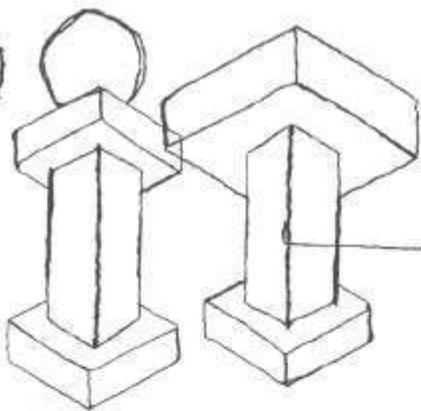


# MAKING IT FIT

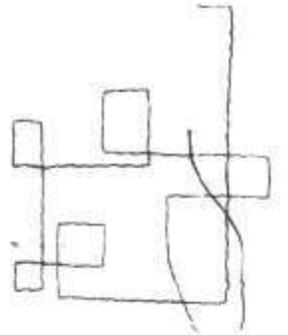
*Graphic designers long for the old days of artistic freedom in the fashion industry.  
But it's still possible to find one's creative match.*

BY ERIKA KAWALEK

ILLUSTRATION BY LIZZIE FINN



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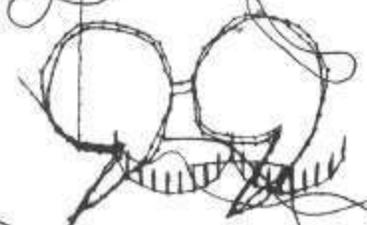
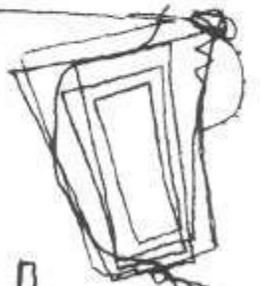


FREEDOM

indulgence

a

Laboratory



PETER SAVILLE

**TO PROMOTE** Yohji Yamamoto's Spring 2008 menswear collection, the New York boutique is exhibiting dramatic banners designed by James Victore inside the store's plate-glass windows. On transparent plastic, the word "home," applied in stencil and spray paint, accompanies replicas of hand-painted, white illustrations of birds to draw attention to the Japanese designer's deconstructed, free-flowing clothes.

Victore.. a self-described "ink-on-paper guy," was summoned to Paris last summer after a Yamamoto assistant spotted his portfolio online. It was his only meeting, and he flew back home to Brooklyn as the newly minted art director of Yamamoto menswear. For a graphic designer who has never before worked in fashion, whose oeuvre includes "Advertisers Think You're Stupid" stickers, and whose left-wing politics take shape in an expressionistic, rough-hewn style, a job in the glossy world of fashion might

seem like a stretch. But Victore has tremendous faith in the alliance. "Yohji knows he's not an art director and gives his collaborators total freedom," he says.

Total freedom is a rarity in the fashion industry. Though graphic designers play a vital role in the success of a fashion label by creating logos, labels, packaging, advertisements, and websites, they're not always given the artistic leeway they might hope for in a like-minded creative industry. Most high-profile gigs are wedded to the kind of market research-generated content demanded by mass retailers.

Yamamoto represents a largely bygone golden age of fashion and graphic design collaboration, and designers fondly recall the '80s and early '90s as a time of widespread experimentation in the industry. Yamamoto's archive of trailblazing couture catalogs are a prime example. Commissioned seasonally until 2000, the publica-

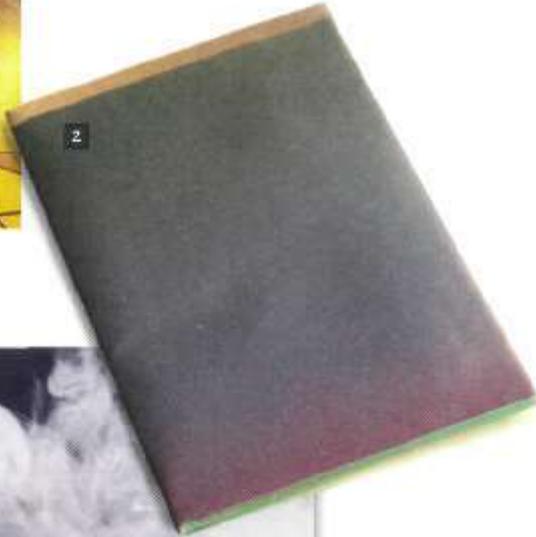
This page: James Victore is men's line art director for all items. Coralie Gauthier is creative director.

01 "Love, Yohji" cards referencing the military themes in Yamamoto's Spring/Summer 2008 collection. 02 Final set of comps. using silk-screen and heavy chipboard to give the pieces texture. 03 Images from the Spring/Summer 2008 collection. 04 Representation for windows at the Yamamoto store in New York, Spring 2008.

Opposite page: Sean Carmody is art director and designer for all work.

01 Image from Rachel Comey's Spring 2008 fashion show. Photographer; Marcelo Gomes. 02 Invitation to Rachel Comey's Spring/Summer 2007 Fashion Week. 03,04 Mailer for the Spring/Summer 2007 collection. Photographer; John Nguyen. 05 Invitation to Fall/Winter 2007 Fashion Week.





tions began in the autumn of 1986 when Yamamoto's art director Marc Ascoli hired photographer Nick Knight and graphic designer Peter Saville. "Yohji would say to me, 'Go and surprise me,'" says Saville. "It was freedom, indulgence—a laboratory!"

The fashion world's embrace of experimentation, especially in the U.S., gradually devolved into "the classic font on a brooding female," as one graphic designer observes. Despite advertising campaigns' perennial appeals to individuality and self-expression, the fashion "look" is strikingly standardized—"FuturaLitc," as Victore calls it.

A handful of graphic designers, however, have found freedom, and happiness, in long-term collaborations with individual fashion designers. Alan Aboud, creative director for Paul Smith, has been deeply involved in the brand's overall strategy since he graduated from art school in 1989, producing advertising and other collateral. Smith's empire began in 1970 as a tiny emporium in the back of a Nottingham tailor's shop and quickly grew to become one of Britain's most successful retailers. "At first there was mistrust on Paul's end because he's self-taught and was doing his own invitations and graphics," says Aboud. But familiarity soon kindled a high-spirited environment with "no written briefs, no agendas, no mandatory fields that need to be ticked." The creative team goes over ideas with Smith in person twice monthly, and Smith and Aboud talk on the phone every few days.

Aboud's playful yet restrained style has proven a good match to Smith's hallmark approach incorporating traditional tailoring with unorthodox details and jaunty colors. Those iconic rainbow-striped shopping bags speak of Aboud's ability to sync neatly with his boss's vision. "He only needs to give me a sentence on a scrap of paper for me to understand what he wants," Aboud says.

Other partnerships are less formalized but no less cohesive. American designer Rachel Comey, known for her vintage-inspired, smartly detailed clothes, works with a rotating group of friends on everything from logos to invitations to textile

patterns. "Smaller companies are forced to be more creative and resourceful," she says.

For several collections now, including this spring's, Comey has been handing what she calls "her chaos" over to Sean Carmody, a graphic designer who had rented space in her studio. When it became clear they had matching sensibilities, Comey and Carmody began collaborating on photography, and the work quickly turned to lookbooks and invitations. "A 4-over~4 postcard to me is a waste of energy and money, especially when people can send an e-mail," says Carmody. "So if you're going to invest time and money to produce this stuff, then the goal is to make something people are going to hold on to. Printed matter can outlast the clothing season."

The appeal of print runs deep with fashion designers, a tactile bunch who generally grew up devouring magazines; but a love of print and an appreciation for digital media aren't mutually exclusive. Partnerships for online efforts have moved from the fringes of fashion's agenda to center stage. Etienne Mincur, founder of Incandescence Studio, builds websites like [Isseymiyake.com](http://Isseymiyake.com) that take the fashion experience off the printed page in the form of animated, dream-scape environments.

Another kind of online partnership—one that compiles behind-the-scenes documentary footage and viewer-generated content—is found at [Showstudio.com](http://Showstudio.com). Founded in 2000 by Nick Knight and Peter Saville, the website explores collaborations between high fashion and art. It not only gives viewers a peek into the notoriously secretive industry, it invites those viewers to offer creative insight for photo shoots and magazine spreads. So far, more than zoo fashion and art professionals have revealed their processes and workrooms, including the pen-and-paper illustrator Julie Verhoeven.

For Saville, the venture represented a new way of engaging with an industry with which he has had a chronic on-again, off-again relationship. Toward the end of his fruitful partnership with Yamamoto in 1991,



Saville's disenchantment with the growing commercialization of fashion became clear. For one campaign, he sidestepped the practice of hiring models to pose for print ads; instead, he selected lowbrow stock photographs and inscribed them with Yamamoto's logo and mordant slogans. The most caustic in the series depicted a video game still of a race car with the tagline "Game Over." "It was a criticism of design in service of consumerism," Saville explains.

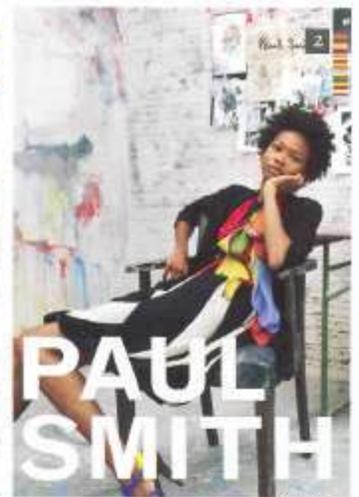
Even for someone as autonomous as Saville, fashion carries a cachet that's hard to pass up. His recent work with Kate Moss

illustrates the challenges associated with collaborating in such a high-profile industry, particularly for the mass market.

Moss hired Paul Barnes of the Modern Typography studio, with Saville as art director, to create a logo the model could use on her licensed products, including Topshop clothing and Coty perfume. The fonts they tried "looked ghastly," says Saville, and the round shapes of the name "Moss" posed aesthetic issues for the designers. They eventually spotted an Alexey Brodovitch font, Albro, released in the '40s but used only in Brodovitch's Design Lab

He only needs  
to give me a  
SCRAP OF  
paper

ALAN ABOUD



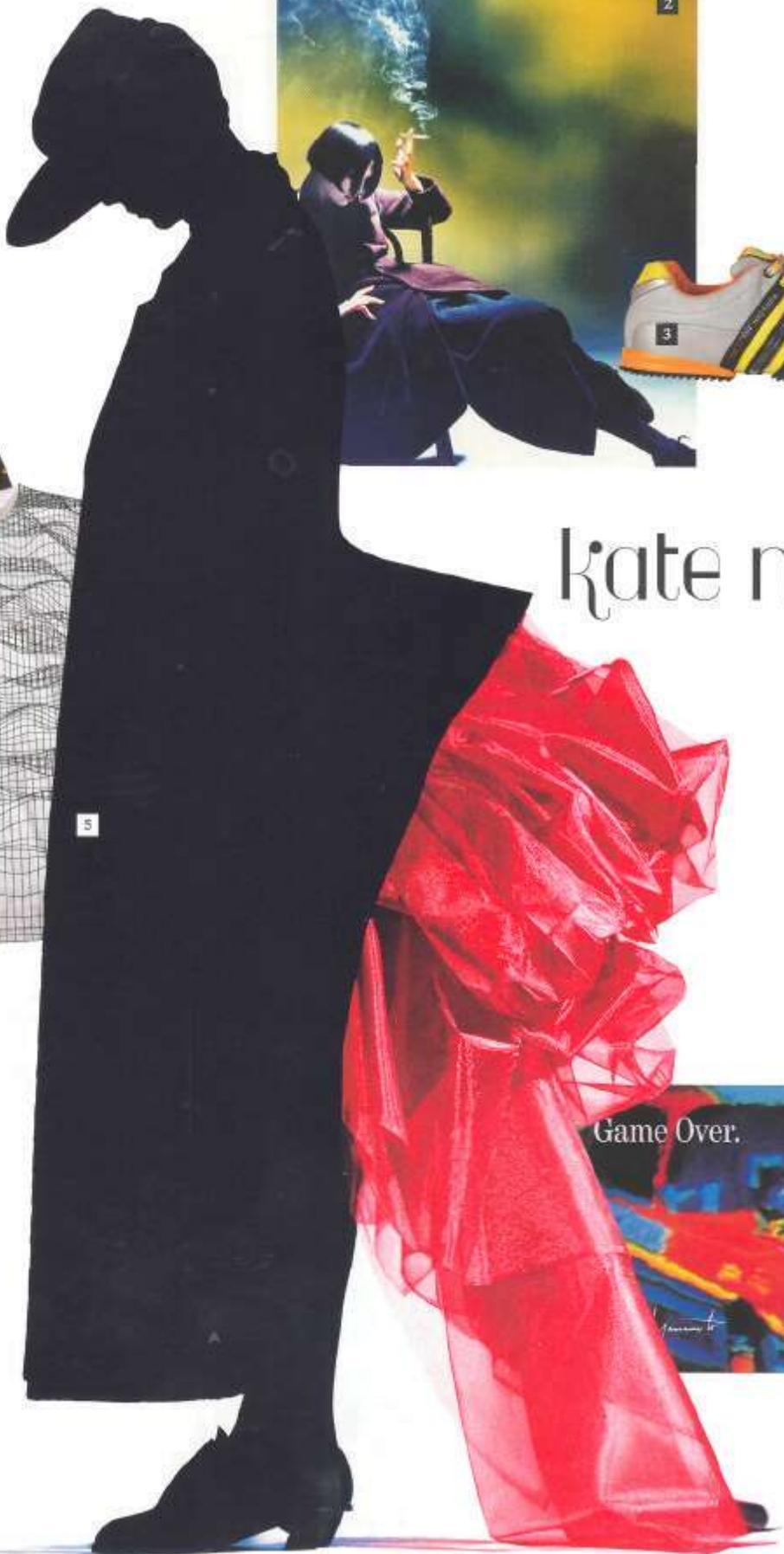
This page: Alan Aboud/Aboud  
Creative is creative director/agency  
forallworkshown.

01 Concept images for Paul Smith  
Sunshine, summer fragrance,  
Spring 2008. Designer: Lisa Com-  
erford; client: Inter Parfums, Paris.

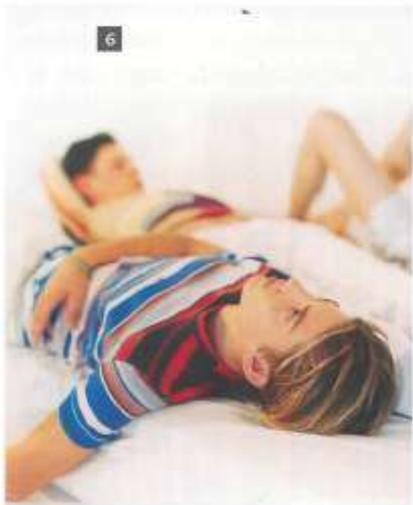
02 Print advertising for Spring/  
Summer 2008. Photographer:  
Julian Broad. 03 Paul Smith retail  
identity, 1999 to present. Designer:  
Maxine Law

Opposite page: Screenshots from  
Isseymiyake.com. Graphic/interac-  
tive design: Etienne Mineur/  
Incandescence; art direction: Roy  
Genty/Issey Miyake, sound design:  
Sacha Gattino.





kate mos



Game Over.



Opposite page: Peter Saville is designer for all work.

01 DC Snow Wear Peter Saville "Icon Collection," 2008.  
 02 Yohji Yamamoto women's wear advertising, Fall/winter 1988/89. Art director: Marc Ascoli; photographer: Nick Knight. 03 Shoe for Y3, The Hacienda 25th Anniversary, 2007. Designers: Peter Saville, Ben Kelly. 04 Kate Moss logo-type, 2007. Designers: Peter Saville, Paul Barnes. 05 Yohji Yamamoto women's wear advertising, Fall/Winter 1986/87. Art director: Marc Ascoli; photographer: Nick Knight. 06 "Peter Saville for Clements Ribiero," Fall/Winter 2004.

Photographer: Donald Christie/ Arena. 07 Yohji Yamamoto men's wear advertising Fall/Winter 1991/92. Art director: Peter Saville/Pentagram.

This page: Julie Verhoeven is illustrator for all work.

01 Print for Uniqlo T-shirt, 2008.  
 02 T-shirt for Mulberry, Summer 2007. 03 Cameo papier-mache necklace, commissioned by Katie Grand for "Pop" boutique at Dover Street Market, London, 2006ff. 04 Quilted bag for Mulberry, Summer 2007.

work. Saville and Moss gravitated to it immediately. But the Topshop marketing department altered the final: "They put hearts all over it," Saville complains.

Alan About, who has directed ad campaigns for H&M, has felt similarly frustrated at the demands of his mass-market clients. "Your idea is designed and researched to death before you go and shoot it. You need an element of spontaneity in order to create original imagery. If you could find original imagery from the get-go, then there's no point in shooting it!"

Even Victore, working with the famously hands-off Yamamoto, learned he was expected to make certain compromises. On the spring show's runway, models strutted to Bob Dylan tunes while clothed in baggy suits appliqued with homing pigeons, song lyrics, military insignia, and red crosses. Accordingly, Victore took the theme of a soldier's homecoming and ran with it—to say the least—creating two provocative promotional series of postcards that tested Yamamoto's boundaries.

One, titled "Love, Yohji," depicted a photograph of an American tank overlaid with a red cross. Another included a photograph of a soldier partially obscured by a drawing of a homing pigeon, executed in loose, white paint strokes. On the reverse side, Victore printed the White House address along with the protest message, "Yohji Yamamoto loves men and wants them home where they belong."

The postcards were insufficiently subtle for Yamamoto's publicity directors. Victore eventually presented a less political version in which Yamamoto's jagged, black signature overlaid the white homing pigeon on one version and a spray-painted "home" on another—hence the softer approach of the current store windows.

The balanced pairing of Victore's street sensibility and Yamamoto's edgy yet refined aesthetic on the windows shows what's possible when two compatible, creative minds come together. Although these collaborations aren't always seamless, it's still possible to find a perfect fit. P