



Aleksandar Mladenovic Leka and Robert Truszkowki

By Elizabeth Chorney-Booth

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Music is often a reflection of the values and emotional make-up of a culture, but how does it directly influence other artistic pursuits? Music has long been an inspiration for visual artists working in a number of mediums — the sound of a serene classical piece, a searing jazz trumpet improv, or the roar of a thundering rock band all evoke different colours and forms, but the role that music plays in shaping our values and memories can also provide valuable artistic fodder. Aleksandar Mladenovic Leka and Robert Truszkowki are from different places, have different cultural perspectives, and are influenced by the effects of different genres of music, but each create work that echoes their respective inspiration in complex and thought-provoking ways.

Serbian artist Aleksandar Mladenovic Leka describes his process as “avant-garde jazz classical Visual Art,” a reference not to the great experimental jazz musicians, but to British post-punk cult hero Vini Reilly of the band Durutti Column. Leka uses the term to describe his own spirit of experimentalism, which he combines with the traditional artistic methods and values that also inform his work. Combining classic and digital techniques, figural depictions meshed with abstract symbolism, and mixed media in his prints, Leka’s work combines historical themes with modern sensibilities to create work that is both contemplative and cheeky.

And going back to themes of music and popular culture — Leka’s flair for cultural nostalgia is a reoccurring theme in his work. Making literal references to everything from pioneering filmmakers the Brothers Lumieres to ‘70s English punk bands The Slits and Sham 69, Leka also evokes that feeling of time passing with his boldly familiar imagery and the juxtaposition of the old and the new.

Vancouver’s Robert Truszkowski also skillfully brings together seemingly contradictory pop culture references, but his work differs from Leka’s in both the source inspiration and the feel of the finished prints. While Leka does use some text in his work, lettermarks take centre stage with Truszkowski’s striking prints. Fascinated with the way in which printing has shaped human culture and communication, Truszkowski takes the responsibility of his role as a communicator very seriously and is cognizant that his

medium of choice is about something much more powerful than merely putting together words and pictures.

Truskowski uses that medium to create images that draw on themes of pervasive religion, pop culture, and other culture-shaping forces that have traditionally utilized the power of print. Whereas Leka is drawn to punk music, Truskowski is a fan of that other deeply revolutionary music that grew out of the '70s and '80s: rap. Whether he's placing Notorious B.I.G. or Jay-Z lyrics next to delicate illustrations of birds or making a statement about quantum electrodynamics through stylized text, Truskowski's prints are dealing with the power of the information that is being thrown at us via the reams of print that we all sift through every day.

Music, like visual art, is both a reflection of our humanity and a force that influences how we live. The way that these two artists use music culture in their printmaking offers two differing, but complementary, takes on how ingrained both music and visual art are in the way we navigate through our shared experiences.

Elizabeth Chorney-Booth is a local freelance writer and a longtime Calgary enthusiast. A former rock 'n' roll journalist, these days Elizabeth writes about food, local events, community, travel, business, and other lifestyle topics. Her work has appeared in the Calgary Herald, Swerve, Avenue, Culinaire, WestJet Magazine, Today's Parent and a number of other print and online publications. She's also the co-editor of Rolling Spoon, a website that mashes up music and food culture, the online Wapawekka Travel magazine, and is an enthusiastic collector of vintage recipes, Pyrex kitchenware, and jelly salad molds.