

“Geoff McFetridge - It's like whittling an infinite stick, like whittling a blob”

Lara Delmage / December 3, 2019



Although those disinterested in the world art and graphics may not necessarily be familiar with the name Geoff McFetridge, they will be very familiar with his work. An ode to simplicity, McFetridge's artwork has the capacity to represent a series of seemingly disparate brands, from Nike to Waterstones, while also staying true to his own artistic oeuvre.

Not only limited to gallery walls and advertisements, Geoff has collaborated with the film industry in his artistic contributions for the film *Her*. He has also nurtured multiple companies of his own. One of such companies is Pottok, selling fabrics, tote bags and wallpaper adorned with his old designs with a view to de-commodify his art by commodifying it. In conversation, despite his clear talent and renown, McFetridge remains humbled and is open about his own self-doubt, something that we all – great artists or not – experience.

**It says on your website that you find the question of who your influences are very uninteresting, so conversely, have you recognised ways in which your work has influenced others?**

Ha! Thank you for reading my website – I am scared of what it says on there. I do think that I have been influential in a way. Definitely, there are aspects of my work that have been influential in a purely visual way. I would like to think that the biggest influence I have had, I think, is my sort of independent, art-based approach to design, how I operate and how that reflects on what sort of things I make and what they look like. In an era where many jobs either don't exist or are terrible, being independent and flexible becomes pretty relevant.



My Left Is Your Right (Always) 2018

**You said in an interview before that you are “a circular thinker” – that you “write in circles. I speak in circles.” Can you explain what you meant by this?**

It is harder to explain in writing but something I draw all the time. The bent pencil that draws and erases itself. The guy walking in a circle, his head becoming the stepping stone he steps off of. Many of my works propose thinking that is familiar, but essentially unravel that familiarity. It is not just answering a question with another question, it is like composing a poem out of words we know but only vaguely understand. I take those words and give them new meanings, misnomers.

**Form is central to your paintings, drawings and animations. What is it about form that compels you so?**

I guess that I believe in form, that form can answer things, and that form is a place where formal invention can resolve what sort of stuff I think about. I think of how a potter pots, how the pots reflect their hands, the shape of their body. I think form is like this. It reveals complex realities of its maker. Or in a messy painting, a very painterly painting, an abstract painterly painting... it is not looked at as unfinished. But there is a suggestion that the viewer will bring some resolution, something that is legible, or maybe a poetic reading of what is seen on the canvas. My ideal is to create work that is legible and maybe of a genre but still proposes this poetic reading by the viewer.

**There is often an element of humour in your work. Is this calculated or accidental? Do you believe that art can be funny, as a phenomenon that is taken so seriously?**

It is definitely not calculated. The way I create work is how you might develop a logo or something. Sketching in a meditative but problem-solving way. Often, funny stuff comes out of this. Like a spill-off of wandering thoughts. I think we all understand that funny is on a sliding scale. Funny can be stupid or very serious and profound. Funny can speak to the gaps in our understanding of things. When funny describes our world well, you often end up with something that is quite hilarious; it is the shock of the familiar.

**You've said before that, "My paintings are as much rooted in logos as they are in art history." Which logos would you say have inspired you the most and why? Would you say that advertising design is art?**

The Rolling Stones lips, MoonEyes – I like logos that are things or when logos are animals or body parts. It is a twisted thing we accept, beautiful and mundane. Or the STP logo, FedEx or Ration, where pure graphics can dominate our perception. Logos play with what makes things legible to us, they add to the lexicon. I make work that is the antithesis of the 'logo rip-off'. I want to put things into the lexicon, I want to build with the subatomic-molecules-of-language, not the alphabet.

**You started your own skateboard company, Solitary Arts to provide people with equipment that was beyond the conventional. Why is it that you conceived this?**

**I guess I am interested in perception. I am interested in the linguistics of everything. Like, what about skateboarding without ollies? Why is skateboarding centred around performance?**

I have had many experiences through skateboarding, surfing and long-distance running where I have had a paradigm shift; my understanding changes. I think this is a type of nourishment that is so important. I saw Solitary Arts as nourishment for skateboarding, a way of looking at something beautiful with a new language.

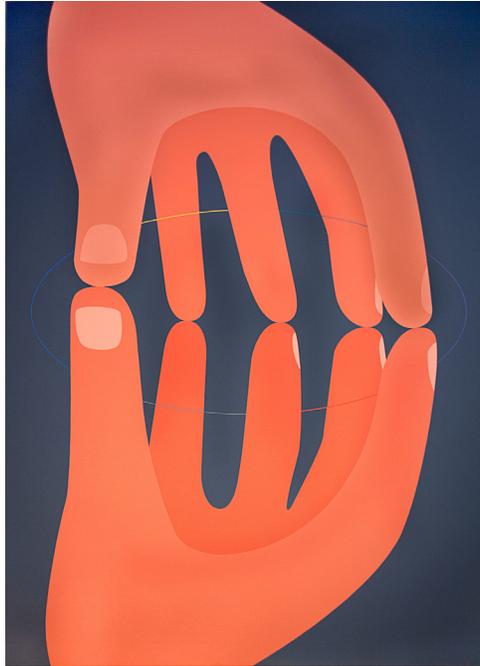
**You also have another company, Pottok, which you started with Sarah DeVincentis, which centres around making and selling wallpaper and fabric printing with designs from your art installations. How do you feel about commodifying art in this way that is very 'everyday', liberated from the confines of the gallery walls?**

Pottok comes out of my very first shows, so it's interesting to talk about it, to talk a bit about those shows, my history. In those early shows, I wanted to de-commodify my art by commodifying it. To have people walk on the art, but as rugs, to package drawings like candy, to have anything painted be on the wall or panels so nothing could be sold. I would have a stretched canvas with a print on it and that same print be on a lampshade or a couch. I wanted the work to be like Ikea but secretly handmade. It was almost unhealthy for me, personally. I was forcing something that was conceptual that I think was related to having low expectations of myself. It was definitely unsustainable.

I became burdened with these processes and decided it was ok to make things that were special, one-of-a-kind and beautiful. I started to take one aspect of what I was doing (painting) and focus on it. Pottok comes from still wanting to make fabric and wallpaper because it is truly beautiful, and printmaking is a big part of my work. Everything is handprinted. It is a functional way to perpetuate the work I first did for my early installations but in a way that put it out in the world, rather than keeping it in galleries. I consider it art, but I like that people buy it just because they like it, that it looks nice in their home.

**You are very active on Tumblr. How, in your view, are social networking platforms like this changing art today?**

Some see that there is something sacrilegious about art removed from a gallery context. It has been such a positive change for me. Instagram and Tumblr are these loose ways to show work that is otherwise never seen. It is such a relief to be able to share work directly without the confines of gallery acceptance or permission. I am careful with what I share, that it adds and doesn't take away from the experience of people who work in other ways. But most people, even those close to me, only see what I do by my sharing images on Instagram.



Elliptical Fader II 2019

**You've done a multitude commissioned works, from Foot Locker to Nike. Many artists find little satisfaction in having to work with a brief, preferring instead to work on their personal projects. Do you share this sentiment? Have you had to change your style to suit a more commercial purpose?**

Most commissions I do really have a very loose or no brief. I consider part of the project a questioning of the project in order to enliven or revise the brief to be compelling. These are the projects I take on that are most successful. If a project is not open to this sort of creative input from me, it is not worth people working with me. This is because my visual solutions are often simple but the thinking is very important. To just use me for my style, for form, creates a sort of flattened... deflated version of what I do. Like when you see work that copies me, it's like zombie McFetridge. Yawn.

**What has been your favourite collaboration with a brand and why?**

New Yorker Tote bags? If we can call the New Yorker a brand. I like to straddle worlds. That is the best part of collaborations. To surf with Joel Tudor through my logos on his boat or to work with rarified brands like Hermès. So much of my life, and people in my life have come out of this type of work – travelling, making art... having real experiences under the auspices of collaboration.

**Your work seems like it has been reduced to only the most essential elements at times. Could you talk a little bit about your creative process? Do you start with a mass of elements and whittle it down? Or does the simplicity come naturally?**

Simplicity seems to come out of my process. But here's a long answer: I usually start with writing or a thought, something to aim for. It might be something from weeks or months before I sit down to sketch. Then I start to draw in coil-bound books. So on each page will be thumbnail like notations of thoughts, usually small so they are quick and not involved. As I work, I begin to isolate things. I will draw frames around things. The frames say, this is a singular image, it is not a piece in this whole page of things. As I continue for many pages, I can start to flip backwards in the book and see where I maybe could elaborate or change course from where I started. I can start to do versions of my own thinking.



Coyotes Wag Their Tails 2018

From these sketches, I then mark things that I think are interesting. Then, from these, I move to semitransparent animation paper, where I draw more finished things, sometimes in paint or ink. These drawings are how I will really come down to what a painting will be like. Sometimes I scan these and colour them or trace them digitally and then redraw them. Almost everything I make passes through the computer at some point.

So a part of this process is about how can I do something with the least amount of image. But since it is almost always drawing from my head, all the work is done in this super plastic infinite space. Should the image change? Should I look at it from a different angle? Could this be done with shapes instead of figures? Could I take a ten-frame animation and make it work as a single image? But that thinking is there from the start. It's like whittling an infinite stick. It's like whittling a blob.