

# Art & Design



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Installation view of  
"STUCK UP" at Maxwell  
Colette Gallery, 2012.

## Crazy glue

"STUCK UP" adheres to the notion that stickers are art. By **Jonathan Kinkley**

The day after a January snowstorm, Maxwell Colette Gallery (908 N Ashland Ave) buzzes as street-art fans line up for a book signing with DB Burkeman. Better known as DJDB, an English-born, New York-based former DJ who helped bring jungle and drum 'n' bass to the States, Burkeman, 49, is also a sticker collector who curated Maxwell Colette's exhibition "STUCK UP: A Selected History of Alternative & Pop Culture Told Through Stickers."

Beginning with Andy Warhol's peel-off banana sticker for the Velvet Underground's 1967 debut album, "STUCK UP" groups thousands of stickers by artist, subculture and medium. Their creators include fine artists like Damien Hirst, street artists such as Shepard Fairey and Banksy, skateboard companies, music labels and unknowns who post their work in cities across the globe. The tags and stylings that street artists including Twist (a.k.a. Barry McGee), Faust, Sure and Haze created on the U.S. Postal Service's free mailing labels make up an entire genre.

"For me, they are simply tiny portable works of art," Burkeman tells me via e-mail. "They could be the most democratic art medium. Anyone can make a sticker and put it up."

According to his 2010 book *Stickers: Stuck-Up Piece of Crap: From Punk Rock to Contemporary Art* (Rizzoli, \$35), coauthored with Monica LoCascio, Burkeman collected many of these stickers himself, starting before he moved to the U.S. in 1989. He obtained others by writing to artists and collectors, and picks up new acquisitions during walks with his 11-year-old son.

Artists' influences ripple throughout the show. Fairey, skate brand Supreme and dozens of others appropriate Barbara Kruger's iconic declarations in white text on red backgrounds. A whole display is given over to Kruger-style stickers bearing phrases like EATRICKIDS and CARPOOLING IS BAD FOR THE ECONOMY. (Asked which stickers are his favorites, Burkeman responds, "Too many to mention, but I love to show culture jamming, so any of the Barbara Kruger/Supreme rips.")

In the sticker meritocracy, value is judged not by an artist's renown but by the efficacy of his or her message. Banksy's altered walk-sign sticker, in which the stick figure walks outside the red circle, touches at the very

heart of all street art in its countercultural nature. It's brilliant in its simplicity—as is an unknown artist's slogan, WHICH WAY TO THE GROUND ZERO GIFT SHOP?

Maxwell Colette owner Oliver Hild says, "When I was growing up, there was no question that this was not art. Nowadays, kids would say there is no difference between a Jenny Holzer and a Mark Gonzales," referring to the skateboarder-artist nicknamed Gonz. Even stickers that merely repurpose familiar logos, rendering Goldman Sachs as GOLD IN SACKS, encourage viewers to critique brands' saturation of our world.

Burkeman hopes "STUCK UP" garners attention from museums because it fills a need they don't yet address. The few institutions that recognize street art's importance tend to exhibit paintings, prints and other traditional media. Burkeman engages visual culture more broadly,

highlighting influential works like Stanley Donwood's Radiohead stickers, the 1980s skate stickers of Santa Cruz Skateboards and Jim Phillips, and other pieces from the fields of advertising and design. They represent a whole new medium worthy of serious study.

Because the stickers are so fragile, there's a degree of urgency. "These are a conservator's wet dream," Hild jokes.

"STUCK UP" runs through March 3 at Maxwell Colette Gallery. See *Galleries, West Side*.

**"These are a conservator's wet dream."**

## Bibiana Suárez



"**Memoria (Memory)**," Hyde Park Art Center, through Mar 25 (see Museums & institutions).

Bibiana Suárez's version of Memory, the matching card game, isn't entirely different from the 1980s edition that I remember. The Chicago artist's 100-plus large-scale cards include images of fruit, flowers and animals. But there are no stickers saying FOR EXPORT ONLY on the fruit in Milton Bradley's Memory, and the Taco Bell Chihuahua isn't among the animals I recall.

Suárez, a DePaul professor who was born in Puerto Rico, parodies Memory to address the challenges facing America's Latino population. Racism, anti-immigration panic and economic injustice shape many of her hand-painted, collaged or digitally printed works, which are beautifully executed but—considered together—a little too simplistic.

The artist arranges her cards in a game in progress that covers three gallery walls, leaving some unturned. The backs of these *Texto/Naming* cards spell out 39 names for Latinos ranging from neutral terms to slurs. Unlike the original Memory, "Memoria" emphasizes complementary rather than identical pairs. As they notice the subtle shifts within dyads, viewers think harder about Suárez's message. Two cards depict a smiling girl: Though her features are the same in both images, one painting portrays her as Caucasian, the other as dark-skinned. Would we react the same way to the two in real life? (The blond white girl is the artist's daughter. So much for stereotypes.)

Though Suárez's board-game format makes her work unusually accessible, it prevents her from addressing Latino issues and history in depth. One card reproduces a 1956 photograph of braceros—Mexican guest workers—being sprayed with DDT as they enter the U.S., but "Memoria" provides little context for this horrifying scene. Fortunately, Suárez leads discussions throughout the show's run, including Saturday 11 at the HPAC, so such episodes won't be forgotten.—*Lauren Weinberg*

