

# GRAND DESIGNS

BRIAN EWING

Design wizard Brian Ewing takes a break from a caffeine binge to tell ROCK SOUND about poverty, porn, and thinking like a 15-year-old boy...

INTERVIEW: Rachel Kellehar

**ACTS WORKED FOR:** Warped Tour, Taste Of Chaos tour, Brand New, The Bouncing Souls, Converge, Elliot Smith, Fall Out Boy, Lifetime, Motion City Soundtrack, My Chemical Romance, Neurosis, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, and many more...



**N**ever one to play by the rules, Los Angeles-based illustrator Brian Ewing has taken an eclectic route into the world of design and illustration. Despite dropping out of art school twice, he has gone on to become one of the music industry's most sought-after artists, working not only with individual brands, bands and musicians, but also as the official artist and designer for the Warped Tour for the past four years running.

**HOW DID YOU GET INTO DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION?** "Accidentally. I went to an arts high school in Milwaukee to study fine art. After graduating I went to the American Academy Of Art in Chicago for a year to study illustration, but the cost was too much. The thought of owing \$50,000 and having no guarantee of a job convinced me to leave. I moved back to Milwaukee, and got a job as a janitor. After a year cleaning toilets and mopping floors in a morgue I thought I'd give art school another try. I attended the Milwaukee Institute Of Art & Design to study fine art, but it ended the same way as the first time. I wasn't better than anyone there, I was just broke and less fortunate."

**DO YOU THINK A FORMAL ART EDUCATION IS NECESSARY TO BECOME A DESIGNER?** "School works for some people and not for others. If you want to go and can afford it, then you should. A degree doesn't guarantee you a job or make you a good artist."

**ARE YOU SELF-EMPLOYED?** "I work on a freelance basis. Most of my work is gained from clients visiting my website. I'm also sponsored by Atticus Clothing. I think I'm the only non-musician they've been consistently sponsoring for the past four years. I've been working with them on a line of shirts for 08, and in they're [in conjunction with Rock Sound] putting together my first art show in London this year."

**YOU SEEM OBSESSED WITH IMAGES OF DEATH, AND FICTIONAL CHARACTERS SUCH AS ZOMBIES AND ANGELS. WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO THESE IMAGES?** "I'm stuck in the mindset of being a 15-year-old kid: music, skateboarding, videogames, comic books, movies, tattoos, and naked ladies. I'm not really obsessed with death. I'm just having fun. Skulls or zombies or devils are a part of our culture's visual language. When you see one of those icons you have an immediate reaction. You know what it means and you understand the mood."

**HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE WARPED TOUR AS THEIR PRINCIPLE DESIGNER?** "Dumb luck. I guess it had to do with the fact that I was working with a lot of bands prior to getting that job and my posters were everywhere. Weirdly enough, at that time I was involved with a few other artists trying to start a studio to do posters and packaging in the music industry. The guy leading the studio had ego problems and lacked professionalism. Luckily they kicked me out and a few weeks later I got the Warped Tour job. I haven't looked back."

**HOW MUCH ARTISTIC FREEDOM ARE YOU GRANTED?** "There's a good deal of artistic freedom with the posters. They hired me to help connect them to the bands and the bands' audience. Sometimes there are too many decision makers involved. Overall it's been a great experience. The workload would kill a normal human being. Well not really. But it is a lot of work. For some reason I always get hired a little late in the game. I drink lots of Red Bull, get all tweaked out on caffeine, and work for a few days straight."

**HAVE YOU EVER GONE ON TOUR WITH THE WARPED BANDS?** "For the first three years I got to travel with the tour as an 'artist' and sign autographs each day. It was a ton of fun and completely insane. They never covered 'touring' in art school."

**IS THERE MUCH INTERACTION BETWEEN YOU AND THE BANDS YOU DESIGN FOR?** "It really varies. Some clients are really hands-off and trust me to do a good job and spell the bands' names correctly. Others want updates daily and have 12 people requesting changes that conflict with each other. For the 07 Warped Tour poster they told me that the theme was tattoos and I took it from there. At first they tried to make the sponsor logos really big and I had to explain to them why that wouldn't work and show them examples. Other than that, they let me do what I needed to in order to finish the job."

**WHAT PROGRAMMES AND TOOLS DO YOU WORK WITH?** "I still work traditionally on the artwork and then do the colouring and design digitally. I use a pencil, brush, ink and paper, and then scan the work and use Adobe Illustrator to colour and do the text. I get asked the 'technique' question a lot, so I recently put together a 'how-to' thingamajig on my website under 'Flicks'."

**WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST DESIGN BRIEF YOU'VE EVER BEEN GIVEN?** "I used to work in porn. Larry Flynt was my boss. It doesn't get any weirder than that."

Details of Brian's exhibition will be posted at: [www.rocksound.tv](http://www.rocksound.tv)  
[www.brianewing.com](http://www.brianewing.com)



THE BLACK CLOUDS AND UNDERDOGS TOUR

# FALL OUT BOY



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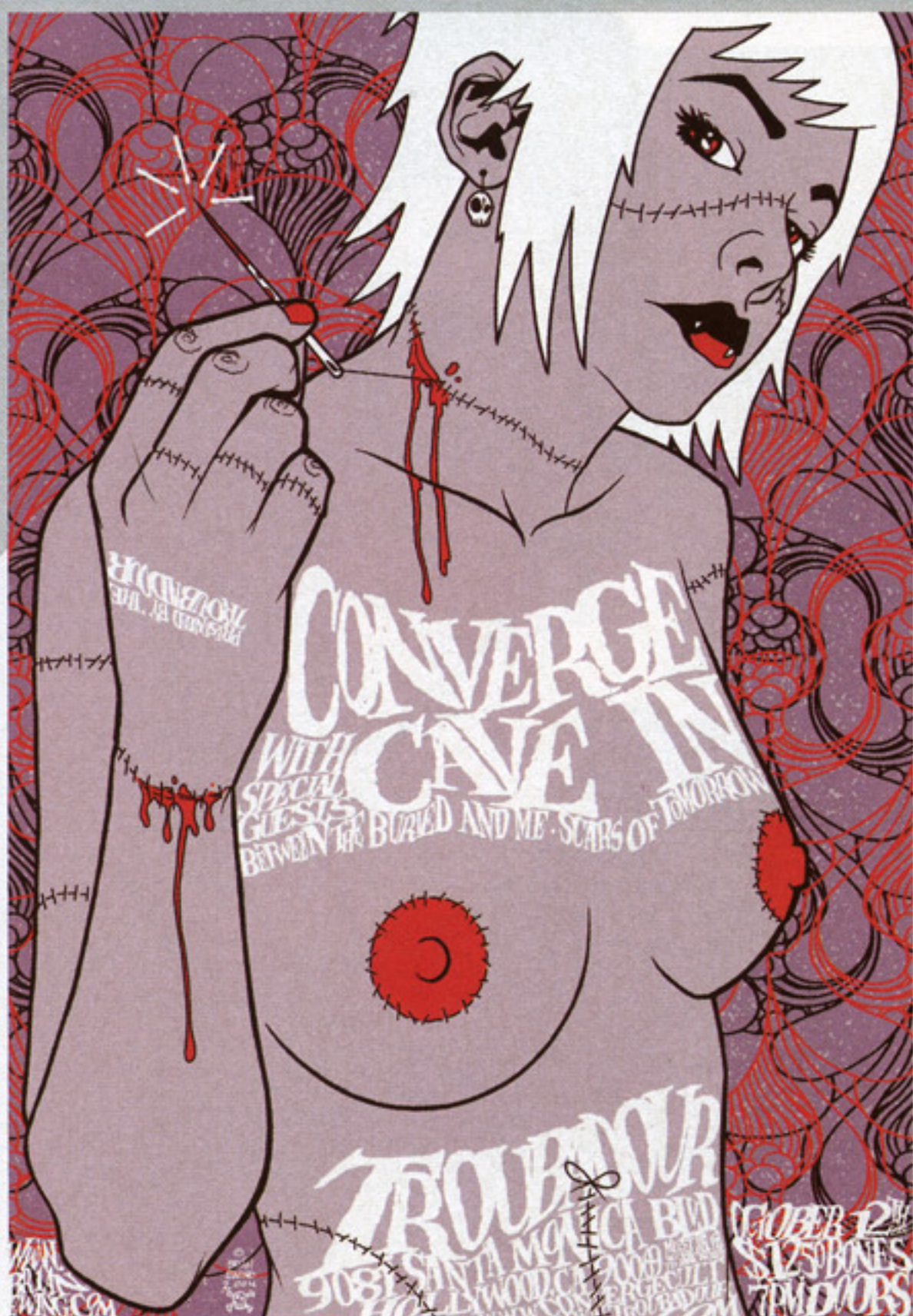
POSTER DESIGN © BRIANREWING.COM



# MOTION CITY SOUNDTRACK

VANS WRAPPED TOUR '06 • JUNE 15TH - AUGUST 10TH

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CONVERGE  
WITH SPECIAL GUESTS  
BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME • SCARS OF TOMORROW

TROUBLE  
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