BY BRYN MOOTH

SIDELINES

OUR HEROES

Sometimes, as a writer, you find yourself wanting to befriend your subject. So I'll try to contain my admiration for the husband-and-wife duo that makes up Hero Design Studio in Buffalo, NY. (Make that, trio: Their dog, Derby, joins them in the office.)

And that office is constantly humming. Designers and partners Beth Manos Brickey and Mark Brickey subdivide their time among several enterprises: a healthy client business creating concert and event posters for bands like Spoon and local organizations like the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library; a screen-printing shop; two online outlets for their greeting cards and fine-art prints; and a bricks-and-mortar store selling not only their own goods but also products from Kidrobot and other designers. A 700-square-foot space in downtown Buffalo houses all of the above.

Brickey morphed his freelance business into Hero Design in 2003; Manos Brickey joined him in 2005, after the couple had dated for two years. They thrive not only on the work, but also on each other. "It's so great to have our lives totally streamlined and headed in one direction together," Brickey says. "Being able to talk about what you do, to be stressed by what you have going on, and to share all of this with your spouse, who not only gets it, but is experiencing it all with you, is pretty cool."

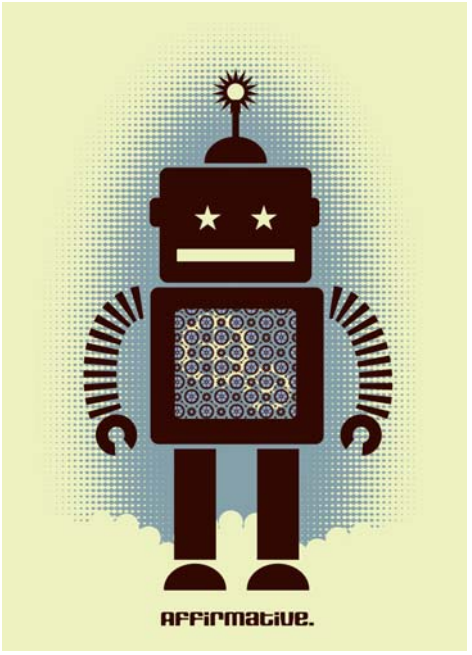
Demand prompted the duo's retail aspirations, Brickey says. Fans would stop by their former studio (which wasn't open to the public) almost daily, asking to purchase their posters. In 2006, they decided to launch a legitimate retail space where they could create and sell their work. Client and self-directed projects represent comparable revenue streams. "I'd say that 60% comes from design services for clients; the other 40% would be split between the retail outlets (our own boutique, online, selling at events, wholesale, etc.)," Brickey says.

While their retail customers are unlikely to become clients, they serve as walking billboards for Hero Design's work. "There's a whole level of promotion that's happening beyond our control; it's truly organic," Brickey says. "Parents have bought our artwork to hang in their newborns' nurseries, and some of those babies are wearing our shirts. I'd like to think that one of those babies is going to one day hire us." HOW

Bryn Mooth is HOW's editor. HOWdesign.com

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»WEB EXTRA
Read the full Q&A with Beth Manos Brickey and Mark Brickey. HOWdesign.com/HeroDesignStudio



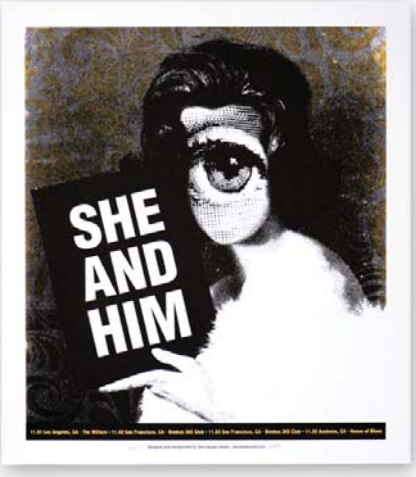
HAPPY TOGETHER
Beth Manos Brickey and her husband, Mark Brickey, thrive on working together. "This is the only way to work, and it's been the only time in my working life that I've truly been happy," she says. "I love that if I'm feeling insecure about a design I'm working on or, on the other hand, very proud, I get to share this all with my husband, every day."



CREATIVE PROCESS
Hero Design's broad range of products (note cards, prints and apparel) has become a hefty portfolio of work that convinces prospective clients of their design chops. "Before we had over 200 pieces of original work to show clients, I have no doubt that most jobs we got were because we seemed affordable and responsible enough to get the jobs done," Brickey says. "Now we get hired to 'do our thing.'"







CUTE, BUT NOT TOO
A clever sentimentality lurks behind the retro illustration style of Hero Design Studio's screen-printed papergoods.

A LOT OF TRUST
Concert posters make up the bulk of Hero Design's client work; these projects come with ample creative freedom. "There have even been times where a band has literally said, 'Do what you do,' and they see it for the first time the night of the show," Manos Brickey says.