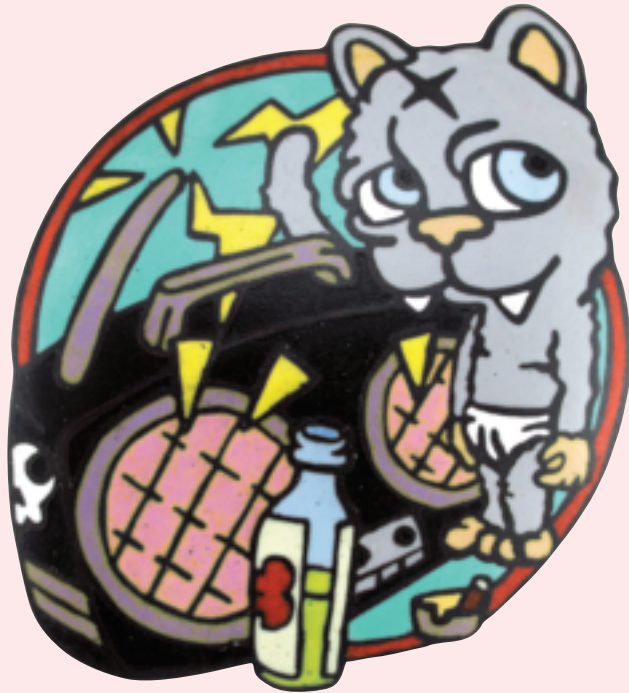


Tooning
into
Enamel
Zachery
Lechtenberg
and
Aurélie
Guillaume

BY TONI GREENBAUM

ZACHERY LECHTENBERG
Fur All the Beat (brooch), 2015
 copper, silver, steel, enamel
 3 x 3 x 1/4"
 PHOTO: ZACHERY LECHTENBERG



AURÉLIE GUILLAUME
Tulipes et petit pois (brooch), 2015
 enamel on copper, fine silver,
 sterling silver, powdercoat,
 stainless steel, micro glass beads
 5 x 4 5/8 x 5/8"
 PHOTO: ANTHONY MCLEAN

ZACHERY LECHTENBERG
Rat / Oni (pins), 2016
 copper, silver, steel, enamel
 1 1/4 x 2 x 1/4"; 1 1/2 x 1 x 1/4"
 PHOTO: ZACHERY LECHTENBERG



ZACHERY LECHTENBERG
Round Cluster (series) (brooches), 2015
 copper, silver, steel, enamel
 diameter 2 1/2" each
 PHOTO: ZACHERY LECHTENBERG

ALTHOUGH WORKING SEPARATELY and in different countries, Zachery Lechtenberg and Aurélie Guillaume share the same agenda of imbuing traditional enamelwork with fresh iconography. Lechtenberg is American, Guillaume Québécoise. They both make figurative enamel jewelry: Lechtenberg in champlévé, Guillaume cloisonné. They are twenty-somethings empowered by the dissonant vibe of the street. Contemporary, timely and edgy, they channel what some refer to as “skateboard culture” through their graphic art—influenced by graffiti and cartoon imagery—to express the energy, color, animation, and humor of today’s youth. Their results are capricious and witty, though, admittedly, at times, disquieting.

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Nonetheless, Guillaume’s and Lechtenberg’s meticulous practices are rooted in pristine craftsmanship, traditional metalsmithing, and fine

enameling. They wish to make pieces that will last and may be handed down through generations.

Lechtenberg encourages public interaction with his artworks; consequently, he pays careful attention to presentation, marketing, and distribution. For his 2015 master’s thesis at East Carolina University, he designed and installed a “pop up” shop, replete with one-of-a-kind enamel jewelry cradled within custom boxes, each one topped by an original drawing of the piece, along with T-shirts, skateboards, ashtrays, and stickers/slaps that also depicted his personal iconography. Ed Templeton, founder of the skateboard company Toy Machine, inspired Lechtenberg by enlisting his company as a platform for his artwork, which includes illustrations, texts, and photographs.

One of Lechtenberg’s main goals is to expand the connoisseurship for contemporary jewelry, and he believes that by using interdisciplinary imagery, he might lure his fans to that end. Having been raised in a Western consumer society, Lechtenberg states that he finds collecting a source



ZACHERY LECHTENBERG
*Object Grouping (Skateboard, T-shirt,
 Plate, Ashtray, Brooch, and Stickers),
 2015*
 mixed mediums
 dimensions varied
 PHOTO: ZACHERY LECHTENBERG



ZACHERY LECHTENBERG
Tiger Style (plate), 2015
 laser engraved enamelware
 diameter 10"

ZACHERY LECHTENBERG
Set Sail (brooch), 2016
 copper, silver, steel, enamel
 3 x 2 3/4 x 1/4"
 PHOTO: ZACHERY LECHTENBERG



of "comfort,"¹ and is, indeed, a collector of contemporary artifacts himself, particularly vinyl "art" toys, which are, like his own practice, a reflection of material culture. Lechtenberg signs his pieces "Yotburd," which is a compound of the verb "yot" (to unite closely, fasten, or rivet) and "burd" (for Buried Underground Residential Distribution). By amalgamating objects, themes from popular culture, installation and commerce, Lechtenberg aligns himself with other artists who construct similar immersive experiences, such as Cheryl Donegan, Pia Camil, Misha Kahn, and Kiosk.²

As undergraduate fine arts students, Lechtenberg, who attended Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, and Guillaume, at Cégep du Vieux Montréal, both concentrated on drawing. They were influenced by all manner of street art: the raw imagery painted on building facades, abandoned houses, staircases, billboards, bus shelters, and cars. Lechtenberg is an accomplished illustrator. He uses either pen and ink or a black felt micron pen and Prismacolor markers on paper, a technique he still practices

with aplomb for the sketches that accompany his jewelry. His desire to cover three-dimensional objects with a lexicon of personal imagery, in fact, initially led him to jewelry, which he regards as a link between the drawings and domestic items that include an arsenal of laser-engraved enamel plates, wood cutting boards, and the like.

Like most of his generation, Lechtenberg grew up watching a lot of television, particularly animated shows. Matt Groening's *The Simpsons* and later series *Futurama*, in particular, had an enormous visual impact on Lechtenberg's zany cast of characters. Another of Lechtenberg's major influences is Brooklyn-based painter/illustrator/sculptor/toy designer KAWS (Brian Donnelly), who incidentally satirized *The Simpsons* in his "Package Paintings" series, *The Kimpsons*. Notable for reworking familiar icons such as Mickey Mouse, the Michelin Man, and the Smurfs into formats suitable for sneakers, clothing, liquor bottles, and cosmetics packaging, KAWS inspires Lechtenberg with his facility to reimagine his graphics within a consumer context.

California artists Margaret Kilgallen, who died in 2001, and her husband, Barry McGee, captivated Lechtenberg with installations that organized their small paintings into dense, wall-mounted assemblages, which exhibited the former's sensitivity to social issues and the latter's ability to capture people in caricature. Lechtenberg also admires them for their riffs on consumerism, as in Kilgallen's montages of her own handpainted "Mom and Pop" store signage, and McGee's 2006 portrait sketch of *Ray Fong* for a yellow-accented Adidas shoe, based on McGee's appearance at age eight and named after the artist's uncle.

Hallmarks of famed Japanese artists Yoshitomo Nara and Takashi Murakami are evident in Lechtenberg's characterizations as well, particularly the innocent but duplicitous nature of Nara's anime-like children and the anime/manga/otaku aesthetic of fashion favorite Murakami, whose collaboration with Louis Vuitton is legendary. Lechtenberg's colorfully enameled brooch series "Round Clusters" was directly informed by Murakami's "Superflat" circular paintings, which highlight surface by relying upon flat planes, strong colors, and repetitive patterning, thus facilitating the transfer of artful images to commercial vehicles. Lechtenberg's enamelwork bridges the gap between the "flattish" planes in his jewelry and fully dimensional objects.

Although the individuals that populate Lechtenberg's world exist within a narrative framework, the "stories" are intended to engage a dialogue with collecting. Lechtenberg regards his characters as "symbols or objects...a collection of stickers...layered on top of one another...like a collector would fill his home."³ Lechtenberg's beings are, furthermore, chameleons, performers playing a multitude of roles, propelled into action by specific circumstances. *The Rat* and *ONI/Demon* occupy prominent positions in Lechtenberg's pantheon. Informed by Ed Roth's *Rat Fink*, who was obsessed with cars, *The Rat* represents a being likewise consumed by his passions.⁴ *ONI/Demon* embodies Lechtenberg's interest in Eastern philosophy, for example, the harmonious state represented by yin and yang. Although demons have been habitually associated with negative attributes, the whimsical *ONI/Demon* possesses positive energy, as well, thus creating a duality or imbalance—to Lechtenberg a symbol of the amusing paradox found in cynicism, as well as referencing Nara's polysemous anime.

Artist-craftsmen have also had a profound effect on Lechtenberg. Robert Ebendorf acted not only as a mentor but also introduced Lechtenberg to the impeccable craftsmanship of metalsmith Gary Knoffke, the entrepreneurial savvy of jeweler Jim Cotter, and down-home conviviality of artist Les Le Pere and his collaboration

with Ken Cory in the legendary Pencil Brothers, a foray into the subversive possibilities of champlevé enamel. With them, Lechtenberg found like-minded spirits

engaged with social satire; but where the iconoclastic Pencil Brothers traveled the anti-establishment road of 1970s West Coast funk, Lechtenberg eschews such counterculture anarchy, expressing instead unconditional love for material culture and its potential for aesthetic enrichment through tongue-in-cheek illustrations and objects. *Fur All the Beats*, a champlevé brooch from 2015, for example, centers on sharing musical collections with friends, while listening to them together on a boom box. Similarly, *Tiger Style*, a laser-engraved enamelware plate, also from 2015, is an ode to the Wu-Tang Clan, a hip-hop group that references Kung fu in their performances. Viewing them led Lechtenberg to scour bargain bins for their videos, which in turn triggered a desire to collect Kung fu.⁵

As with Lechtenberg's champlevé enamelwork, cartoon imagery forms the backbone of Guillaume's cloisonné. Like Lechtenberg, she does not derive her characters from storytelling. But where his populace, morphed from earlier studies of other artists' comics and cartoons, speaks of consumerism, hers are hybrids from personal life experiences, which include a childhood spent in the French West Indies, teen years in the south of France, and young adulthood in Francophonic Canada. Guillaume is enamored of underground Montréal cartoonists such as Simon Bossé, whose funny, densely charged compositions are legendary; Julie Doucet's *Dirty Plotte*, a provocative series of comic books satirizing bad relationships, menstruation, masturbation, and even her "life as a man"; French cartoonists Lewis Trondheim and Boulet (Gilles Roussel); and French illustrator/cartoonist Loïc Sécherresse, notable for his cover illustration for the *The Economist* magazine memorializing the Charlie Hebdo massacre. But unlike Lechtenberg's panoply, whose familiar visages reappear en masse on brooches, plates, and stickers, Guillaume's equivocal personages exist alone (save the occasional animal), navigating dreamlike atmospheres with obfuscated genesis and purpose.

Guillaume's vision is rooted in contradiction and ambiguity. Having grown up in three different French-speaking cultures, each with its own idiomatic slant on the language, she developed a sense of irony-in-meaning; for example, she relates how the phrase "C'est écoeurant" means "It's disgusting!" in France but "It's awesome!" in Québec. This double meaning is cogently illustrated by her brooch, *Tulipes et Petit Poils* ("Prickly Tulips"). Informed in part by François Rabelais's series of 16th-century tales about the giant Gargantua and his son Pantagruel, the jewel amiably contrasts the subject's obesity—inspired by Pantagruel's, and regarded in most circles as grotesque—with his true persona, which is delicate and childlike, represented for Guillaume by a rosy complexion, smiling, freckled face, tulip-patterned jumpsuit, and pinwheel-mounted cap.

Monsieur Louis, a dandy with aristocratic bearing but his head in a fog, represents the affecting contradiction between material excess and the deficits of the poor. As in *Tulipes et Petit Poils*, *Monsieur Louis* is bursting with symbols; for example, the clouds on his lavender coat limn a

As with Lechtenberg's champlevé enamelwork, cartoon imagery forms the backbone of Guillaume's cloisonné.



AURÉLIE GUILLAUME
Monsieur Louis (brooch), 2015
 enamel on copper, fine silver,
 sterling silver, powdercoat,
 stainless steel
 3 1/2 x 5 1/8 x 3/4"
 PHOTO: ANTHONY MCLEAN



AURÉLIE GUILLAUME
Rendez-vous Fleuri (brooch), 2015
 enamel on copper, fine silver,
 sterling silver, powdercoat,
 stainless steel, micro glass beads
 2 3/8 x 6 1/4 x 3/8"
 PHOTO: JACOB MAILMAN

dreamlike state, encouraging the viewer to ask: Is he in denial? Insensitive? Or just oblivious? Similarly detached and duplex are the ghoulish figures of the *Rendez-vous Fleuri* ("Flowery Meeting") series. Having evolved from a parade of smiling ghosts once encountered during the aimless wanderings of Guillaume's disillusioned bureaucrat Mr. Herbert and his downtrodden, neurotic dog, Monsieur Poodle (formerly immortalized in a series of screen-prints), the brooch's enamel specter boasts a white, masklike face and carnivalesque attire; and as with the hordes of revelers participating in the raucous festivities surrounding Mardi Gras in the Caribbean and Mexico's Day of the Dead, it simultaneously acknowledges and mocks death.

Guillaume is intimately connected to the sea, having lived near an ocean in three out of four habitats: the island of Martinique, Cannes, and Halifax, where she received her graduate degree from NSCAD University (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design). Her brooches *Barbe mauve* and *Konk* flaunt nautical themes. The former, based on the miscreant named

in the title of the famous 17th-century French folk tale *Barbe Bleue* ("Blue Beard"), "barbe à papa" (French for cotton candy), and *Barbapapa* (popular French children's cartoon), sports a pineapple in his jacket pocket (the sailor's emblem for welcome) while the latter holds a conch shell, which is listening to him, rather than the other way around.

Both Lechtenberg and Guillaume make a point of reminding us that although depictive, their imagery is purposefully vague, conceived to appeal to each viewer's

They stand apart from most other jewelers of their generation in the refreshing way in which they combine old and new.

particular set of references and psychological makeup. They stand apart from most other jewelers of their generation in the refreshing way in which they combine old and new; another ironic, if congenial, manifestation of their respective oeuvres. Rather than bee-lining to



AURÉLIE GUILLAUME
Barbe mauve (brooch), 2015
 enamel on copper, sterling silver,
 fine silver, 24k gold, powdercoat,
 steel, microglass beads
 3 3/4 x 4 3/4 x 3/4"
 PHOTO: JACOB MAILMAN



AURÉLIE GUILLAUME
Konk (brooch), 2015
 enamel on copper, sterling silver,
 fine silver, 24k yellow gold,
 powdercoat, steel
 4 7/8 x 4 1/8 x 3/4"
 PHOTO: JACOB MAILMAN

the latest technological advance or shocking material, they consider their methods and mediums prudently and opt for quality and longevity. For artists on the cutting edge, they're pretty old-school, embracing time-honored practices and exacting formats, while turning to alternative methods only when one is the best solution.

Aurélie Guillaume and Zachery Lechtenberg meld the hard-won progress of the past with the exuberant optimism of the present day. In the best Québécois sense of the phrase, "C'est ecoeurant!"—It's awesome!

Toni Greenbaum, an art historian specializing in 20th- and 21st-century jewelry and metalwork, lectures internationally and teaches theory and criticism of contemporary jewelry at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

1. Transcript, Zachery Lechtenberg MFA Thesis (East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, School of Art and Design, April 2015), *An Interview with Yotburd: Creating as a Collector*, p.1.
2. Cheryl Donegan and Pia Camil were each the subject of solo exhibitions at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in early 2016;

the former presented a "concept store" and the latter an installation that invited visitors to exchange items of their own for those on display. Misha Kahn's *Mall Girl*—an installation in the guise of a "pop-up" shop—was organized by Gallery Loupe in spring 2015; it featured jewelry, lighting, an inflated "fountain," and even hand-blown glass perfume bottles—each one capped by a unique wig. Kiosk promotes itself as "a place, an installation, a store, a happening, a whatever." Consisting of inexpensive objects that have been gleaned from marketplaces around the world, Kiosk has a commercial website and "bricks and mortar" location on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Kiosk was installed in a dedicated gallery during the exhibition, Greater New York, at MoMA PS1 from October 11, 2015–March 7, 2016; Kiosk currently occupies a section of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum Shop.

3. Email correspondence between author and Zachery Lechtenberg, March 12, 2016.
4. Ed "Big Daddy" Roth (March 4, 1932–April 4, 2001) was an artist/illustrator/cartoonist/pinstriper and custom car designer best known for his comic hot rod icon "Rat Fink," Roth's perverse answer to Mickey Mouse. One can still purchase T-shirts, toys, decals, and other collectibles from Rat Fink's eponymous website.
5. Email correspondence between author and Zachery Lechtenberg, July 12, 2016.