

NEA ARTS

NUMBER 4. 2016



MAKING
ART
HAPPEN



THIS ISSUE

Actors, singers, authors, painters, dancers—when it comes to the arts, it's central characters such as these who get the lion's share of the spotlight. But truth be told, these figures represent only the tiniest fraction of the cultural landscape. For every artwork created, there is a massive cast of supporting characters, from editors and stagehands to agents and costume designers. Rarely heralded, these unsung heroes are in large part responsible for making art happen.

In this issue of *NEA Arts*, we go behind the scenes with individuals—many of them trained artists themselves—who help bring the art we celebrate to life. We'll see how Ellen Freund, the Hollywood property master behind *Mad Men*, sets the scene with objects sometimes scrounged from grandmothers' garages. We'll hear how lighting designer Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew integrates art and science to create entire environments through light. We'll see the coordination and details that go into executing a performance at Millennium Park, and will explore the process of making the perfect pair of pointe shoes. We'll also talk with book designer Rodrigo Corral—who designed this issue's cover—about how he balances artistry and marketing for manuscripts that often become bestsellers.

There are countless other professions involved in the arts, each of them fascinating and creative in their own right. As you read through this issue, we hope you'll gain a better sense of the myriad pieces and people that help make art happen.



01

Making the Character Whole

The Importance of Objects to Property Master Ellen Freund

BY HADLEY DESMEULES

06

Telling Stories with Light

The World of Lighting Designer Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew

BY PAULETTE BEETE

10

Controlled Chaos

At the Pritzker Pavilion with Stage Manager Dayna Calderón

BY JESSICA GASSETT

14

When the Shoe Fits, Dance in It

The Art of Making Pointe Shoes with Capezio

BY VICTORIA HUTTER

18

Judging a Book by Its Cover

Reading Along with Book Designer Rodrigo Corral

BY REBECCA SUTTON

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Props from the television series *Mad Men* were displayed during the 2016 Modernism Week in Palm Springs, California.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FREUND/TOWSTEGO



MAKING THE CHARACTER WHOLE

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBJECTS TO PROPERTY MASTER ELLEN FREUND

BY HADLEY DESMEULES

“E

VERY PERSON I ENCOUNTER IS A collection of what they carry and what they wear,” said Hollywood property master Ellen Freund. “What kind of glasses? What kind of watch? Do they have a pen in their pocket? What else do they have in their pockets?” It is Freund’s job to bring characters we see onscreen to life in the same way by assembling props that express their personalities and experiences. She has worked on AMC’s award-winning series *Mad Men*, films such as *Night at the Museum* and Tom Ford’s recent *Nocturnal Animals*, and is currently in production for the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*.

“I always try to start from the point of view of creating a character and telling a story. That’s what I love,” Freund explained. “Each character has objects that make that character whole. It’s what you carry in your pocket. It’s what you wear on your wrist. It’s what kind of eyeglasses you choose. It’s what’s in your purse. It’s those things that make you you.”

While some of these props are featured prominently in a show or film, many are seen on camera only for a split-second; sometimes, they are not seen at all. Yet even those props invisible to a viewer are crucial on a set. “Something [the actors] often said on *Mad Men* is they never opened a drawer without knowing that what was in that drawer was going to be something that belonged

to them,” said Freund. “That enables an actor to stay in their character and that is a major contribution that I can make.”

Situated in the art department, property masters oversee the procurement or production of props, as well as their maintenance and care. The amount of props required for a given production is staggering. The series *13 Reasons Why*, for example, has 13 episodes, each of which has a 60-page script. Freund estimates that every page calls for ten to 12 distinct props. So when shooting an episode a week, Freund is responsible for roughly 600-720 objects. Sometimes props must be created, but very often it is a matter of searching for and acquiring the right items, whether that’s the latest iPhone, a personalized notebook, or a specific Bic pen from 1956.

How does a property master even begin to narrow down this near infinite shopping list? It starts with the script and proceeds with a great deal of collaborating with various production staff to establish some guidelines. “Let’s say I’m doing a film that has 12 main characters. Each one of those characters will have a gender, age, social strata, profession—all of those things that make a person who they are,” said Freund. “I’ll get together with the costume designer and the set decorator. What kind of furniture does this person have? Do they collect old dolls? Or do they have a teacup collection? What are the things that make this person this person?”

Even as she brings the idiosyncrasies of a character to life, it is also Freund’s responsibility to ensure these unique elements still form a cohesive production. “I’ll go to the production designer and see if we have a color theme,” she said. “If everyone else is creating a somber tone, I don’t want to show up with a yellow teacup. I want to make sure that what I do blends and supports with what everyone else does.”

The nature of the work demands that prop masters are essentially encyclopedias about what objects are most appropriate for a given profession, age, time period, etc. “You are the one they turn to and say, ‘So when the ambulance pulls up, does the EMT have a belt on or a badge, and do they wear gloves?’” In order to answer these questions, Freund has to do an incredible amount of research. In many ways this has been made easier by the Internet, but Freund still prefers to speak with someone knowledgeable about the period or specific item. “I do as much [online] research as possible but I always try to get out in the world too,” she said. “It’s easy to sit at your computer and think you’re seeing the choice of every backpack a teenager could carry. But until you go out and stand near a high school and see what kids are actually carrying, until you’re looking at people and going to the mall where those kids would shop, you’re not getting a sense of what’s really there.”

▶
Ellen Freund on set.
PHOTO COURTESY OF
FREUND/TOWSTEGO





“Something [the actors] often said on *Mad Men* is they never opened a drawer without knowing that what was in that drawer was going to be something that belonged to them. That enables an actor to stay in their character and that is a major contribution that I can make.”

▲ Ellen Freund designed a bar cart for every character on *Mad Men*. Every detail was personalized, from the liquor and glassware to the condiments and mixers.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FREUND/TOWSTEGO

▼
For the film *Danny Collins*, starring Al Pacino, Freund and her team created albums, CDs, tickets, and even backstage passes to represent the 40-year career of an aging rock star.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
FREUND/TOWSTEGO

When Freund is looking for an historical item, such as for *Mad Men*, she defers to collectors and specialists. Her “cadre of experts,” as she calls them, includes collectors of old bottles, pens, eyeglasses, and other miscellaneous items. One notable specialist is her “pen guy.” “The great thing about my pen guy is that he’s not a guy who collects fancy fountain pens,” she said. “He’s a guy who collects the Bic pen and he can tell me what every schoolchild would have carried in every year.”

Her specialists also compel her to take on additional detective work to ensure absolute accuracy. “If I look on eBay and see a bottle that they say [is a] 1920s soda, I don’t really know that they know it’s 1920s soda,” she said. “I want to find the advertisement that shows me a picture

of that bottle that’s actually dated from a magazine from 1920. Because if I put in a bottle and it’s 1923 [in the production], my bottle guy will surely call me up and say, ‘That bottle didn’t come out until 1928.’ That’s the phone call I don’t ever want to get.”

Her detective work can occasionally turn into door-to-door searches for historic ephemera that most people would never think to save. “It’s easy to find the fancy stuff that people consider collectible,” she said. “It’s not easy to find the quotidian objects that people consider trash once they run out of ink or once the liquor is gone from the whiskey bottle. That’s when you have to delve deep and find people’s grandparents who have a liquor cabinet that’s been in their house from the ‘60s and they don’t



drink a lot.” In some cases, it comes down to asking people, “Is your grandmother alive? Has she lived in the same house since the ‘50s? Would it be okay if I went through her garage?”

Sometimes finding an artist is the best way to find a unique item. She once turned to an artist in Petaluma, California, for the perfect “sad teacup” that fit a depressed character’s persona. For *13 Reasons Why*, she found an artist in Detroit whose purses made from old mailbags were ideal for a character Freund described as a “rebellious artist.” “To me that’s the greatest find—one artist somewhere [whose work] doesn’t look like anything else,” she said. “If I can make something personal and at the same time I can spend my budget supporting the arts in addition to creating a character, then that’s what I’m in favor of. It’s an extension of voting with my dollar.”

Then there is the question of age. Once she has found the perfect object, she has to make sure it looks appropriately used. “When I go to the paint department with an object, say a briefcase, I’ll go to them and say, “This briefcase is two years old and the character commutes every day on the train,” she said. “So it’s rubbed around on the floor every day. Or [the character] bought it last week and is guarding it carefully, so there’s almost no aging to it. I have to make a choice with every object I bring into that character’s world.”

Despite the incredible lengths Freund goes to in her work, she said the best mark of a job well done is not even realizing she had a job at all. “Honestly, you shouldn’t notice what I do,” she said. “You as a viewer should not notice it except to have it be part of the story. I don’t want [a prop] to leap out and take more than its fair share of your attention. You need to pay attention to the story, not the really cool watch [a character] wears.” ▲



“If I can make something personal and at the same time I can spend my budget supporting the arts in addition to creating a character, then that’s what I’m in favor of.”

▲ Detroit artist Matt Strickland of Warpath Leather Goods made this bag using old mail sacks. Ellen Freund thought it was perfect for the character of Skye from *13 Reasons Why*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FREUND/TOWSTEGO

TELLING STORIES WITH *Light*

THE WORLD OF
LIGHTING DESIGNER
JEANETTE OI-SUK YEW

BY PAULETTE BEETE

► **Act Two of *Ludic Proxy* by Aya Ogawa. Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew served as production designer for this multilingual, multimedia play, which presented the challenge of transforming one room into three distinct settings.**

PHOTO BY CAROL ROSEGG

LISTEN TO A THEATER AUDIENCE LEAVING a performance of, say, Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* or Katori Hall's *The Blood Quilt* and you'll hear them talk about a lot of things: the story itself, how much they liked (or didn't like) the costumes, whether the music was as good live as it is on the official cast album, or how they wish they owned some piece of furniture from the set. What you probably won't hear them talk about is the production's lighting design. While most people get excited for the moment that the house lights dim and the stage lights start to shimmer, very few can articulate how the overall lighting design affected their experience of the show.

This is no surprise to veteran lighting designer Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew who's long made her peace with the fact that audiences rarely have an idea of what her work entails—or even that her job exists. “I've been to many different gatherings with people who are not necessarily in the theater. [When I say I work in theater,] they'll say, 'Oh, are you an actor? Are you a director? Are you a playwright?' And then they kind of stop there.”

She observed that part of the difficulty in understanding what she does is that the work isn't tangible. “If I said that I make costumes, they'd go, 'Oh, I get it. That's what they're wearing.' Or if I said that I made the set, people get it. But with lighting design, it's sort of like, 'Oh well, aren't you just turning lights on?'”

Lighting design is in fact equal parts art and science and involves a lot more than just turning the lights on and off. As Yew described her work, “I'm building the basis of what this light feels like in this space.” As a lighting designer, Yew has to understand not just the physical properties of light, but its emotional properties. She also has to understand how light works given a particular set of constraints, such as the dimensions of the set or the palette of the costumes. As she works, Yew ponders questions such as whether the space should feel environmental or magical. Does it need to have a lot of contrasts? Does it need to feel very emotional?

For a recent project, for example, Yew had to imagine the world of a cemetery waiting room. She explained, “The core of the story was about two people suffering a lot of



grief and trying to make a connection with each other in a very unusual and sterilized space. So that is what I'm thinking about a lot as a designer. What is this space? What is this environment that this story is unfolding within? [My thinking] is very architectural-based in some ways."

In the early days of what we think of as the modern theater, theatrical lighting was rudimentary at best, comprising candles and then gaslights. The history of theater—and other forms of performance such as dance—is rife with stories of performers setting themselves on fire by getting too close to the footlights. By the 1900s, with the advent of the electric light bulb, performances could include specific illumination—such as spotlights—as well as general lighting. Still, lighting effects were usually the purview of the set designer. It wasn't until the 1930s that lighting design evolved into its own specialty.

While Yew bears ultimate responsibility for the lighting design, her work is rooted in collaboration. As Yew related, the design process starts with a series of conversations with the production's director and the entire design team

about "what is this world that we're trying to create so that this story can exist."

After getting a handle on what a particular work is about, the next step is for the director and design team to discuss possible challenges. "Every single piece that you do, there are some things that you are challenged by, [such as] some impossible stage direction or a limited budget," she explained.

Yew also attends rehearsals throughout her design process. "Because lighting design is a movement-based design and because we are dealing with a time-based element, the movement of how people react in space becomes very important," she said.

The final design isn't executed until technical rehearsals, which start a few days before the performance's first public showing. Few shows rehearse in the space in which they'll be performed, and when the space becomes available,



▲ **Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew.**

PHOTO BY HUNTER CANNING

sets must first be built and finalized, and performers must acclimate themselves to those sets. It is only then that lights are hung and positioned, color filters—known as gels—are installed, cues are set, and all the physical components of the lighting design are executed.

Yew calls lighting design “the last jigsaw puzzle piece because we don’t get to try anything earlier. The responsibility becomes about, ‘Okay, am I creating a total picture onstage?’ There’s nothing I can try out at all until I am in tech because we just don’t have the resources to set up lighting or be in the theater early. So all of my work is completely public. It has to be done with everybody in the room.”

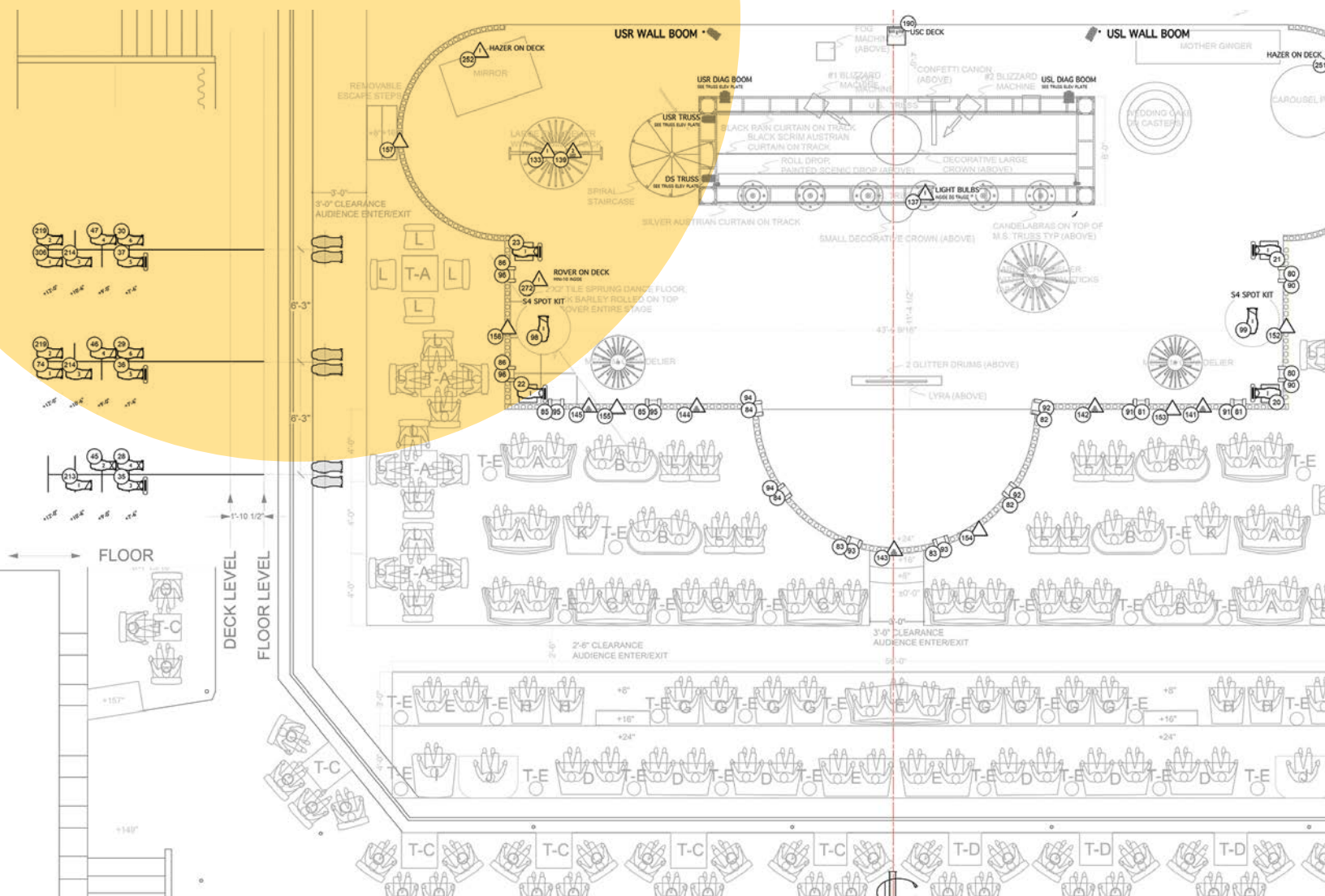
This public aspect of her work is particularly challenging as it demands not only exquisite attention to detail but a fair amount of multitasking. Yew said, “[It means] being able to really keep track of a lot of things thrown at you at the same time, like being able to hear the director and watch what’s on stage and keeping notes in your mind and keeping track of time. I guess that’s my superpower: being able to store all that information in an organized way and in a very short amount of time.”

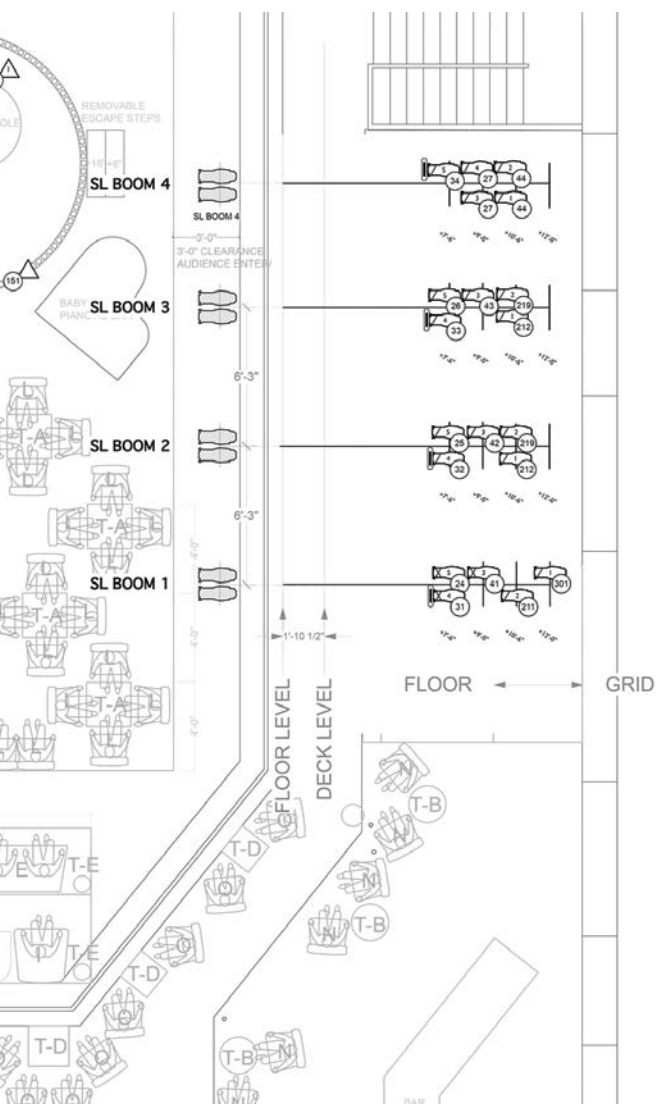
Like many theater professionals, Yew is a multi-hyphenate artist. In addition to her lighting design work, she also works in video and puppetry. Both art forms appeal to her because, like lighting design, they each have an ephemeral quality, albeit with an added element of concreteness that she embraces. Her exploration of these other forms also deeply informs her lighting work. Making videos allows her to further ponder the qualities of light from a different source, while working in puppetry helps her understand the creative process of a production as a whole. “With puppetry, similar to lighting, it forces me to think about the totality of the design, because as a puppeteer you think from beginning to end when you create work,” Yew explained. “You are the playwright, you are the costume designer, you are the set designer, you are the lighting designer.”

This ability to see multiple viewpoints also allows Yew to be clear-eyed about issues she sees in the theater field at large, such as the scarcity of women designers and designers of color within larger regional theaters or on Broadway. “I think there’s a little bit of a glass ceiling,” said Yew of working at that level. “My experience has

▼ A portion of the light plot for *Judge Me Paris* by Company XIV, which was performed at Brooklyn’s Irontale Theatre in 2016. A plot is a schematic road map for the position of the lighting instruments.

IMAGE COURTESY OF
JEANETTE OI-SUK YEW





been if I'm working in a non-regional theater or an off-off-Broadway theater, I encounter a lot more women designers and women behind the scenes, either the stage manager or dramaturge, or [positions] like that."

She believes the field needs more role models who identify as women or who are people of color so that a more diverse pool of people will be attracted to work in it. "If people can see that this costume designer is from Japan or from the Dominican Republic, then people will see that this is possible." Yew cites economics as another barrier to having a more diverse workforce in theater. "As a designer it's hard to make a living. If you're coming from an already economically challenging background, it's just hard to make that decision to go into the field." She also said that attitudes need to change in terms of identifying people by the function they perform instead of what they look like. "I know that when I walk into a room, people look at me as an Asian woman lighting designer. They're not looking at me as a lighting designer."

Despite these challenges, Yew remains optimistic about her work and is game to take on new projects. Although she likes the ease of collaborating with colleagues with whom she's previously worked, she particularly likes "projects that I don't know anything about to challenge myself," she said. "It's also about practice for me." She's especially drawn to new works "because there's a whole discovery process. I look at every opportunity as a way to grow and learn more." ▲

▲ Justin Perkin performs in *Are They Edible?*, an immersive, multisensory puppetry adaptation of *The Odyssey*. The show was conceived and directed by Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew, with lighting by Burke Brown and set design by Torry Bend.

PHOTO BY HUNTER CANNING

CONTROLLED CHAOS

AT THE PRITZKER PAVILION WITH
STAGE MANAGER DAYNA CALDERÓN

BY JESSICA GASSETT

▶ **One of Dayna Calderón's favorite rituals is to stroll through the audience during Millennium Park concerts.**

PHOTO BY DAYNA CALDERÓN

THINK ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE CONCERT: THE SOUND of your favorite artist's voice. The people around you, dancing and cheering. The infectious energy. Your own voice, singing to whatever familiar song was playing at the time. It's easy to remember those elements of a live performance. But what about all of the other elements that made your concert experience magical? Do you remember the lighting? Do you remember the audio system, tuned to perfection? Do you remember the visuals?

Most people don't remember or even notice these details, but they are essential to the quality of live performance. These are the details that define Dayna Calderón's career. Calderón is stage manager for the Pritzker Pavilion in Chicago's Millennium Park, a venue known for the quality of the live performances it produces. Since it opened in 2004, Millennium Park has become one of Chicago's main artistic hubs, boasting fantastic public art and free performances. Right now, the park is filled with people ice-skating and participating in holiday events. However, in the warm months, the park's open-air, Frank Gehry-designed Pritzker Pavilion presents about 80 outdoor concerts per season.

As stage manager, Calderón is the production force behind these live performance series. During her time at Millennium Park, she has produced events ranging from the annual Chicago Gospel Festival to *Soul Train's* 40th Anniversary Celebration. She is responsible for every aspect of these live performances, from pre-production to final bows. Each performance requires a detailed list

of items needed and schedules for the production team and the artist. Most importantly, a team effort is required to guarantee the successful execution of the event.

Calderón's passion for production came from her experience producing live radio broadcasts. "I loved the whole live element of it," she said. "I loved what could possibly happen. Either your system will go down or a show will

OS



be cancelled or the artist isn't showing up. I live for that kind of controlled chaos."

She eventually took a job with the Old Town School of Folk Music—a frequent NEA grantee—where she started producing live performances. This eventually led her to work for Millennium Park. In addition to the 80 shows she does per season at the Pritzker, she also works on other music festivals and smaller performances as an independent contractor, including NEA-funded events such as the Make Music Festival.

When asked what her typical day looks like, Calderón said, "It depends on the day." If an event is in pre-production, she first has to review an artist's technical and hospitality requests, known as "riders," to make a list of what needs to be provided for the artist. This means everything from ordering the proper equipment for the band or artist to requesting culturally specific dishes from the caterer to making sure the dressing rooms are comfortable.

Calderón considers this type of hospitality an essential component of successful stage management. "I want every band to leave the Pritzker Pavilion saying, 'That was



▲ **Dayna Calderón with Colombian music group Herencia de Timbiquí at the Pritzker Pavilion during the 2016 World Music Festival.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAYNA CALDERÓN

▶ **Good food is a key part of keeping performers happy. Dayna Calderón relies on Millennium Park's caterer Jorgina Pereira, pictured here, to keep performers well-fed.**

PHOTO BY DAYNA CALDERÓN

the best experience I've had on my whole tour.' That's my goal. We've got the stage set for them ready to go. We've got a good meal waiting for them. We've got some nice facilities backstage for them to rest. We're keeping them on track so they don't have to be watching their clocks. It's a lot of logistics along the way about what needs to be done. But it's definitely giving them a little bit of mothering when they get there."

During a long tour, when artists are away from their families and sleeping on the road, this type of treatment is greatly appreciated. It can also help smooth things over when an artist's requests cannot be fulfilled. "If we can't get the amplifier that they really, really wanted and they complained about it the whole way, you give them a good meal and all is forgiven," she said. Other times, it's a matter of communication. "[It's] going back and seeing who can make a compromise on a number one keyboard to a number two keyboard, for instance. It's talking people

through, you know?" Calderón is prepared for these challenges and truly enjoys the pace of her work.

Finally, all of the planning culminates into one final event, and the schedules, logistics, and preparations are put into action. Those days are quite a bit more hectic than pre-production. She explained, "It's confirming your catering is coming in time. It's confirming that the backline rental is arriving on time, and as soon as it gets there checking it off, making sure it's the right order. And if something is missing, calling it in right away, making sure it's all in working order. If it's not working, we'll figure it out. It's working with the stagehands and making sure they've got their stage plots, helping to set up and [plan] how we're going to make our changeovers smooth. We only have 15 minutes between bands."

Although she is responsible for organizing the major elements, Calderón credits her team with an event's successful execution. "It's pretty much everybody involved

in it. It's the caterer. It's the maintenance. It's the monitor engineer. It's the people who are supplying our back-lighting. It's definitely the stagehands and the audio crew and the people who program [the event], who work so hard. The people in marketing. It's a lot of moving parts." This teamwork is one of the things that Calderón enjoys most about her job.

But even with foolproof planning, challenges always arise. One specific challenge of producing events at Millennium Park is the weather. "We're a slave to the weather," said Calderón. "But it is rain or shine, until it gets dangerous." Even on the most perfect of summer days, there is also the daily noise of urban living: the sirens, buses, and occasional rehearsals for air and water shows on Lake Michigan. Although she noted these sounds can be distracting for unamplified performers, such as an orchestra, she said, "Those are things that we deal with. We're not going to cancel a show because of this."

Certain events require more facilitation to properly execute, like the Chicago Gospel Festival, which Calderón said is one of the most challenging events she handles. "But believe it or not, it's my favorite festival, because it's dealing with so many people," she said. "We're talking about 100-plus voice choirs—not just one a day, several a day. It's coordinating all of those different tech riders from about five bands per day for a three-day period. And just dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't' and making sure you've got that right equipment." There are buses to park, backstage security lists to update, and space to find for the choirs before they perform. "But when that first beat hits, it's gospel in its glory," she said. "I can't help but smile and jump up with the spirit."

Multiveneue festivals present their own unique challenges as well. "You have to look at your schedule every day and [think] where am I today? Where are the shows today? Where's all of our equipment going? I set a lot of alarms," she laughed, which remind her what needs to happen and when.

If possible, one of Calderón's rituals during each performance is sitting out in the audience to get the full experience of the show. "I think my favorite moment is being out there in that audience," she said. "I make it a point to go out there to look at the audience. It's always such a great feeling to be out there to see people of all different ages, different ethnicities, races, economic backgrounds, older seniors to children. The different way people react to music is interesting to me."

Even with all of the challenges that come with the work that Calderón does, she enjoys her work and appreciates the opportunity to work in her industry. "I am blessed," she said. "I have a great gig. I couldn't think of anything else I would rather do." ▲

“I loved the whole live element of it. I loved what could possibly happen. Either your system will go down or a show will be cancelled or the artist isn't showing up. I live for that kind of controlled chaos.”







WHEN THE SHOE FITS *Dance* IN IT

THE ART OF MAKING POINTE SHOES
WITH CAPEZIO

BY VICTORIA HUTTER

ALL PHOTOS BY VICTORIA HUTTER

EVER SINCE 1796 WHEN CHOREOGRAPHER AND INVENTOR CHARLES DIDELOT attached wires to French dancers so they could skim the stage before actually leaving it, ballet dancers have tried to appear ethereal by rising to their toes. However, it would take many decades for the soft slippers and wires of Didelot's time to evolve into the pointe shoes that allow dancers not only to rise to their toes, but to stay there.

Today, pointe shoes have become a ballet dancer's most important piece of equipment. In addition to suggesting lightness, they significantly extend a dancer's range of motion, affording greater spin, speed, and visual interest as well as dramatic possibility. Pointe shoes are largely made with the same materials as decades ago—layers of fabric, stitched together and hardened by glue with a

Rows of finished pointe shoes, divided by dancer. A single cobbler at Capezio can produce as many as 80 shoes a day.



▲ Fabric is tightly pleated around a pointe shoe's "box," which will eventually encase a dancer's toes.

(Center) Rows of shoe lasts, which serve as the foundation for building pointe shoes.

leather sole and satin cover. Shoes are handmade, one by one, by cobblers in a process that evokes tradition, craft, and unheralded artistry.

Tony Sousa is one such cobbler. He plies his trade in a shoe factory in Little Falls, New Jersey, that is managed by Capezio—one of only a handful of pointe shoe manufacturers worldwide. The company has been in the dance shoe business since 1887 when Salvatore Capezio opened a theatrical shoe repair shop near New York City's original Metropolitan Opera House.

Sousa has been making pointe shoes for Capezio for 31 years. Originally from Portugal, he was hired by Capezio despite not having shoe-making experience, learning his craft on the job. It takes at least two years of training before a cobbler can specialize, becoming a "maker" for individual dancers.

The importance of such a maker is immense. In her book, *Winter Season: A Dancer's Journal*, author and former New York City Ballet dancer Toni Bentley said, "We each have a 'maker' designated by his mark on the shoe. I have Y, and there is a frightening rumor around that Mr. Y is dying or retiring. Well, we Y devotees are at a real loss. Some of us have already been given P—such messing around with our shoes...is not taken lightly!"

At Sousa's station at the factory, there are shelves of completed shoes and shoe lasts (the internal foot-like form) on one side and a small table in front with a nail gun, bowl of flour-based paste, and a variety of knives and implements.

Needless to say, it's not your usual factory setup. The size of the pointe shoe market—a niche among niches—

has been an advantage in a technology-driven world where individual handcrafting regularly falls victim to machines. Paul Plesh, the senior product line manager for Capezio who develops pointe shoe styles, said, "We are cognizant of the possibility for automation but it would be difficult to recover the costs from an initial investment. We're happy with the way we are doing now. As business grows, I train more people, and with more shoe options, there's greater opportunity for specialization." Currently, Capezio offers 17 shoe styles, each with different characteristics intended to suit a range of feet and structural preferences. Of course, each style requires its own precise type of craft and construction.

In his position, Plesh—who previously danced with the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre and Boston Ballet—wears many hats, which includes traveling to schools, companies, and dance retail outlets to do fittings. When Plesh does a fitting, he looks for a number of things. "First I look at the shape of the foot. That will tell me the best shoe style in terms of width and shape, whether that's broad, moderate, or tapered. We'll ask them to point their foot to see their arch to determine which shank strength will be appropriate. Also, you can tell a lot by looking at a dancer stand on pointe and seeing her alignment."

These kinds of measurements are also part of custom orders from professional ballerinas that go to Sousa. Measurements are detailed in a shoe order or ticket, laying out exact specifications regarding the height of the heel and sides, width of the toe box or vamp, type of shank supporting the arch, and other requirements. With every shoe he creates, he adds his mark, number 7, to the inside



lining. Quality and consistency are his and every maker's hallmarks. Each custom order must be absolutely, exactly the same. Any deviation can ruin a performance.

Sousa makes 40 pairs (80 individual shoes) per day to keep up with dancers' needs. Warm air from the dancer's foot (as well as humidity and air temperatures) plus the constant flexing and weight-bearing involved in pointe work quickly wreak havoc on a shoe's constitution. Although a student can hang on to a pair of pointe shoes for months, professional dancers can go through a pair in one night's performance.

Each pair is made using a turnshoe technique wherein a shoe is made inside out and then turned right side out for the final stages. When shoes are new, there is no distinction between left and right, nor are there any ribbons or elastic. Those must be sewn on by the dancer herself.

Sousa starts with three pieces of cut satin sewn together with a cotton lining, resembling a flat pink collar. Then he pastes layers of cotton in descending sizes below the satin cover forming the all-important box of the shoe, where the toes will go. Next, he takes the appropriate-sized last and nails a leather outer sole to the bottom of it, slips the glued fabric piece over it, and pulls the fabric into very tight pleats at the back of the shoe's tip.

Next Sousa stitches the shoe at a fierce, chattering sewing machine that secures the fabric to the sole. Back at his station, he releases the nailed sole from the last, pulls the shoe off, and turns it. He then places the shoe, now outside out, back on the last, and pounds and shapes it with smooth-headed mallet. Finally, an interior shank and cotton liner are glued and nailed into place before the toe

box gets a final shaping. He works quickly but is constantly eyeing, touching, and testing to make sure everything is right.

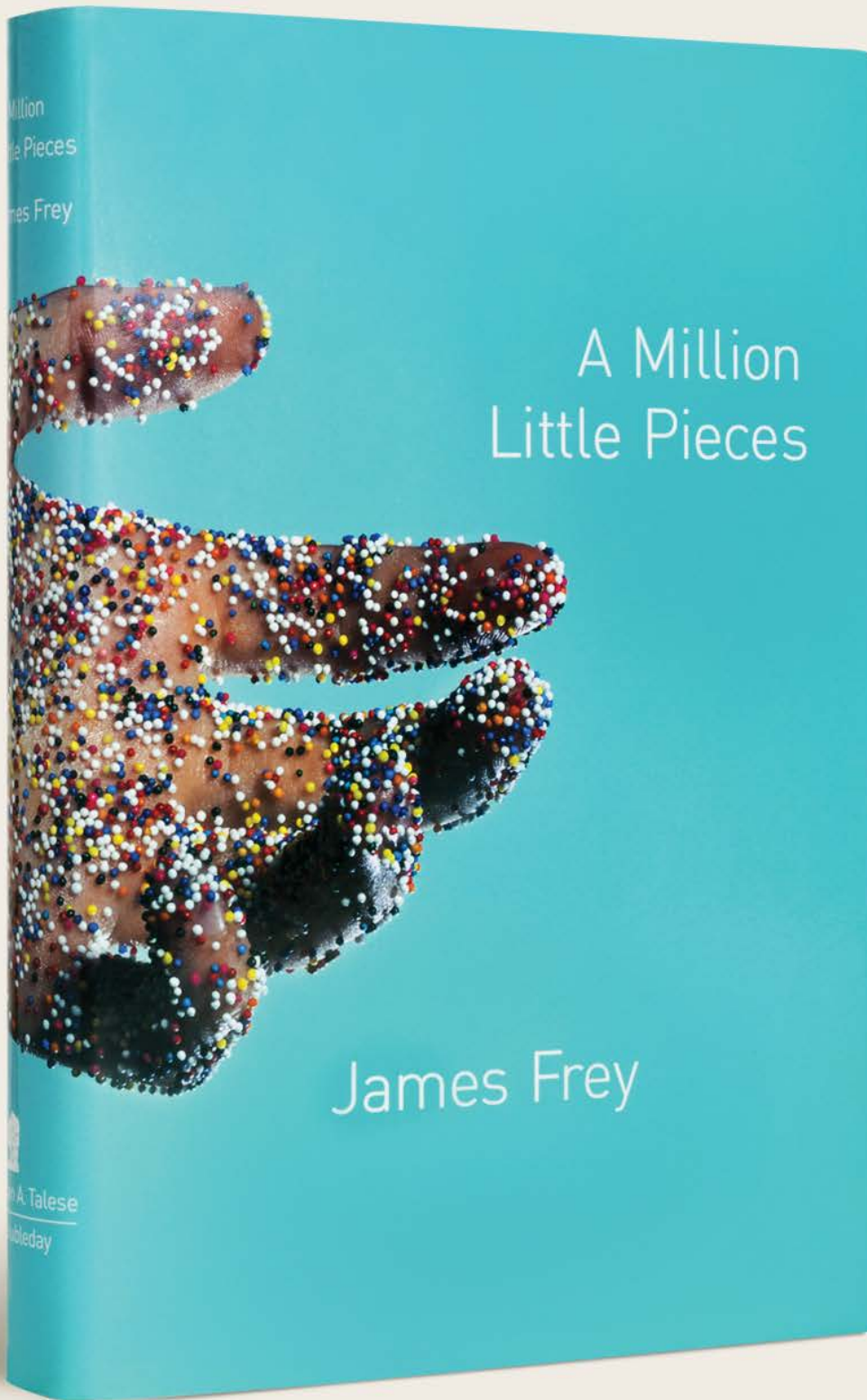
Sitting across from Sousa is fellow maker Serafim Mendes. Also from Portugal, Mendes has been making Capezio shoes for 33 years as maker 17. Among the dancers who rely on maker 17 is Stella Abrera, a principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre.

"During my busiest performance seasons, I can wear through two pairs in a day," said Abrera. "That means I spend up to an hour transferring ribbons from old pair to fresh pair. This task could be tedious were I working with lesser shoes, but Serafim's are little masterpieces, and I enjoy holding my beautiful [pointe shoes] in my hands almost as much as I do wearing them."

Abrera had the pleasure of meeting Mendes recently, something that rarely happens between dancers and makers. "Everything about him seems deliberate and meticulous, from the manner in which he chooses his words to his approach to cobbling," said Abrera. "Even before we met, I felt connected to him in a powerful way. I'll never cease to marvel at Serafim's craftsmanship and artistry, nor to appreciate having met the man. After all, how many violinists can say they got to hug Signore Stradivari?"

For both makers and dancers, their job is their art. Each is proud and committed to their work, respects tradition, strives for perfection, and even suffers injuries whether from slipping on stage or slipping with a shoemaker's knife. Plesh noted, "There is such a romance between the dancer and their maker. Dancers hold makers in such high regard because they couldn't do their art without them." ▲

▲ Almost completed, a pointe shoe awaits shaping and its interior shank and cotton liner, which are glued and nailed into place.



Judging a Book by Its Cover



READING ALONG WITH
BOOK DESIGNER
RODRIGO CORRAL

BY REBECCA SUTTON



BOOK DESIGNER AND GRAPHIC ARTIST Rodrigo Corral was strolling through New York when he passed by the baking supply store N.Y. Cake. Immediately, a display of colorful nonpareils sprinkles caught his eye. The tiny rainbow beads of sugar became “one of those things that I instinctively love and feel like there’s a home for as an idea,” said Corral, who runs the design firm Rodrigo Corral Studio in New York.

Not long after, he began designing the cover for *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey, the 2003 bestseller about a recovering addict. Images of these colorful candy sprinkles coalesced with memories of old pharmaceutical commercials, which frequently showed how medicine coursed through a human body. “I couldn’t shake what drug addiction would look like through the body,” said Corral, who is also creative director at Farrar, Straus & Giroux (FSG) and creative director-at-large for New Directions. He hired a photographer and sent him a packet of sprinkles. Together, they came up with what has become one of the best-known covers of the last two decades: a hand, open and extended, covered in candy dots. It was, in the world of cover design, a direct hit.

◀ **Rodrigo Corral.**

PHOTO BY ANNA KASSOWAY

(Opposite) *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey. Publisher: Nan Talese/Random House, jacket design by Rodrigo Corral. Jacket photograph by Fredrik Broden.

IMAGE COURTESY OF
RODRIGO CORRAL STUDIO

▼
The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz. Publisher: Riverhead Books, jacket design by Rodrigo Corral.

IMAGE COURTESY OF
RODRIGO CORRAL STUDIO

This is the sort of success that has defined Corral's career. He has designed covers for Junot Díaz, Lauren Groff, Chuck Palahniuk, Gary Shteyngart, and NEA Fellows Jeffrey Eugenides and Jonathan Franzen. His covers are both instantly recognizable and difficult to forget. There is the swooping script and simple wedding band of Eugenides's *The Marriage Plot*; the mod, neon polka dots of Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*; and the unsettling, spray-painted silhouette of Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

His philosophy is relatively simple. "Make art, while balancing marketing concerns," said Corral. Corral might be guided by marketing or sales departments to use a specific color that research has found effective for a

particular readership. Other times, he might be given specifications for the point size of an author's name depending on their renown.

But his portfolio is bold enough that if contacted by a publisher, "there's probably room to make it a little unconventional or not necessarily fitting a specific mold of the marketplace." Corral strives to "bring an unexpected perspective, an unexpected translation that communicates the idea [behind the story]," he said, while simultaneously "leaving room for readers to make a discovery on their own."

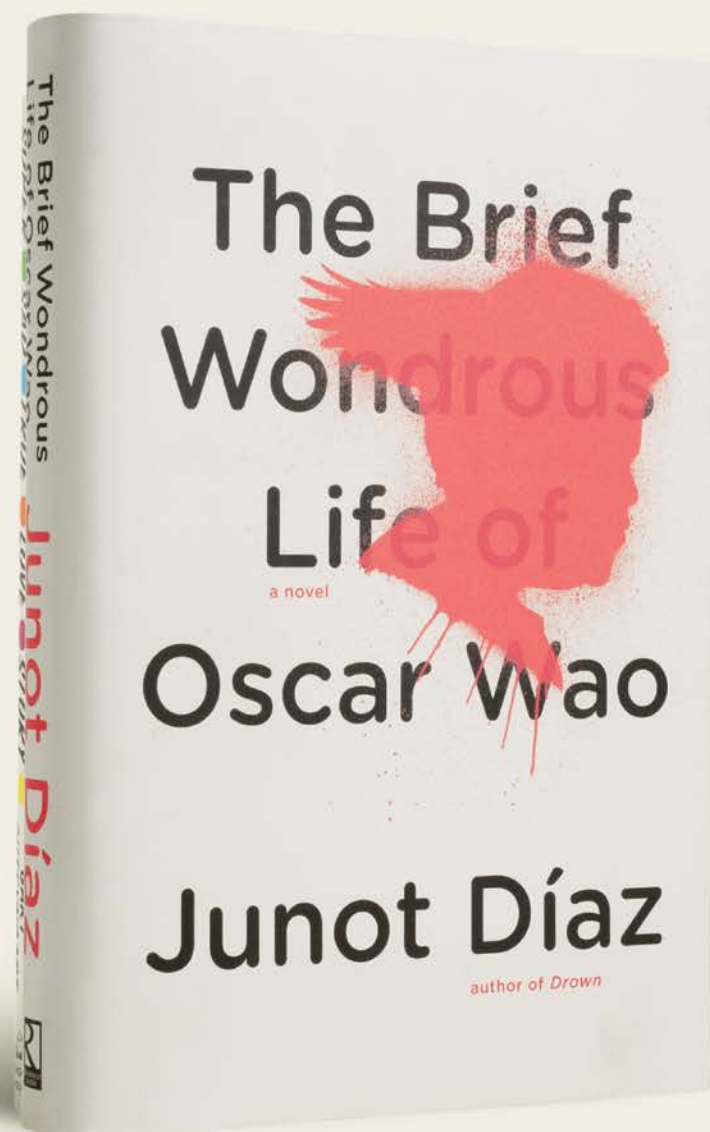
Timelessness is also a critical piece of Corral's creative approach. "My desire to make timeless art for authors is a priority," he said. One of his biggest fears is that a cover might feel dated, or evince a specific period, five or ten years down the line. It's a real fear: covers are frequently redesigned to renew interest in a book, promote new editions, or reach a different readership. Corral himself has led many redesigns, including *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre and *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse, a cover that was notable for its lack of title or author name.

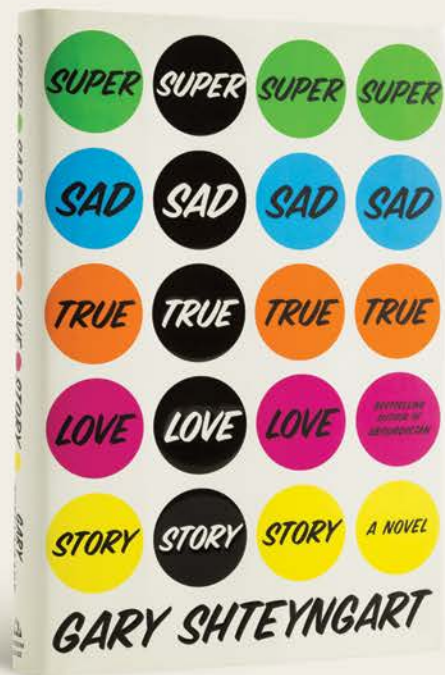
But whether he is designing a classic text or a new manuscript, the process starts the same way: by reading. The things that excite Corral most about a manuscript are those that would excite any reader: a fresh direction or unexpected twist, strong character development, powerful arc, or social relevance. "From a design perspective, our radar's pretty high for authenticity," he said. "What we look for in a good read is getting lost in a story, being moved, and having our reality suspended momentarily. If those things are working, then I'm excited to go in and start trying to find a good solution for that book."

To find a book's "solution," Corral draws on a vast library of inspiration, which includes artists such as Robert Gober, Francis Bacon, and Felix Gonzales-Torres, as well as a healthy archive of newspaper and magazine clippings he has collected through the years. "Whether it be composition or an expression on someone's face, I'm always collecting images, color swatches, and taking notes—even on a simple word combination that I think holds potential ideas," he said.

As was the case with *A Million Little Pieces*, his surroundings are also an endlessly rich source of stimulation. "I break the golden rule in New York, which is don't make eye contact," he laughed. "I'm the total opposite. I'm on the subway and I'm staring at people and mesmerized by their body language or gestures or what they're carrying or what they're wearing. The inspiration comes from anywhere, so I try to be as open as I possibly can."

For any given project, he and his team generate two to three cover ideas. "We generally send two incredibly distinct approaches that have nothing to do with the other, and then maybe a third option that is a combination of





◀ **Super Sad True Love Story** by Gary Shteyngart. Publisher: Random House, jacket design by Rodrigo Corral Studio.

IMAGE COURTESY OF RODRIGO CORRAL STUDIO

Area X: The Southern Reach Trilogy by Jeff VanderMeer. Publisher: FSG Originals, jacket design by Rodrigo Corral and Tyler Comrie.

IMAGE COURTESY OF RODRIGO CORRAL STUDIO

the two,” he said. Often times, he will collaborate with other painters, illustrators, photographers, and stylists in order to achieve a certain effect, as he did with *A Million Little Pieces*. “That was an example of needing to have a great photographer who understands composition and lighting,” he said. “I couldn’t have composed that myself. That’s not something I could sketch with a pencil, or I could have even shot today with an iPhone.”

These artistic collaborations, however, do not usually extend to the authors themselves. Authors, he said, are so close to the story that cover design can ultimately prove stressful and complicated for all parties. He has never met Chuck Palahniuk for example, for whom he has designed a dozen covers; the two have only ever exchanged cursory notes of “here’s the manuscript” and “good luck.” One notable exception was Jay-Z, who walked Corral through his apartment and shared personal stories and inspirations. The experience, which Corral described as “surreal,” informed the cover of Jay-Z’s memoir *Decoded*, which prominently displays a gold foil rendition of Andy Warhol’s *Rorschach* print.

It is only after weeks of research, collaborating, designing, and tweaking that Corral’s proposals are reviewed by a publisher. Although approval is obviously the end goal, he noted how this can occasionally be at odds with creativity itself. “As book jacket designers, we’re doing so many projects simultaneously that it could be easy to give a solution that we think could get approved,” he said. “Instead, what we try to do is push. It’s something I suggest for all creative designers: push yourself even further and give something you feel strongly about. Taking those

chances as a creative and then putting it in front of a client, publisher, editor is the only way you’ll find out whether it will work or not.”

Creative risk can pay off in unexpected ways as well. Many book cover designers feature rejected proposals as part of their online portfolios and Instagram feeds, giving potential clients a broader look at their abilities. Just a few weeks ago, Corral said, his studio posted a rejected cover from a few years back on Instagram. Within hours, Corral’s studio was contacted by a creative director who was interested in using the design for a forthcoming title.

Although a project technically ends with approval, it is also the start of something arguably more satisfying: seeing your work in the public sphere. Corral has designed so many revered and bestselling titles that his work has become fairly ubiquitous. He recently passed by a Warby Parker eyewear store, where a display of books included *Oscar Wao*, which was published in 2007. “The fact that they haven’t changed the cover is reassuring that my approach to design and making art is pretty solid,” he said. “I can be on the subway and see someone reading a book that I designed ten years ago. It reaffirms why I love being in this industry and making art for books.” ▲

▶ **Lullaby** by Chuck Palahniuk. Publisher: Doubleday. Illustration by Judy Lanfredi, jacket design by Rodrigo Corral.

IMAGE COURTESY OF RODRIGO CORRAL STUDIO





ONLINE

As part of our online content for this issue, available on [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov), the National Gallery of Art's Chief of Design and Senior Curator Mark Leithauer discusses the art of mounting the museum's Alexander Calder installation, such as choosing the right light, wall color, and spatial design; NEA National Heritage Fellow Wayne Henderson shares how he makes his handcrafted, steel-string guitars; and dialect coach Jerome Butler tells us how he helps actors embody their roles through their voices.

Don't forget to check out our *Art Works Blog* ([arts.gov/art-works](https://www.arts.gov/art-works)) for daily stories on the arts in America.

(Above) Installation view of *Alexander Calder: A Survey* in East Building, Tower 2 galleries at the National Gallery of Art. Copyright © 2016 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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