

Dead RockStars

Blunt Graffix stages an international menagerie of music's late greats

By Dante Zuñiga-West

Being a rock star isn't about playing rock music. It's about the unabashed charisma that an exceptional performer guts out into the world and how that magnetism affects listeners and fans over the course of time. An authentic rock star can win our love from beyond the grave.

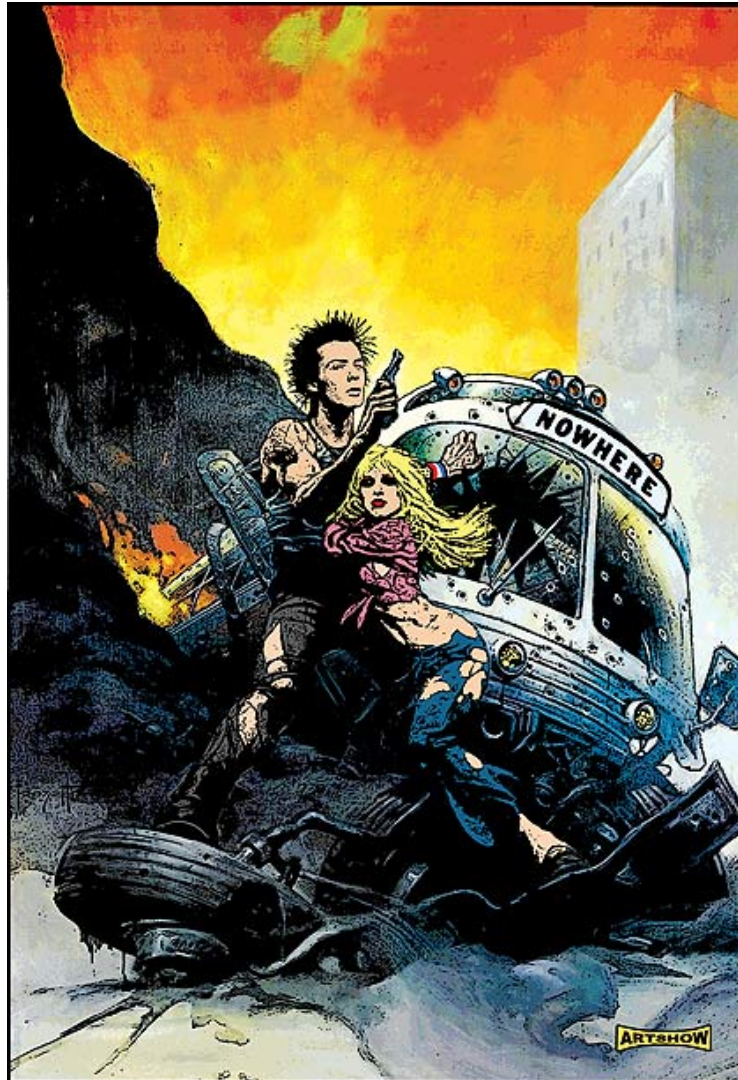
That said, and given that rock stars are often fringe personalities who find themselves prematurely on the other side of mortality, there sure are a lot of dead ones. And there is perhaps nothing more romantic in our culture of arts and entertainment than the dead-rock-star archetype.

Matt Dye knows this, and so do the other 58 artists whose work will be showcased at the Blunt Graffix studio on Feb. 2.

Dead Rock Stars: A Tribute to the Mortal Gods of Sound is a phenomenal exhibit of printed art that includes contributors ranging from international graphic designers to New York street artists.

The ambitious and large-scale endeavor, though sensational both in proportion and conception, would seem to be the next logical step for Dye. The son of a welder whose ingenuity inspires him to this day, Dye spent 10 years in the U.S. Air Force, where he worked in air-traffic control guiding planes off of and onto ships.

Dye found a burning passion in the visual arts, left the Air Force and began furiously designing concert posters for touring bands. It is the experience of his initial plunge into the design world that Dye is now, in a sense, returning to with his Dead Rock Stars show.



"Sid and Nancy, the Gauntlet" by Blunt Graffix



“The dead rock star theme made sense with what I’d been doing earlier,” says Dye. “And a lot of these guys (contributing artists) did concert posters over the years too.”



Molly Mae Culligan and Matt Dye printing the work of Indonesian artist Tombstone 14. Photo by Todd Cooper.

It is almost midnight at Blunt Graffix, and Dye is talking about his humble beginnings as a young artist — what it was like to track down band members and crank out images geared to entice show-goers. His huge dog, Chase, paces throughout the warehouse. Small and large screen prints litter the edges of the workspace.



“Joe Strummer” by Boneface

“I’m so glad this show came together,” Dye says. “I’m still getting emails from artists who are still trying to submit. There is so much talent and they are all so good.” While speaking, Dye carefully dissects the packaging around a piece of art that arrived earlier in the day. The return address is a location in Germany.

Dye is low key about his current projects, some of which will be on display at the Feb. 2 show. Together with collaborator Molly Mae Culligan, Dye produces large-scale screen prints that require hours of tedious attention to detail. When most people think of screen-printing, they envision a few janky wooden boxes with little squares of mesh in some very enthusiastic DIY kid’s basement, with edgy T-shirts as the final product. That’s not the type of thing going on over at Dye’s studio.

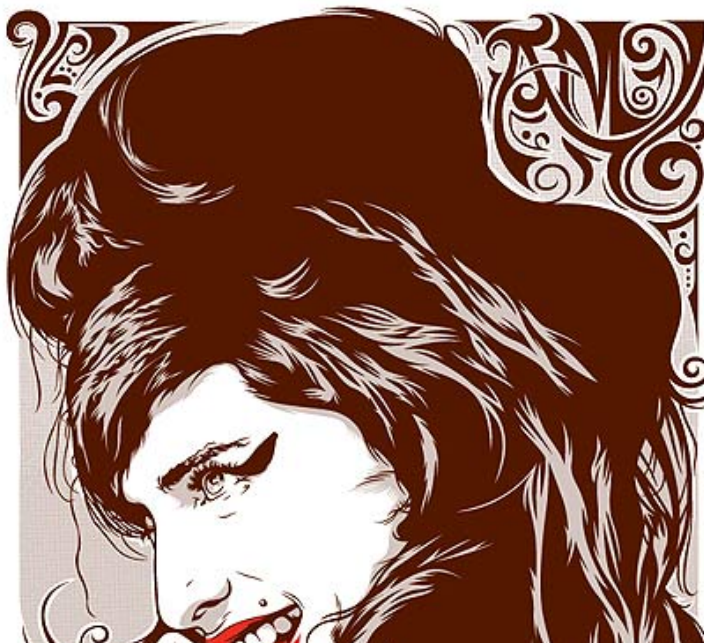


“The Ramones” by Retro Outlaw Studios

First comes the idea, which Dye usually sketches, photocopies and then lays out in a computer formatting program. This portion of the process, the raw, creative part, can take up to 10 hours or more.

“If you’re not happy with the picture or the design in 10 hours or so, you’ve got to move on,” Culligan says. “But after the first 10 hours you know whether or not you’re going to put in more hours designing.”

The image is separated by color onto transparencies. Then screens are coated with photo emulsion and left to dry, after which the transparencies are burned onto the screens using an exposure unit — a large table, with long UV light tubes, that looks like a copy machine on steroids.



“Every place the ultraviolet light hits the screen burns the emulsion into the screen,” Dye explains. “Then we rinse out the excess part. Then we have our stencil.”

The rinsing-out part looks like Dye and Culligan placing the exposed screen into a bathtub and using a pressure washer (basically a water cannon) to blast it. This aquatic assault occurs at short range — and sometimes at very close range to ensure the crispness of the image.

There must be a stencil (or screen) for each color; therefore the exposing and water blasting is repeated as many times as needed. Next comes Culligan’s specialty: the mixing of inks to obtain just the right color.

Lastly, the screens are taken to the press where Dye and Culligan work patiently, printing screen-by-screen and color-by-color to achieve the final product. From time to time, Tim Jordan, another diligent Blunt Graffix collaborator, comes in and helps with

the process. The last part of the operation can take about an hour per color. On average the Blunt Graffix crew uses four colors per print.

One of Dye’s creations, “Sid and Nancy, The Gauntlet,” an action-filled scene of punk casualties Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen of The Sex Pistols, is filled with so much color, you’d swear Dye and Culligan must’ve suffered brutal insomnia to make it happen. The two artists have that look of well-earned exhaustion about them, and rightfully so.

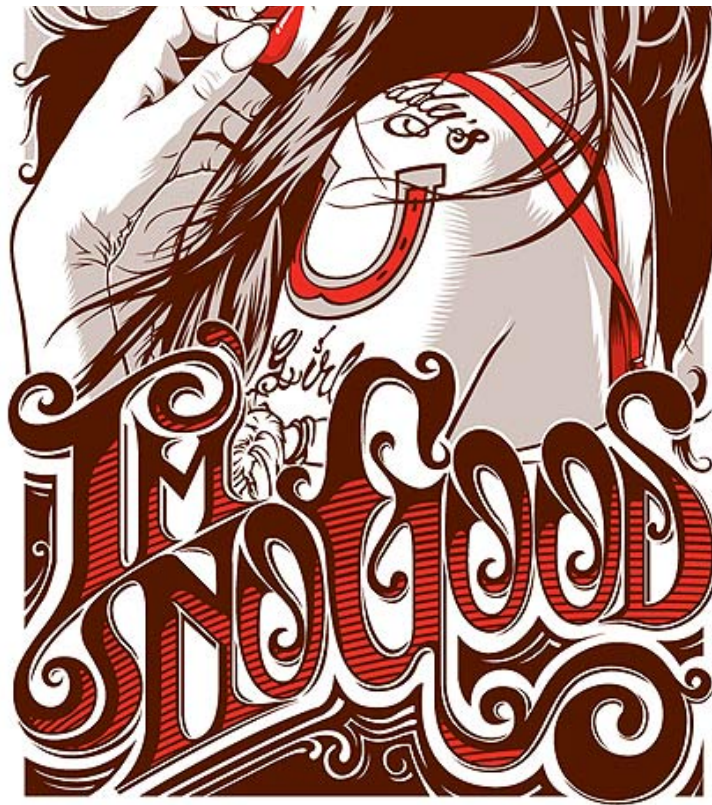
Other meticulous and masterful artists represented in the Dead Rock Stars show are Michael Roderick — a local musician from the band Mood Area 52 as well as a concert poster designer — Jim Mazza, Japan’s own Roamcouch, and Frank Kozik. But seriously, the list goes on and on and on: Strawberry Luna, Paul Savage, Boneface. One of the larger names whose work will be on display is the 69-year-old London-based graffiti artist known as Copy Right.

“There are a lot of big names, and to be in the same show as they are is a real honor,” says Joshua Budich, whose homage to Amy Winehouse will be among the art pieces hanging in the studio at Blunt.

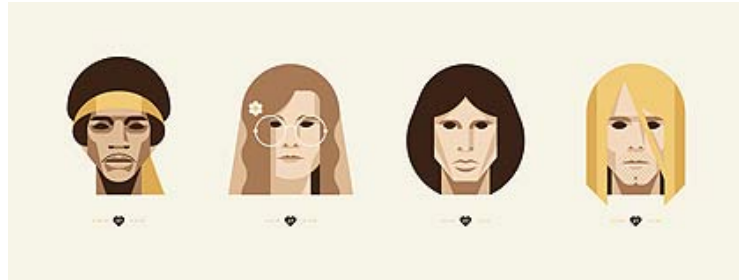
Skeletal images of Kurt Cobain and The Ramones, Jim Morrison mixed with Han Solo and cyborg-esque portraits of Michael Jackson are just a few of the images show-goers can expect to see. The added treat of live music, courtesy of Girin Guha and the Experience, will also be on the scene.

But Dye isn’t stopping with the Feb. 2 show, nor should he, given the magnitude of artists and talent he is collaborating with. *Dead Rock Stars: A Tribute to the Mortal Gods of Sound* will be on display at The Wave gallery starting Feb 24. Dye is also in negotiations with San Francisco art gallery Spoke Art.

Hanging around Dye in the final days of his preparation, you can sense his excitement. It’s contagious. As tired as he seems from long nights and odd hours of work, there is an undertone of enthusiasm that seems glued to Dye. He is about to watch an idea hatched in the early hours of a morning many months ago turn



“Amy Winehouse” by Joshua Budich



“27 Club” by DKNG

into a nationally touring event that has potential to land in galleries up and down the coast.

“I’m so excited to see this thing take off,” he says, “especially to take it on the road.” He smiles big. “I wanted to do something different like this. And everyone loves dead rock stars.”

Dead Rockstars: A Tribute to the Mortal Gods of Sound *opens 6pm Thursday, Feb. 2, at Blunt Graffix (1040 Tyinn St. No. 3, Eugene). The work will also be available for viewing Feb. 3-4 from 4-8pm and Feb. 5 from 3-6pm.*

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