

FASHION ON THE RISE

# DESIGNERDRUGS

Written by LYNN FURGE

*“The Ramones are one of my favorite bands. Disco was huge when they began. They didn’t like what they were hearing. I feel the same way about my shirts. There is something more interesting about things that are gritty and dirty and have different levels.” — Josh Scholl, Creator, designerdrugs*

I remember the first time I met Josh Scholl. I was at a networking event, clad in black Roland Mouret, topped with a Chanel headband. In walks Scholl. This lean, scruffy guy, just as comfortable in his skin as in the perfect pair of Cheap Monday jeans he sported. I shook his hand and all I could say was “I don’t normally look like this. I’m usually messier and in mix and match earrings.”

I am not cool. Josh Scholl, creator of designerdrugs is. He politely smiled. It was warm, self-assured, and sarcastic all at the same time. I knew I needed to know more.

Josh uses words like “folks” and “gal.” It’s heart-warming. In fact everything he does is done with heart. His first t-shirt line was done as a non-for-profit. Scholl was working in a treatment center for kids with autism and had always wanted to do his own t-shirt line but didn’t have that “flash of inspiration” regarding screen printing graphics or conversational slogans versus photos.

“I saw the kids’ amazing artwork, I knew I could make it look really unique. I did seven or eight designs—it was limited edition—and I donated the majority to an autism foundation.”

Not only did that spark the creative juices, it set Scholl up to do his own thing. And if a picture is worth 1,000 words, then designerdrugs, ‘Clothing for High Class Low Lifes’ might just have started a dictionary.

Remember the iconic 1993 Janet Jackson cover of *Rolling Stone*? Now picture it in reverse. Big man boobs and lady hands grasping from behind. There you’ll have “Sex Still Sells”, one of Scholl’s original designs.

“I’ve always loved t-shirts and worn t-shirts and knew I could do better than what was currently being retailed. It is like art to me. Why do people want to wear a t-shirt that says “I party”? I wanted to mix chic with grungy dirty rock and roll on a smart and conscious level. I wanted unforgettable images. The viewer should [do] a double take. I want people pausing on the street. Almost like when you are looking at a really cool photograph or a piece of art, where you have to take a second look to get it,” explains Scholl.

The brand designerdrugs is deeply rooted in music, which becomes obvious when you see half the characters that grace the shirts: Anton Newcombe of The Brian Jonestown Massacre, Tim Harrington of Les Say Fav and Pete Doherty, post-Libertines. Jared Swilley of Black Lips, Bob Nastanovich of Pavement, Alan Palomo of Neon Indian, and Tammi Terrell also make appearances.

“The Ramones are one of my favorite bands. Disco was huge when they began. They didn’t like what they were hearing. I feel the same way about my shirts. There is something more interesting about things that are gritty and dirty and have different levels. It’s Top Forty versus other choices of current music that people could make. Think of designerdrugs as the non-Top Forty” Scholl says with a smirk, as if I could even begin picture him singing in the shower to Katy Perry.

There is definitely sarcasm to each design he chooses. A simple tank top adorned with the word “Hygiene” is also decorated with a dawning from anarchist collective Crimethinc’s book *Days of War, Nights of Love*. Members of anarchist collectives are generally not known for their strict attention to hygiene. “Eggs over Nasty” features photographer Rodney Bowes’ image of Wendy O. Williams, frontwoman of The Plasmatics, burning toast, topless. “It makes Karen O look like Doris Day. Punk as fuck!”

Which brings me to an obvious question, with music as a big focus, what makes a band worthy of being on a t-shirt? “It is that feeling that you can’t describe. What does cool mean? You just are and people know it. You’re sick of what’s happening, you just want to do something different. The other day I was at the Brian Jonestown Massacre show ...at a bar after the show wearing a t-shirt...Anton Newcombe stopped me and asked me where I got it, could the band have some, et cetera. It just spirals from there.”

Each style is a limited edition run of 300. But one thing Scholl will never limit is the quality of the printing and the cotton—he is basically creating designer clothing, but in t-shirt form. Each shirt is its own entity. The ideas come out of the clear blue. “Most of my ideas seem to happen while I’m

driving or when I’m at a church service,” Scholl shrugs.

I ask if the man boobs inspiration came to him in church, to which he replied. “Nope, other ideas come to me in dreams. I see an idea in my head and think, “That will be an amazing t-shirt”. I sometimes do a Google image search and contact the artist of the image I want, but most of the time I’ll have an idea and I have to shoot it myself. The people that participate in my ideas have to be pretty uninhibited. They have to have an open mind and let me do whatever I need to do to get the correct vision. If my model won’t pose the way I need, I will find some who will. There is always someone who will do anything. I just shot a zaftig woman in the style of the trucker mud flaps for my banner at Magic [the twice-yearly fashion trade show] and she was totally into it. People will remember my booth, man... “

With all of the talk of double takes and the hope that the shirts elicit a noticeable response, one wonders if the scoffs are as good as the accolades.

“Actually, I kind of like it when people are offended. ‘Cause I don’t really think they are offended at all, curious maybe, and I know I made their innermost self chuckle,” he says with a smile himself. “If they could see the stuff that is really in my head...I’m just a glutton for punishment for stuff like that. I almost love it when they don’t get it.”

And because this issue is about both humor and the risk takers that create it, we sit down a few days later to speak about what is funny to Josh himself.

“*Ghostbusters* Bill Murray, Bill Murray’s great. I actually have a button that says “Back Off Man” with the Ghostbusters symbol. It’s from the scene where he is interviewing the librarian. “Back off man, I’m a scientist”—that’s the quote. It’s the first time I remember laughing out loud just from watching something, and I would quote it out in public. Though *Waiting for Guffman* was the first time I realized that there was a whole different level to comedy. It felt like how I joke with my friends.”

He then clowned as the interviewer: “So what do you consider a ‘high class low life?’”

“You.” I responded, laughing.

There is a nod and a pause, and again, that heartfelt smile with hidden sarcasm.

“There is a certain arrogance—Iggy Pop is the perfect example. Pete Doherty, even Kate Moss.” He answers his own question for me.

But Scholl isn’t arrogant; he is a good guy with bite, because he knows what he likes.

“You’re probably going to get some ass from this article... what’s better on a woman, sense of humor or T and A?” I ask, my final question.

“Why can’t I have both? I choose all of the above. But the sense of humor will make me stick around.”

And with that, the women of American, including myself, just started polishing up their punchlines.



Model: TIM HARRINGTON of LES SAVY.  
Image by JOSH SCHOLL.