposing ideas brings forth vitality. “It’s important to keep things within a certain region or certain realm but not a specific overly planned kind of approach. Sometimes I just grab everything on the floor and put together my work in a kind of random way,” he states. It is indeed an approach that has worked for Zippel over the years, as he invents new ways of working and thinking about art in an urban environment. Zippel believes in both predetermination and free will. Wrestling with this contradiction makes daily life rather complex (and fun).

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