

EXCLUSIVE: ORIGINAL ART AND STRONG OPINIONS FROM ART CHANTRY, JOE DUFFY, MICHAEL IAN KAYE, SAGI HAVIV, BARBARA GLAUBER + MORE

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THERE IS A PRACTICE NOW RAMPANT among design students and certain young professionals that I find particularly cloying. It is endemic to the current generation—you know who you are. Yes, you!

I'm not talking about the longstanding designer preference for black apparel, a sartorial selection that in recent years has been largely surpassed by colorful paisley prints and Western-style fashions, but to another excessively overt design trope: a person photographed from the neck down, holding portfolio samples that are gripped in two hands—as though it were clean laundry.

This self-promotional trend began about a decade ago, made possible by digital camera technology that allowed designers to easily create showcases of their own work. The visual template has proliferated to the point where I now see it all the time—around one in three digital portfolios from students and professionals of a particular age range (usually 19 to 35 years old) includes at least a few such artifacts; sometimes they make up the entire sample.

You might ask: Isn't this an efficient and compelling way

of showing large printed work? Of course. But what was an innovative, efficient alternative to static, flat display ten years ago has now become so commonplace and clichéd as to reflect the designers' lemminglike lack of imagination. Admittedly, there are not all that many unique ways of displaying portfolio pieces, but that shouldn't be an excuse for falling prey to the latest fad. Design work should speak for itself and not be embellished by bells and whistles—or hands and three-dimensional space, as the case may be.

The first time I saw a photograph of someone holding a poster in this manner, I thought, Nice job. By the time I'd seen it in hundreds of instances, I thought that somebody high up on the design mount must have been telling students to do this. Frankly, I wish they'd stop. Print does not have to be dimensional, kinetic, or otherwise made to be something it's not. Flat is just fine.

