



hair Guido for Tom & Guy, styling assistance Julie, model Nikki of Select, all clothes customized by Anna Cockburn, shot at Metro Studios

THE PATHETIC ART OF DAN ROLLMAN

STRANGE BUT TRUE: Dan Rollman, a 30-year-old copywriter at Goodby, Silverstein & Partners in San Francisco, who works on Hewlett-Packard, eBay and Saturn when he's not being a conceptual artist, has a faux career as a T-shirt designer. He even has a faux bio about it.



THE BIO: Dan Rollman is one of the world's pre-eminent handwritten T-shirt designers. Rollman was born in London, Canada, in 1973. Strapped of cash following a poor investment in a motorcycle track, Dan's parents, Gary and Barbara, had no option but to bring up their two sons in inexpensive, plain white T-shirts. Tired of being teased by more fortunate schoolmates, Dan began writing on his shirts in an effort to give them personality. Early phrases he coined included "I Love Princess Leia" and the now widely recognized "Spelling Bee Champyon." Rollman's shirt-writings continued as a hobby until 1986, when he was hired by Toronto band Fetchin Bones to design a shirt for the cover of their *Bad Pumpkin* album. His now legendary "This Car Ain't For Sale, Bitch" T-shirt sparked furor among conservatives across North America, leading to Tipper Gore's infamous "This album shouldn't be for sale, jerk," rebuttal. Rollman's career really took off in 1993 after notorious photographer Larry Clark (director of *Kids*) stumbled upon the Fetchin Bones album in an Athens, Ga., record store. In need of a concept for an upcoming *Select* magazine photo shoot with former *Dukes Of Hazzard* actress Catherine Bach, Clark tracked Rollman down and commissioned him to design her shirt. Soon after Clark's photo hit the newsstands (and news of Rollman's steamy new relationship with Bach went public), opportunities for Rollman broke open. By staying extremely selective with the projects he took on, however, Rollman was able to build a much ballyhooed career that still thrives today."

This retrospective of Rollman's work includes loans from several private collections. It marks the first time they have been shown together publicly.

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BACK TO REALITY: This bio appeared at last month's creative/designers' fine-art exhibition at New York's Ohio Edit (see the Feb. *Creativity* for other work from the show), where Rollman displayed "extremely official art cards to accompany each image."

A SAMPLE ART CARD (IMAGE SEEN ABOVE, CENTER):

I Want Dan Rollman

1994, Black marker and T-shirt

Photo by Larry Clark, Collection Charles Saatchi, London.

"It was my first time working with a celebrity, so I was kind of nervous," said Rollman about working with Catherine Bach (*Dukes Of Hazzard's* "Daisy Duke"). Legend has it Bach invited Rollman to her trailer and whispered the now classic "I want Dan Rollman" phrase into his ear. The two went on to have a tempestuous two-year relationship before Bach eloped with ex-footballer Brian Bosworth.

BACK TO REALITY: "I also brought 60 blank white T-shirts to the opening and wrote personalized, one-of-a-kind phrases for people, after briefly interviewing them," Rollman explains. "Phrases included, 'My drycleaner shrunk this shirt'; 'Words that start with the letter T are better than words that start with other letters'; 'I could've kerned this shirt better'; and 'F-stop in the name of love.' Overall reaction was very positive. There were a few people who struggled to figure out whether the whole thing was real or not—one guy genuinely believed that I'd dated Catherine Bach for several years."

This was Rollman's first attempt at going semi-legit. "The fact is, the whole thing is a big, giant lie," he confesses. "I started by creating an entirely fake history about my T-shirt designing career. Then, for each piece of art, I took an image from a magazine, cut out the shirt that the person in the image was wearing and replaced it with a white piece of paper on which I drew a T-shirt design. What was my inspiration to do this?" Actually, we were wondering about that, Dan. "My love of T-shirts, pop culture, catchphrases and lies. Or, as a more sophisticated artist might say, I wanted to explore what happens when fiction and nonfiction intertwine within a pop-cultural context. My next step is to develop a real line of 100 percent original, one-of-a-kind T-shirts. I don't think it's fair to say I have a 'real' T-shirt career now, but I definitely plan to do more T-shirt projects in the future. An exhibition here at Goodby—we have monthly art shows—is likely, and I'm hoping to arrange more improv shirtmaking events in the near future. When time permits, I'd love to set up a T-shirt business online."

Dan, can you make us one that says, "I publicized Dan Rollman and all I got was this lousy T-shirt"? That's XL, man. (TK) ■