Q&A with the "Alphabetacool" Authors

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Adi Goodrich and Sean Pecknold are two parts of the Los Angeles based Sing Sing Studio. They're prolific and immensely talented visual artists, and they've come together, through an obsession with children's books and a belief that kids are smarter than us, to make a children's book of their own.

We're very excited to have their book, ***Alphabetacool***, and I sent them a few questions so we could get a little more insight into this incredibly fun book they've made - one that's more intellectual and uniquely visual than any kids book we've recently seen. Also, it's good for us adults too...

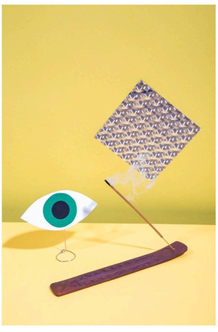
HES: You two have a huge catalogue of diverse work, and now you're making this step into books. Has this been something you've always been interested in? Or is it something you sort of happened upon amidst other work?

ADI: I've been obsessed with children's books since I was in college, and would spend most of my research time in the Harold Washington Children's library looking like a total creep and loving the design of children's books from the 60s-70s. I've always wanted to make a children's book, but never thought I could until Sean pushed this project for our studio.

SEAN: I've always loved kid's books. Maurice Sendak, Roald Dahl, Dr. Suess, Richard Scarry; they made such cool worlds in their books. When I was first getting into animation a few years ago, I would look at some of those books for inspiration. Adi and I had been taking photos together for a couple months, and this seemed like the perfect place to start making kid's books.

HES: We've been talking a lot about the intellectual side of the book. It really does seem like it will force, especially young readers, to make some significant linguistic and visual connections - beyond what a lot of children's books do. Was this something you went at with intention, as a goal for the book? And how did you cultivate that theme throughout?

SEAN: We wanted the book to appeal to both kids and our friends, and wanted to make some fun and weird still-life photos, so we didn't restrict ourselves too much to reach a specific age range or learning level. And our collaboration with Jeremiah Chiu on the typography puzzles was also very open, we gave him a lot of freedom to explore and have fun designing the hints for each page. It's been fun to read the book with kids and see what they notice. I think a good kid's book is one that you come back to and get different things from at different ages, so if there is a little joke or something in there, that a 3 year old won't get at first, maybe she will when she's 8.



HES: What came first, the object or the word? What I mean is: what was the selection process like for the words to include?

ADI: We were in New York for the fall making photos as our studio practice out there. I was frustrated at making photos of random objects- I thought it was a waste of my time. But, basically that's what we decided to do. One evening, we went on a walk and I cried a little bit about how I was feeling unmotivated and that I was wasting my time in the studio. (This was one of many creative meltdowns I'm sure everyone has) Sean looked at me very confidently and said " O.K., we are going to make a children's book. We'll do it with random objects we find around the studio, outside and in grocery stores around the neighborhood. We're going to make 26 of them. It's going to be an alphabet book."

HES: You work a lot in video, photo, and animation. What was a challenge (or an expected reward) of the bookmaking process that you hadn't discovered in other work you'd done?

ADI: This was our first photo project together, so one of the challenges was with the equipment - we had just bought a lighting kit - so that was definitely a challenge. I have personally styled so many still life photographs, so that was pretty easy, but the hardest part of the project was getting it printed. Printed within time, budget and the quality we wanted. Our dream is to have it be published by a publisher we respect and who sees the importance of the book. If we could make this a hardcover book, we'd be so happy!

SEAN: I'm primarily an animator and filmmaker so everything I've worked on has been on a screen, which is great, but it was amazing to make something together that ended up in people's hands. The printing for the first-time-ever was challenging. Getting the PDF correctly formatted, and submitted with the correct bleed in time with the right cover and paper, there's so much that goes into it! Luckily our studio-mate Jeremiah has done it a million times, and was able to help us out a lot.

HES: More books in the works?

SEAN: For sure, we are hoping to make at least one book a year. It's great working with Adi because we are always talking about new ideas together, and give each other energy to make those ideas real. I'd love to do a multi-plane book, even with a simple story. We are striving to make visual work, both still and moving that rewards kids and adults alike, the possibilities are endless!

Grab Alphabetacool ***here****.*

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