

Sometimes the solution comes quickly, sometimes it simply takes forever. A possible explanation is that one topic might seem inherently more interesting than another, inspiring more immediate possibilities. For instance, a jazz festival (page 233) might conjure more stimulating images than an article explaining “asset acquisition” (opposite page). Both assignments trigger different responses at different speeds. The “festival” looks easy because the words offer visual clues and it is a familiar event, but therein lies the trap. I don’t always trust my instant solutions. In fact, I’m suspicious of them. If the solution appears too quickly, it may also occur quickly to the viewer, which means it may not be novel after all.

On the other hand, illustrating “asset acquisition”—seemingly more difficult at first glance—actually presents more opportunities for invention. Because we are less informed about the subject, most of us start with fewer preconceptions, so the possibility for abstract concepts are more available. For me, this kind of assignment leads to visual metaphors and surreal scenarios—cobbling together familiar symbols to tell a new story. It becomes the perfect place to use irony, wit, and juxtaposition to create a new porthole into a subject. If I’m intrigued by my solution, I’m pretty sure you will be.

This was a big discovery, as it means that sometimes the scariest assignments are actually the richest. My unfamiliarity with a subject has actually opened a window into more provocative solutions. It taught me to turn fear into curiosity into opportunity.

My goal is always to get a little further “out there,” which requires exploring the obvious first, then digging deeper. This may be the most challenging part of illustrating, but it is the required work and it does, in fact, reward you. It’s like finding that fabulous T-shirt buried beneath the ones you wear every day.

Turns out I gained a reputation for these kinds of assignments, which would attract other clients, particularly in the financial world. They have complex issues that need to be explained in terms we all can understand—and hopefully learn from.

By the way, jazz posters are a lot harder to design than they look!



Annual report  
Orion Capital, 2000