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REED+RADER

story / Shanna Fisher photography / REED + RADER

We spoke with Reed + Rader, the Brooklyn based art house made up of blue-haired Pamela Reed and Matthew Rader. Their super-surreal, animated images are bright and dynamic; some being as frightening as they are mesmerizing. Reality mixes with the subconscious with their fashion-fueled photo art, and it's no surprise to learn that the two are influenced by such avante-garde designers as Comme Des Garçons, Yamaoto, and Gareth Pugh. According to their website, the duo enjoys pizza, robots, and Nintendo. Well, who doesn't?! We spoke to them to learn about what else they like and what's behind the mastermind of the visual genius phenomenon that is Reed + Rader.

How did you transition from still images to animated images? What was the inspiration?

We've always been heavy into technology and gadgets but it wasn't until Polaroid died that we began to question what was going to be the next step for us. Previous to working in video and animation, we were shooting strictly 4x5, so it was quite a jump to take from under the dark cloth to strictly creating work for a screen, but it was also a very comfortable transition for us as we were already so involved in this world personally.

The inspiration for moving to animation and video was really just trying to figure out what this post print world will be. Screens take advantage of images that move, images don't need to still be on them. Screens are created for moving images, so we wanted to take full advantage of that.

How did you two team up?

We met while attending the Art Institute of Pittsburgh in 2002. It's been 9 years now since we've been best friends. Even before we were formally Reed + Rader, we would assist each other on set, when we joined as a team in 2005 nothing really felt different. Everything flows

nicely between us.

Your work has a sense of childlike-wonder mixed with edgy beauty—are you influenced or nostalgic for things from your youth?

Absolutely, just like the gif format has nostalgic value, we always try to incorporate elements into the work that make us smile. More than often, they are inspired by video games, stuffed animals, characters—all leading back to our own childhoods.

Did you know as children that you wanted to be photographers “when you grew up?” When did you realize this is it?

Growing up, we really had no knowledge that you could do art as a profession. We both come from small blue-collar towns where no one in our family was in the arts. We didn't formally learn how to use a camera probably until we were about 20. Originally we went to college for web design and interior design.

Your client list includes the likes of V Magazine, V Man, Dazed & Confused, Another Magazine. Do you find they adapt easily to your including animation?

For the most part, we find that clients are excited about new technology and new mediums to explore online. The internet has a way to share information very quickly, so by having these digital stories that are made for a screen on their websites, they are getting a lot more traffic as it's custom to just their site.

If you could photograph anyone past or present who would it be?

We'd love to involve our stuffed animal family (“The Family”) more often in our work.

What's a day in the life of Reed and Rader like?

A non shoot day: wake up, play with cats, email,

drink some tea, cats, email, cats, edit, cats, edit, edit, water the garden, cats, internet, email, cats, pizza, internet, cats, Battlestar Galactica, cats in bed, and sleep.

Where does the cat fascination come from? Do they inspire your work?

We have 4 cats: Essy (18), FiFi Bofinkles (10), Xanadu (5) and Brother Bear (2). We are a cat family basically in every way you would expect. Essy has been with Matthew since 5th grade, so she's the Mama in our family. We love our cats dearly, and they do inspire us, sometimes so much to the point of using their sounds or features for our work. Cats are also a good conversation breaker—bring up cats in a room, and you'll get at least 2 other crazy cat lovers. Meow.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

For us, the key word is interactivity. We want the users to no longer have a passive experience, but we want them to participate in the work. We love the idea of having the viewer become the art director, let them make the choices. These are all ideas we have pursuing and pushing in our work.

What are you working on right now?

Right now, we're gearing up for a holiday season of editing, and then putting together ideas for the new year. We will be pushing interaction installations next year in galleries and stores, as well as making online projects where the user will control the images.

What excites you?

Just the thought of how quick technology moves and what's in store for us all in the next 5, 10 years is pretty mind blowing. We just want to keep moving with technology, and take advantage of what it offers, and move our work alongside it. ■

