

Evan Pricco on *Juxtapoz Magazine*:

25 years of Art & Culture

An interview with Evan Pricco,
Editor-in-Chief of *Juxtapoz Magazine*

This year marks the 25th anniversary of *Juxtapoz* magazine. How did *Juxtapoz* move from being a small alternative art magazine to a multi-platform entity?

Evan Pricco: 25 years ago, *Juxtapoz* was founded by pop-surreal artist Robert Williams, who at the time had established himself as a bit of an underground art legend in Los Angeles, and had started a mag called *Art Alternatives*. That did not last, as a lot of magazines don't – the fact that we're celebrating 25 years is actually quite amazing, considering we're an independently owned magazine.

Anyhow, Robert had been in a really seminal art show at the MOCA in Los Angeles called *Helter Skelter*, and what he noticed there is that he was perceived as this 'underground comic' who wasn't getting the appreciation, or the attention, or the critical study of his work that his contemporaries were. And it kind of felt like he was being left out.

Magazines and establishments like *Art Forum* and *Art America* dominated the art lexicon for almost a hundred years in America. And we were always told what art is

important, and what art you are supposed to go see, but what Robert wanted to do was to create an art magazine, and an art history, that celebrated the art that we live with. That means the comic books, the rock posters, the album covers, the graffiti – all of these art movements that were not getting an art history established along with them.

So, the first years of *Juxtapoz* were basically a celebration of these alternative art communities – but they were also predominantly about the things that people already knew. I mean, people knew about Michael Jackson album covers, but they didn't know Mark Ryden had created them. These little things that we live with that don't get any credit for being art.

And that's how we connected to street art later on – *Juxtapoz* was giving a voice to movements that weren't necessarily getting a critical, or an art historical, academic presentation – which is important.



Juxtapoz Issue 1, 1994. ©Juxtapoz Magazine.



Juxtapoz Issue 73, 2007. ©Juxtapoz Magazine.

So, 25 years ago, this was the very first issue? You must have been in high school then?

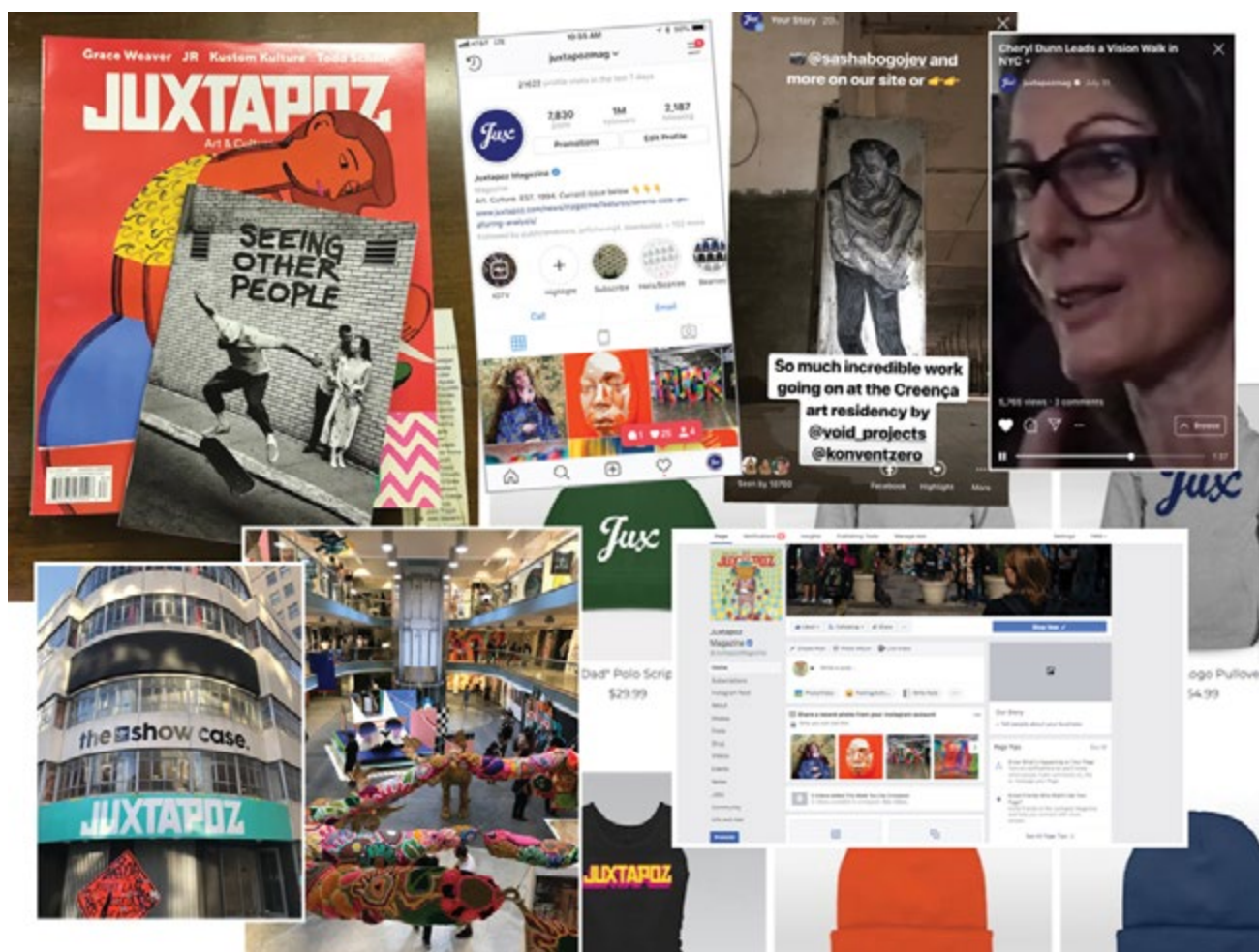
Yeah, I was in junior high at that point – so, no I wasn't working for *Juxtapoz* yet! But I was lucky that I grew up in San Francisco to parents that had psychedelic rock posters in the house growing up, and who had bought comic books from people like Robert Crumb in the streets of San Francisco back in the '60s. So, I was lucky to have a certain kind of visual history. But I didn't know who any of the artists were, and it wasn't until I met Robert Williams and his friends that I started learning about this stuff.

Obviously, stylistically, things have changed quite a bit since the grotesque of pop-surrealism in 1994. There is a striking difference to the way that the cover of *Juxtapoz* looks now, but the whole point of what we're still trying to do is to make sure that all of the art that is happening in the world is connected, and that you don't necessarily have to have some sort of separation between high and low cultures. We have always tried not to make a distinction between high and low, the way some publications do.

So, issue 73 was the first one you worked on?

Yes, this was my first issue. My first assignment at *Juxtapoz* was to organise a photo shoot with Dennis Hopper, who was one of my heroes. I almost had a nervous breakdown on the phone with him.

But the really important thing about this issue is the cover. Swoon was a such big moment for art magazines. This was the first time we had put a street artist on the cover. And at the time we faced a little bit of a backlash for doing that. Because, traditionally it has been all about painting. But all of a sudden, we were putting a wheatpaste installation on the cover of *Juxtapoz* and I think everybody had pretty much a nervous breakdown that we were going to ruin the magazine. But I think that it was important not only to have Swoon on the cover, but also to establish street art as something that needs to be part of the *Juxtapoz* language that we have tried to establish.



Juxtapoz 2019: Not just a magazine. Montage ©Juxtapoz Magazine.

How has *Juxtapoz* changed since your first issue?

In 2006, all we had was a shitty website. Fast forward to 2019, and *Juxtapoz* does about 25 different things. We've got a bookstore, a gallery, a magazine, a website, an Instagram, a Facebook, a Twitter – we have a clothing line, we do books, we do events every single year. The nature of what we're doing – and what all these scenes are doing – has changed so much. It's not just about a magazine, it's not just about a website telling you about what's happening, it's about creating your own culture. And we try to go to the most well established art events, like Art Basel, and then to create our own little universe outside of that universe – we try to make people feel comfortable with art. Because the way that art is still explained to people is that, 'it's not really for you'.

In every single issue, we're trying to have an honest conversation with people about what's actually happening in the art world. It just so happens, that in 2019, that conversation needs to be across about 15 different platforms, every single day, at all times.

How have you created space for art and culture outside of the magazine itself?

Ten years ago, when we celebrated our 15th anniversary, we did a fundraiser where we created art residency programs in Detroit, where we took a lot of homes that were being foreclosed on, and bought them and gave them to artists to create bodies of work and to use as studios for the year. It's an ongoing thing – it's happening, still today. It's this idea of creating a space and place for creativity to happen outside of a print publication – and if we have the platform to do it, we feel like we should do it. We feel like it's the artists that run the magazine. It's not just the five of us that put it together – there is only five of us, by the way! – it's about establishing a good thing for artists, because they give us so much.

In 2015, we were asked by the Times Square Alliance to create an art object in Times Square for two weeks, so we created an old fashioned news stand, where we had artists take it over for the day and sell products and prints, and it turned into an art activation zone in the middle of the

most corporate environment in the world. But the great thing about it was that people were so convinced it was a real newsstand, they would come up to us and ask for gum and cigarettes and newspapers all day long. We ended up selling cigarettes and gum to people. You've got to create an alternative economy for yourself!

So, you can get into these really established places and do something unique, and you can do something that's going to have an impact and that's going to kind of confuse people – and that's totally fine. And that's our version of what the street artists do.

Print magazines seem to be becoming extinct – how has *Juxtapoz* survived?

So, last year we went from a monthly to a quarterly. Not necessarily to combat falling print sales, but mostly because we wanted to create more projects outside of the print magazine, to keep the momentum going. They're projects that allow us to keep the magazine alive, and also make the print product a little bit more archival and a little

bit more special for people, and maybe to do stories that are a little bit more special too. Because when you are a small staff putting something on every month, you end up focusing just on that, and in the blink of an eye it's been ten years. So, we took a step back to focus on doing better things.

Again, it's really a lot easier when you're independently owned, and you're not a corporation that thinks about cuts and the balance sheets every single issue. We're lucky that it's only just a small staff, and we've got a good foundation – we don't necessarily have to go by what *Vanity Fair* and *Rolling Stone* magazines have to go by. Our adjustment has been a little bit of luck too – we didn't think we were going to have a million Instagram followers! We've always wanted to be the biggest art magazine in the world, but we just didn't want to have to be like the other ones, so we've tried to find a way of broadening our scope without losing our integrity.

Also, there is a re-establishment, especially for creative people, to buy physical objects. We're not going to see the end of magazines.



Juxtapoz Newsstand, New York City, USA, 2015. ©Juxtapoz Magazine.



Evan Pricco, Editor-in-Chief of Juxtapoz Magazine. Photograph ©Nuart