

# Inter view



## CHRISTOPHER COX

*Imaginative, multi-talented and having engaged in nearly every creative discipline going, Christopher Cox is a name to watch*

**C**hristopher Cox might be from a small town in Midwest America, but his designs are taking the world by storm. The 31-year-old is an art director for an agency in Denver called Cactus and is also the man behind *Changethethought* ([www.changethethought.com](http://www.changethethought.com)), a blog site that serves as inspiration for the creative community and also hosts Cox's personal portfolio of work.

Through Cactus and his other projects, Cox has done it all: art directed television spots, photography shoots, motion graphics and websites, as well as producing creative work for all things print, including a range of t-shirts. He

is also in the process of printing posters for the first time, which will be sold through his online store.

*Changethethought* was launched in 2002 as a portfolio site for Cox to establish himself, but after spending some time blogging for *Design Is Kinky* ([www.designiskinky.net](http://www.designiskinky.net)), he decided to overhaul his own site into a "more robust blog", which was launched earlier this year commenting on the best in new design talent. As Cox says: "[The site has been] growing in audience almost exponentially month after month. So, that has been really exciting and I am not sure exactly where that may take me".

Cox has been drawing and painting since he was a child, when he would get bored of colouring books and draw his own creations instead. In his pre-teen days he became obsessed with comic-book art, before taking a deviation into performance art, fuelling a desire to be an actor, which still remains today.

He studied graphic design in college, switching from being a medical major. "I was immediately absorbed by design because, in many ways, it is a science unto itself," Cox says. "I continued studying psychology while I started studying design and I saw a connection between the two. I have always been



# Christopher Cox

## LOST IN SPACE

**(FAR LEFT):** "I have always been fascinated by how people respond to visual stimuli"

## WAR IS OUR GOD

**(LEFT):** "It has been impossible not to be influenced by things like the war in Iraq and America's blundering foreign policy"

## DEEP SEA (THIS

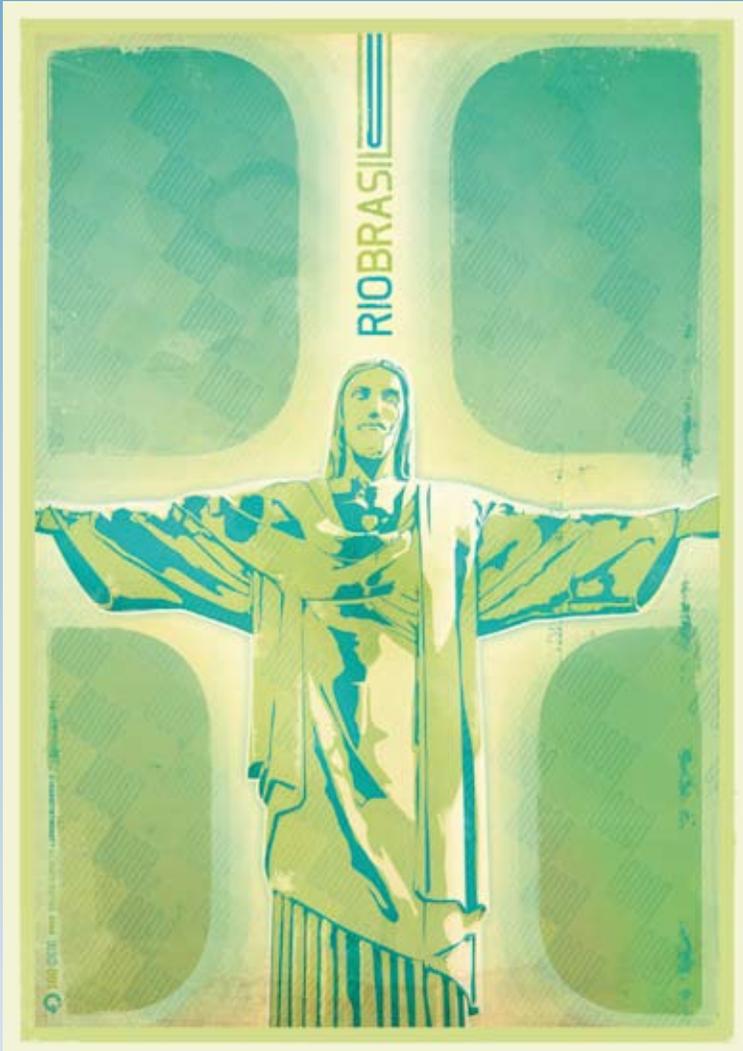
**PAGE):** "I am old enough and experienced enough now that I can say with some assurance that I know how to create things that people will like or appreciate"



# Inter view



**COLLAGES 2008:** *"I would really like to move to another country in the future and work abroad so I can get the experience of creating for another culture"*



fascinated by how people respond to visual stimuli. I love vibrant colours and the computer allows you to really explore the outer limits as to what is possible with colour now."

## Imaginative design

Cox can barely remember his first professional commission now, but a few years ago he attempted to embark on a freelance career, with his first project being album cover art for the now-defunct band The Receiving End Of Sirens. "The album turned out great," Cox narrates. "I was paid barely anything for the project, but it attracted a lot of attention. I still get asked if I can provide art from the album so fans can tattoo it on themselves."

Since then, Cox has "held just about every job you could think of" in the creative arena. He has worked in publishing, advertising, Flash web design; he's done voiceovers for radio commercials, art directed television spots and motion graphics, made his own music for websites and curated blogs; he's even helped start the first internet television network – most of us would need a lifetime to achieve so much.

None of this would be possible without talent and a healthy dose of imagination, the latter of which Cox attributes to his upbringing: "I think growing up in a small town actually made me more imaginative in a certain kind of way. There weren't a lot of places to go or things to do so I just had to make up my own little world to be in."

## WE'LL SHOW THEM (TOP RIGHT):

*"I feel as an artist you have some responsibility to listen to the undercurrent of society and feed that into your work"*

## RIO BRASIL POSTER (TOP LEFT):

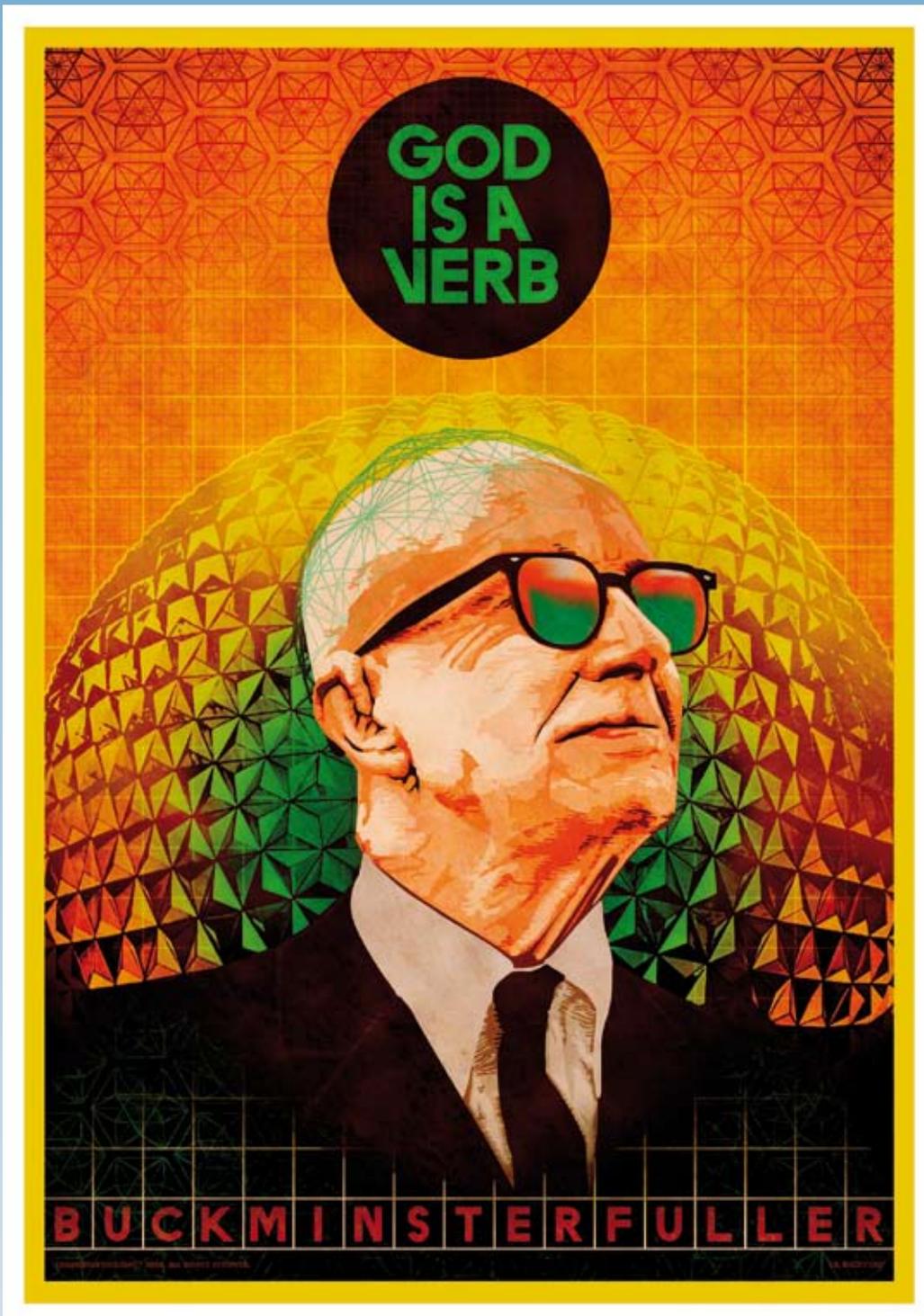
*"Posters were a way for designers in the past to extend their abilities and earn extra income. So I think now is a good time to attempt something like that"*

Nowadays, he keeps his work fresh by indulging in small, personal projects. "If things go stale at work, as they often do here in middle America, I freshen up by either creating new work to sell on my own or just create for art's sake," Cox explains. "It's a constant battle in this industry to stay relevant and keep creating things that are new and interesting. I am not a big proponent of a singular style either, so I don't really put parameters on myself in that regard. I like to try new things constantly and with all the technology available now that is an easy thing to do."

This belief in not keeping to one distinct style means that when asked to describe the style of his own work, Cox struggles: "I have always wrestled with this question. I don't really >>>

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“I LOVE VIBRANT COLOURS AND THE COMPUTER ALLOWS YOU TO REALLY EXPLORE THE OUTER LIMITS AS TO WHAT IS POSSIBLE WITH COLOUR NOW”



believe in style when it comes to graphic design. I see graphic design as a 'solution-based' form of art. It works best when it solves the problem defined by the brief. I have created design that is very trendy to very minimal." Often with commercial artists, personal style comes through in personal projects, but even here Cox is reluctant to pigeon-hole himself: "I just like to experiment and try whatever appeals to me at the moment. I don't know if a long-term style will eventually evolve out of that approach or not. The two things I love most are colour and typography. Maybe a definable style will come of that, but for now I prefer to be style-less or maybe even style-full."

## Style advice

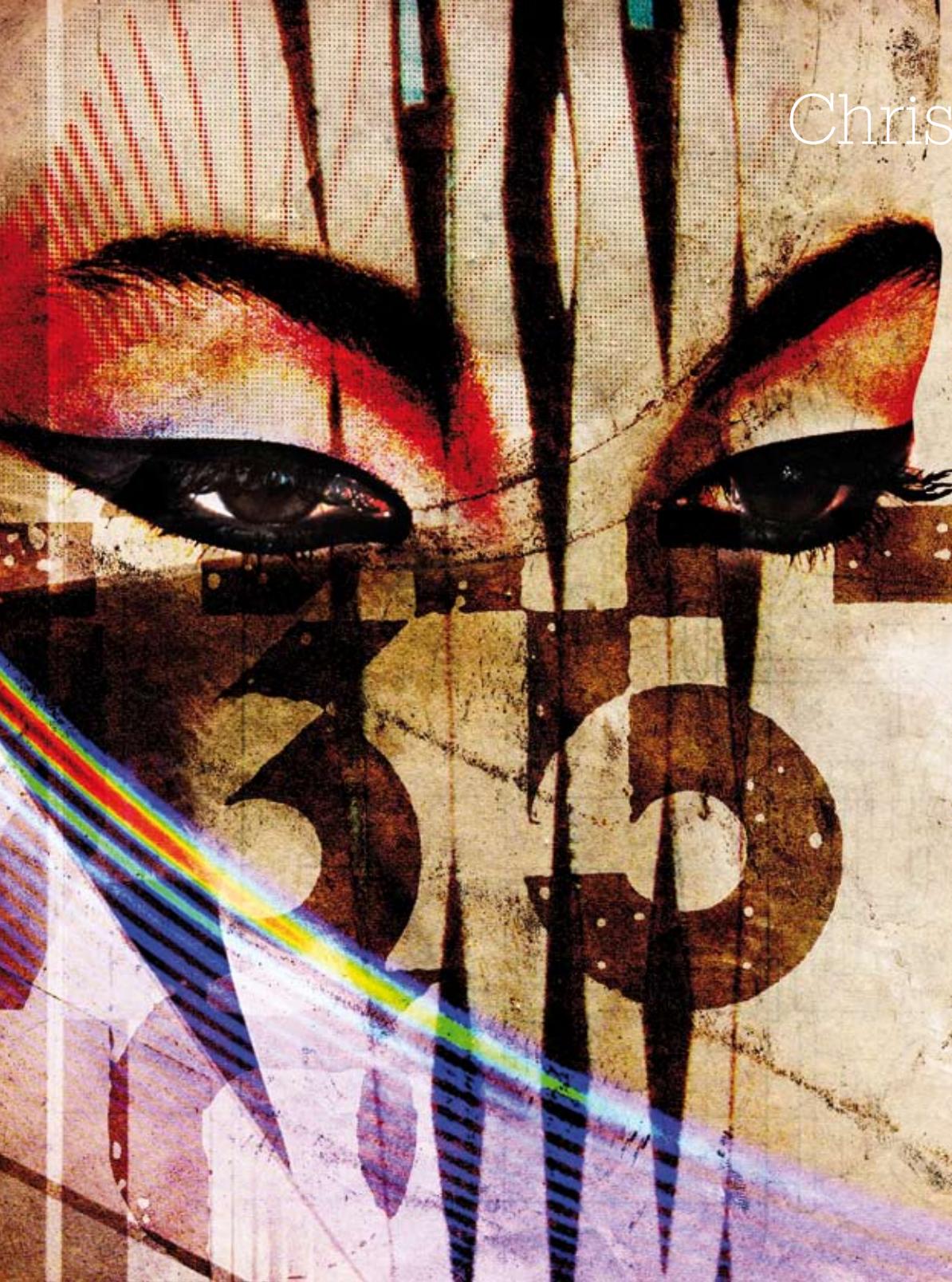
In commercial work, style can often be dictated by the client, which is something that Cox is very aware of: "When an agency starts pandering for money or taking on more than it can handle to make a buck, you start to see things turn for the worse. The creatives can no longer defend their ideas when the decision is made to give in to the client's every whim. When that happens you aren't really designing or being original any more. You are just being a short order cook. You are making food, but it is junk food. It only satiates momentarily and provides a sense of fullness, but eventually it leaves everyone bloated and sick. It's all right to say no when you have to."

So if it isn't the demands of the client influencing his work, what exactly is? "The present political situation in the US has had a huge influence on me and my work. I think growing up in middle America where people trust the government and then seeing it so shamelessly turn on those very people has really toughened me. It has also made me aware that community extends beyond just your particular locale. It means being conscious of the country in which you live and how that country influences the world. We all have to live on this planet and I think we are beginning to learn that if we don't figure out a way to come together and take care of it, our very survival may indeed be threatened."

A strong set of ethics have certainly steered Cox throughout his career, as can be seen from some of the images shown over these pages. The idea of authority, for example, is something that Cox has always questioned: "I think people are at their best when they are allowed to be free and express themselves and discover who they really are. My work and my need to reach out to my peers is my way of working towards learning more about who I am and how I fit into this world."

He describes himself as a "news and information junkie", which comes through clearly on his [Changethethought](http://Changethethought.com) website, where

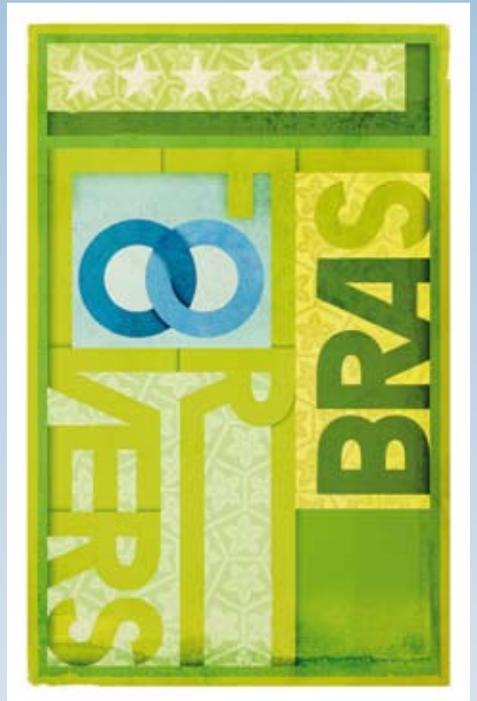
# Christopher Cox



**GOD IS A VERB (OPPOSITE PAGE):** "I love to be pulled out of my comfort zone. If there is anything I hate, it is a comfort zone"

**PHOTO COLLAGE 2008 (LEFT):** "It seems like a lot of designers are returning to a more classic approach to design and typography"

**BRASIL IS FOR LOVERS (BELOW):** "There is an obvious immediacy to typography that isn't always as easily achievable in an artistic image"



a news bulletin with stories from around the world are added, along with his personal reflection and comments.

These strong political views have also contributed to his career as an artist: "I think because my work has been so political, and also because I don't really have a recognisable style, it has been touch and go as far as published recognition goes. People usually either like my work or can't stand it. It usually doesn't seem to cut people in the middle."

Cox comes across as an insightful individual and this extends to his own work, of which he is very self-critical: "I am never satisfied. I don't think I ever will be. Sometimes this is to my own

detriment. I work very hard and [try to keep] myself inspired regardless of where I am stationed and who I am working for. I usually don't like my own work very much and never really think of it as being really all that good."

There's no denying that whatever Cox says about his work, the technical skill that he exhibits in his pieces is truly excellent. However, in his typical fashion, Cox doesn't stick to any one particular technique to create his images: "I don't know if I have a real definable technique per se. I see something in my mind and I just use what I have to work towards realising that image." He continues, explaining where our favourite Adobe app comes in: "Composition

and colour play a huge part. I usually start out in Illustrator when I am working in typography. I go towards Photoshop when I want to create really spectacular effects or colour. I like to experiment a lot with dense layers and textures. After I achieve the texturisation I want, then I will turn to working with colour. I am a sucker for bright glowing colours on black. I just like the drama in that combination."

And drama is certainly what seems to influence a lot of Cox's ambitions, whether literally in his dreams of becoming an actor, or in the debate his political art creates – but one thing is certain, and that is he will certainly help some people to change their thoughts. ■