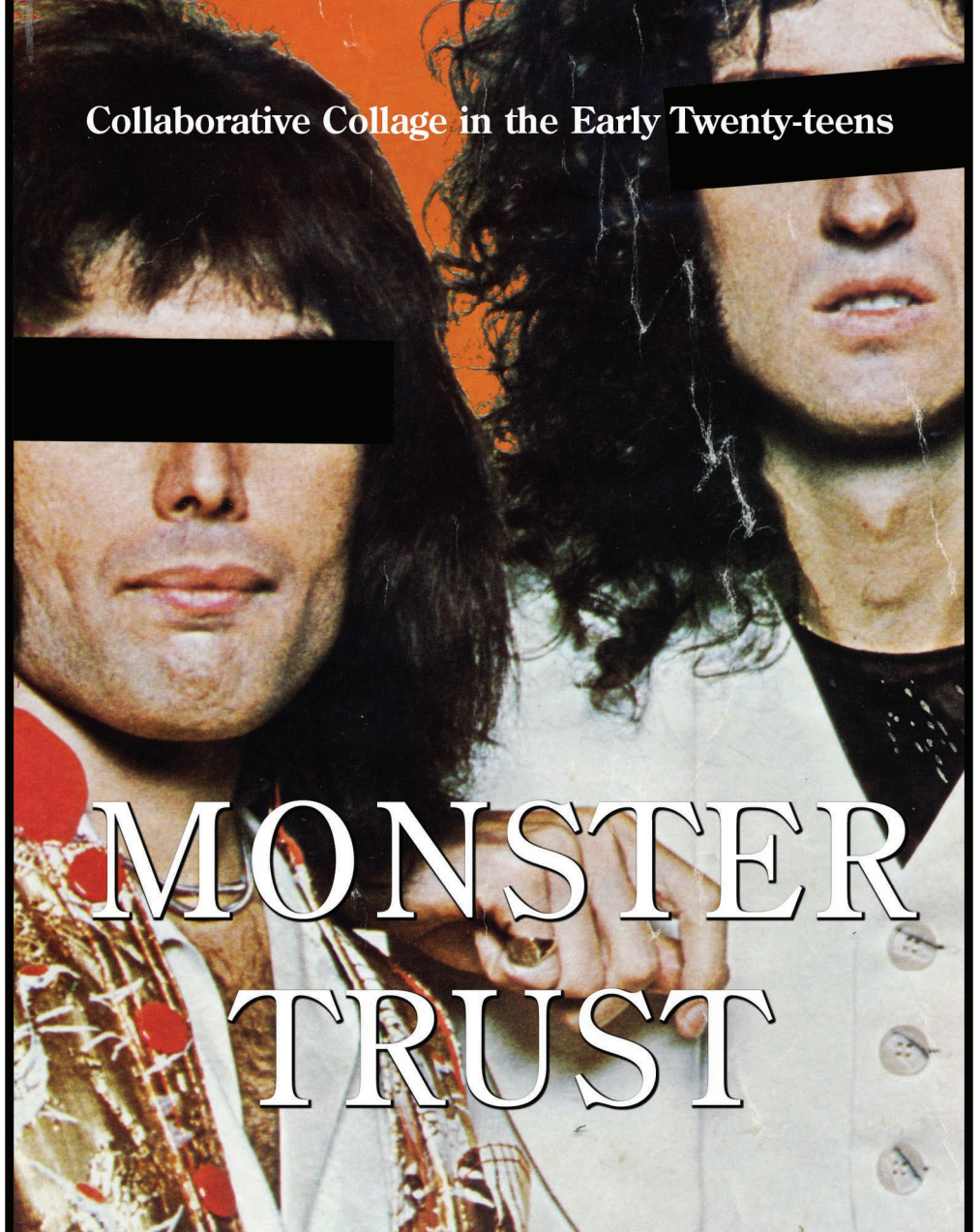

Collaborative Collage in the Early Twenty-teens
MONSTER
TRUST



MONSTER
TRUST



MONSTER TRUST

An Exploration in Collage Collaboration with Zach Collins, Mister Koppa, and Eight More Excellent North American Collagists

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For Jens


SIN AND THE FOUR LAKES REGION
LAKE MONONA
LAKE WAUBESA

LEFT: with Nikki Soppelsa, BEREA, OHIO

RIGHT: with Susan Ringler, DARLINGTON, MARYLAND

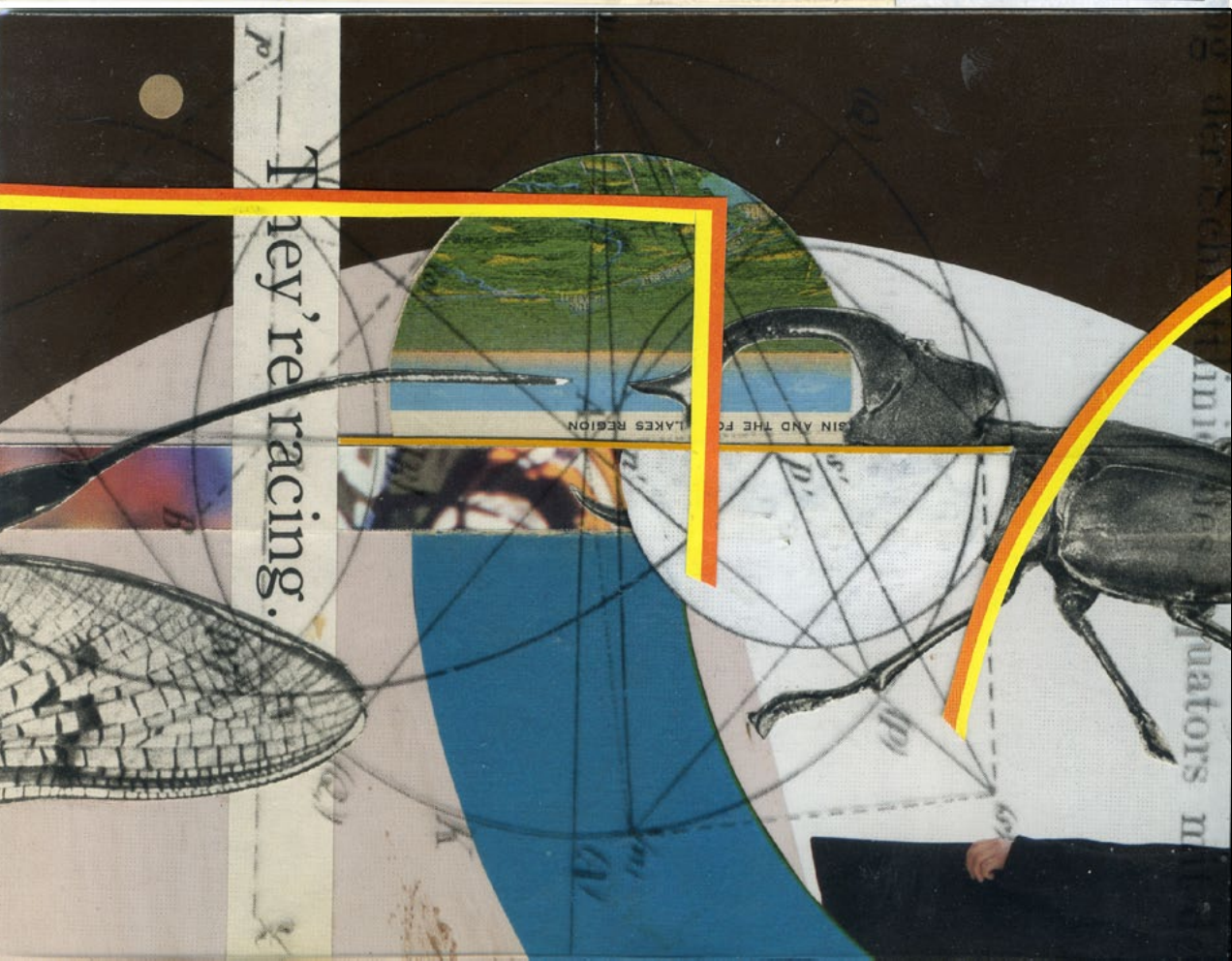




LEFT: with Kat Silver, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

RIGHT: **with Cory Peeke,** LA GRANDE, OREGON





LEFT: **with Laura Collins,** CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

RIGHT: **with Travis Medford,** ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA





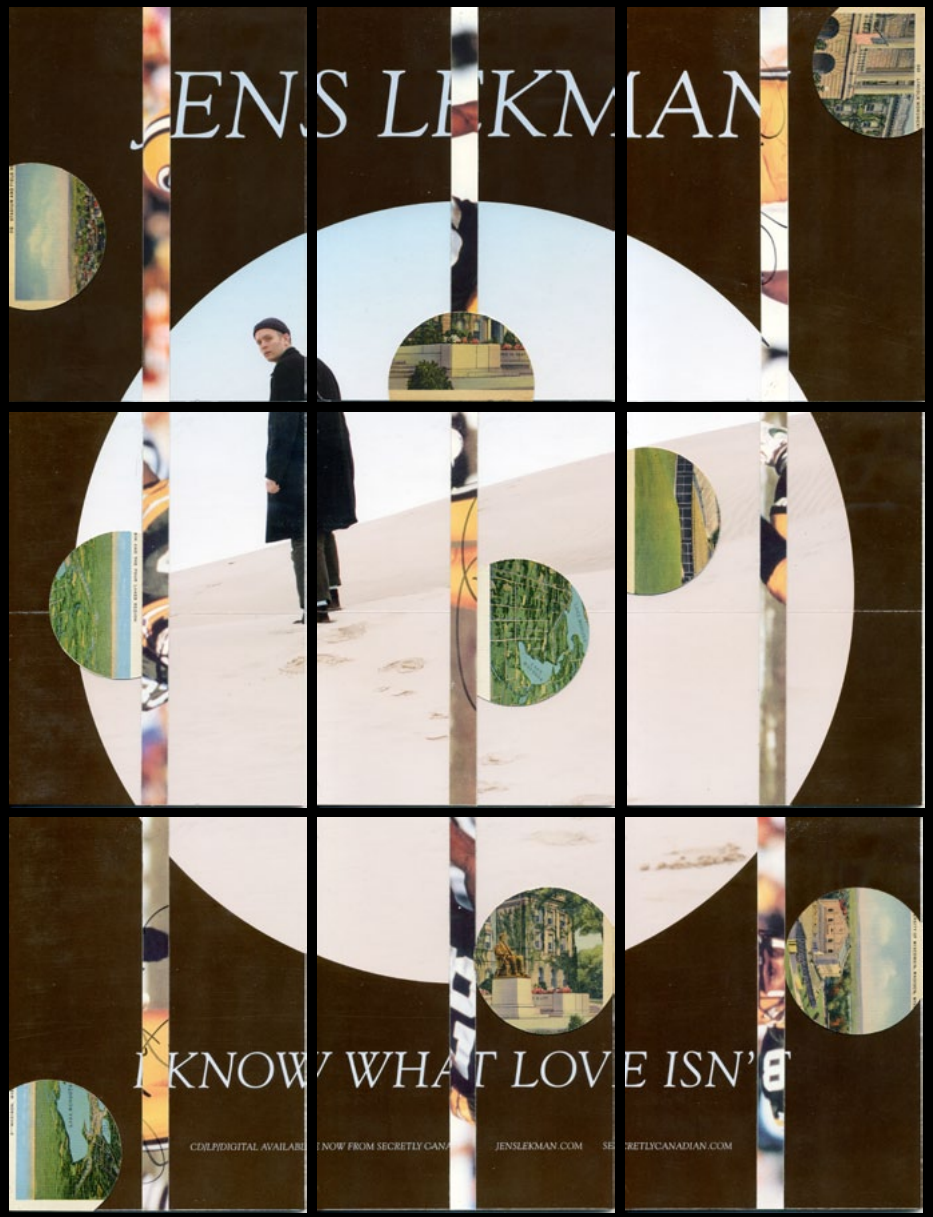
LEFT: **with Jesse Treece,** SEATTLE, WASHINGTON





RIGHT: by Zach Collins, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

LEFT: **with Tracy Jager,** VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA



COLLAGE COLLABORATION

Made Possible by the Facebook Collage Artist Network

Collaborating with another artist is a challenging venture resulting in personal growth. Like many (maybe most) other visual artists, I generally work alone. There were times in school when I sat at a table with other students and we enjoyed sitting together, working on our own projects, but I cannot think of a time when I worked on a specific project with another artist until very recently.

I've been active on a relatively new social media network called Facebook since about 2009, seeking and befriending other collage artists from around the world. Early on, I began to see these collage artists showing collaborative efforts… one would send a "starter" to another, and later it would get credited and posted as "finished" by someone else. Zach Collins (St. Paul, Minnesota) may or may not have been the instigator of all this

(who could really say for sure?), but one thing is certain…Zach was on a mission to collaborate with everyone—hundreds of collage artists from around the world—and I felt a sense of belonging when he finally reached out to me.

Before Facebook, I had the egocentric notion that I was one of a few artists playing with collage as a primary medium. Suddenly there were tens and then hundreds of others from around the world. I went from thinking my work was especially unique to feeling like what I was doing was just more ephemeral trash destined for the recycling bin. Being self-taught and isolated, I began to wonder how my work compared—technically, stylistically, and aesthetically—to the work of all these other collagists. I'll admit I was a little scared that somehow my work just wouldn't measure up to the work of all these others. This is a grown man, mind you, having these thoughts about whether or not he is playing a game (a game that has no rules) well enough. But I am also the wallflower who can watch the dance from the sidelines for only so long before I have to jump in and join the fun.

I gladly accepted Zach's invitation and asked if we could do more than one, because I like to work on several collages at once. He sent four, and when I received them I remember thinking, "This is it?" That's no dismissal of Zach's work. It's just that I had focused for so long on precision and presentation; having been trained as a commercial picture framer, I have always felt the work needed to be perfectly crafted from start to finish. Receiving these starters from Zach, mounted on the backs of cereal boxes with scraps of paper cut and torn and loosely glued down was a mind boggler. "What am I supposed to do with this?" I thought.

It took a little while to digest. Finally it became clear, again…this is a game and there are no rules. Play with it. Have fun with it. If it's not fun, then why do it? Because it's certainly not for the money, and no one said I had to do any of this. And there was the first big lesson: Loosen up.

When I began to play with the four starters I received from Zach, I soon had a need for more. I found a Bert puzzle I wanted to get rid of,[1] so I asked if he would send another five to complete the



3 x 3 array I had in mind. A few months later he obliged, and the project eventually turned into a mobile of nine 2-sided collage panels. Did I have any idea I was going to make a collage mobile when I received the invitation to "collaborate" from Zach? No way. Second lesson(s): Collaboration requires patience, and creativity begets creativity.

This new so-called "collaborative" process[2] intrigued me, but it felt a little one-sided. Zach sent me something, and I took the ball and ran with it. Done. It felt more like an assist than collaboration. So, somewhere in the middle of working on that first project, I decided I would at least return the favor, and began to work on another grid of nine starters to send Zach.

Now here was another unsettling feeling. I really liked what I had started. Sometimes what I like about making art is the control. No one tells me what to do or how to do it, and whatever project I invent for myself, it's up to me to start it and finish it. Pack these things up and send them to someone else to finish? I suppose it was a little like sending a kid off to school. I had to get over my desire for

control. I had to believe that everything was going to be okay. Or, what might be even worse, that it didn't matter—that what I had done might get lost in the shuffle or ruined and whatever time I had put into it was just that: lost time. Ultimately, it was just another reminder that for me, making art is like playtime, and that was enough. I am thankful for the luxury of having time to play.

Zach fulfilled his end of the deal, and because I wanted to advance this collaborative effort further, I asked him to return the panels to me, so I could work on them again myself. I guess I wasn't really ready to give up control after all. But the collaborative spirit was alive—I intended to send them back to Zach for more. "Hold it," I thought. "This is a game, right? No rules…play…have fun." I went to the computer and logged on to Facebook. Quickly, I thought of nine other collage artists whose work I had appreciated, and asked them if they would like to get involved. All agreed. Each of the nine panels was sent around the country to be worked on by another artist, with instructions to send to Zach upon completion. This was a real sign that I had given up control and learned to trust not only other artists, but to trust the shipping industry.

Zach knew nothing about this until he received the first surprise package in the mail. Then the Facebook message, and my reply, "Yup. There's eight more on the way." This was maybe the hardest part—the waiting. It did take almost a year for it to come together, and a little prompting along the way, but eventually eight of the nine found their way back to Zach, with the ninth allegedly ending up in some dead letter office. Not wanting to see it incomplete, Zach took it upon himself to create the missing panel from scratch, and his final contribution to the collaboration was subtle and perfect. When I unpacked the box of nine panels, I found at the bottom, four orange and yellow stripe-shapes—exquisitely cut curves and right angles—and the word "camera." Quickly, I arranged the grid on my dining room table and placed the shapes over the top as one final unifying element to complete the project.

Like the mobile, how could I know this story and this book would be the final outcome of

accepting a collaboration request? And does it matter? The answers are *I couldn't have* and *probably not*. But I don't care. What I know is that I am a better man for it. I have learned to loosen up and relieve myself of the stress of self-importance. I have learned that other artists' creativity inspires my own creative work to grow in ways I never would imagine on my own. I have learned to appreciate the techniques, styles, and aesthetics of other collage artists. I have learned that sometimes it is okay to relinquish control. And maybe most importantly, I have learned to think of art as my time to play, and to be grateful for that, and not think of it as a self-imposed important job I have to do. I have learned that I love my art time, and now I know I can share that love with others.

[1] My mission as an artist, as of January 2013, as mentioned in *Organizing a Mess* (The Heavy Duty Press, 2015), is to use up all the collage materials I have amassed by turning them into art.

[2] In my mind, a true collaboration would mean that two or more people agree to work together to solve a problem, or creatively work toward a specific goal, like writing a song, or synchronizing a marketing campaign. A true collaboration might involve discussion and the verbal (or written) sharing of ideas as part of the process.



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