

4.8. Deka – skate, illustration and the other side of the skateboard

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Abstract

Skate and skateboarding culture emerge from the street space, which simultaneously influences artists, designers, illustrators, musicians, writers, filmmakers and creatives. The Deka project focuses on this relationship between the urban culture of skateboarding and illustration and the expressions that this relationship trigger. To this research, various activities were structured throughout 2013, such as artistic events, a graphic diary and the participation on the 'Milhões de Festa' festival, with the outreach event 'Dekalhões', where was spurred an environment that combined art, illustration, music and local skaters, wrapped in a diverse audience. The action plan was structured in order to promote new artists and the skate culture in Northern Portugal, through research and analysis of intervention opportunities at public events, physical spaces and digital universes. It is sustained that this urban counter-culture is an opportunity to enhance and Express creativity and the case study of the research reinforces its potential to become a starting point for artistic intervention. dekaday.tumblr.com

Keywords: illustration, skate, urban culture

Background and context

The practical-based project happens with the aim of combining and bringing to Skateboarding other parallel perspectives. Having Skateboarding as a starting point, from it emerge associated various hypotheses or ideas to explore: (i) skate as inspiration for artistic creation, (ii) in the dissemination and support to the activity and (iii) as an agent of integration of all the surrounding culture in a new context.

Allied to Graffiti and Music, Skate emerges from the street space, influencing artists, designers, illustrators, musicians, writers, directors, designers and other creatives. Faced with this dimension, the Deka project examined, in an applied research, a point of convergence where it conceives opportunities for an intervention. It is intended, with this strategy, to highlight distinct subcultures soaked by the underground and that are outside of a mainstream system, projecting independent creators or other forms of cultural expression. In this sense, its ambition is to generate artistic work and visual expression for its promotion, to promote and to collaborate with new artists and mostly to highlight Skateboarding as a voluble and singular modality.

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An (brief) historical review

In the late 1940s and early 1950s of 20th century, the object Skate becomes associated to Surf in California. With the shortage of waves and low tides the skateboarders sought an alternative and built their own skateboards for urban practice, that after development became known as "sidewalk surfing" or street surf.

However, the concept of Skate at the time was quite primitive and consisted in a reproduction adapted from the Surf; this modality was practiced barefoot and on slopes, the manoeuvres were similar to the Surf as if it is an extension of the aquatic environment to land.

A short time later, with more and more followers and after constant variations in the suitability of movements and way of skating, changes emerged Skateboard and has established itself increasingly, developing a singular vocabulary. Companies have noticed the growing phenomenon and started producing boards from layers of pressed wood and specific trucks for Skates, giving a better consistency and use by the skaters who began inventing tricks as handstands, manuals or 360°.

Alongside this, appeared the first competitions and teams and in 1965 occurs the first television transmission of a skate contest in Anaheim on the channel ABC's Wide World of Sports with only two categories: the flatland freestyle and the slalom downhill racing.

At the same time, alternatively other skaters were exploring new concepts, as practice in empty pools by sinuosity and speed that could reach, contributing to the design of a new environment and style and for the evolution of this modality in a way that exploits and adapts to any medium, feature that continues today.

Everything changed when Frank Nasworthy designed the first urethane wheels "Cadillac Wheel" that achieve a higher traction, flexibility and durability, contrary to the primitive clay wheels. The skateboard reaches the necessary impulse to turn into something more. In 1975 the Zephyr Team debut in freestyle championships, founded by Jeff Ho and Skip Engblom, and distinguished himself by bringing together the best "skater-surfers" of Dogtown, the Z-Boys: Stacy Peralta, Tony Alva, Jay Adams or Jim Muir presented a new style, attitude and way of skating defining new parameters for the future. The Z-Boys were fluid, quick and had style, differentiating itself from an earlier generation that was rigid, property and quite technical.

At that time, the magazine Quarterly Skateboarder changes its name to Skateboarder and after the second edition and under the pseudonym of John Smythe, the articles and photos of the documentary photographer, skater, artist and writer Craig R. Stecyk contribute to create the myth Dogtown and of the Z-Boys. In his first article "Aspect of the Downhill Slide" (Stecyk, 1975), comes one of the most quoted phrases in the history of skateboarding:

"Two hundred years of American technology has unwittingly created a massive cement playground of unlimited potential. But it was the minds of 11 year olds that could see that potential." C.R. Stecyk (1975)

In 1978 another important moment occurs, Alan Gelfand – nicknamed by friends for "Ollie" – invents a movement that allows jump and hold the skate without hand support. Later, the trick adopts the name of "Ollie Pop" and is arguably the most important trick in the history of skateboarding. "Ollie" was the beginning, which opened the way to the evolution of multiple combinations causing other new tricks as aials, or inverts marking a new era that looked move away from the world of surf.

Between 80 and 90's, the Skateboarding continues to grow and to assert itself as counter-culture. The skaters begin to build their own structures at the back of the house and moved

to the skate parks and streets, at the same time the shape of the boards is modified in order to overcome obstacles and to adapt the new movements. Born the VHS technology and the start of production of skate videos reaching an worldwide audience. The Skate video became a promotional tool most powerful for skate brands enabling them to define an identity. This technology allowed a evolution of Skateboard since it was possible observe new skaters, tricks, techniques or styles.

At the end of the 1980s, the Skateboard declines again by economic recession, which precipitated the end of the skate park era by the lack of security, the collapse of many skate manufacturers and the posterior end of the magazine Skateboarder.

However, the skate parks were replaced by structures made by skaters or by the invasion of pools. As a consequence, Skateboarding re-emerged into a symbol of counter-culture and also as a signal of the times that they lived. The Skateboarding has become underground and clandestine, adopting a value of social and cultural identity by the Do-It-Yourself from the Punk Rock scene. The culture of skateboard and the music intersected and fecundated themselves, mutually sharing an individualism by disregard and iconoclastic style.

During this change, born in 1981 the Thrasher Magazine by Kevin Thatcher and Fausto Vitello (Independent Trucks), which became the bible of the rebel skater reconsolidating a rebellious image, of controversy by the motto "skate and destroy" against the clean image of surf-skate perpetuated in the 70s by the media. To the magazine, and this new wave were intrinsic Skate Punk bands as Jodie Foster's Army, Black Flag or Suicidal Tendencies, by the dissemination of music collections in each issue.

Skaters as Steve Rocco and Rodney Mullen continue to invent more complex freestyle tricks. Mullen took the "Ollie" of Gelfand and turned it into a trick with more pop and gradually other skaters as Mark Gonzales, Natas Kaupas or Tommy Guerrero will use the tricks of Rodney Mullen in the streets and will completely revolutionize the "street skating" allowing new challenges over banks, stairs, gaps or rails.

The change from the Vert to the streets precipitated a global change in the culture of Skate. The suburban skate park and the homemade half-pipe with followers from the Punk Rock became a flexible and multicultural urban scene, where skaters of different urban tribes boosted abandoned spaces of the 60s into authentic ready-made skateparks.

Skateboarding nowadays

Skateboarding has been extended by the commercialization of brands, by the competitions such as X-Games or Street League Skateboarding and by the media coverage sometimes contradicting concepts or ideals that are linked to the origins of Skate.

On the other hand, alternative and movements appears by individuals and independent brands as an example of Pontus Alv and the Swedish brand Polar Skate Co. These companies are made of people who observed that something was missing in the world of skateboarding and that they intended to distance themselves of purely commercial and profitable trends, devoting a look on the skateboard in its pure form under the manifest of the importance of this state. Pontus Alv believes in the capacity of the Skateboarding by the union in community, for fun in turn be standardized and packed. By the DIY spirit, also defends the importance of the reappropriation of abandoned spaces by the use in a positive and constructive way, moving away skaters of their comfort zone. The formula for success of Pontus and Polar is defined by thinking the Skateboarding as a centralized action in people's lives. In 2005, Pontus Alv

portrays a singular vision of skateboarding by the debut of "The Strongest of the Strange", whose title comes from a poem of Charles Bukowski and it works as documentary and video artist.

Based on the above here, we can say that skateboarding is able to reinvent themselves and now his incarnation corresponds to a post-modern miscellany of historical consciousness and of a contemporary focus. As Rock Music, the Skateboarding may appropriate features from its past in a recreational cycle and today is a fusion of tastes, sometimes uneven, styles and images.

"DEKA"

The project arises from a discussion under the Masters in Illustration and Animation from the Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave (Barcelos, Portugal), October 2012. Through a discussion of ideas the theme of skateboarding was identified as a research area of common interest.

Through the Deka Project, it is proposed to promote copyright work in the areas of Illustration, Urban Art and Communication Design, with Skate as main inspiration, related to the world of Skate, as well to participate and organize events or cultural manifestations. The Project looked up and created the necessary conditions to mix art, illustration, music, local skater community, wrapped with a diverse audience.

After a brief analysis to the national skateboarding overview, especially in the North of the Portugal, we noticed that the number of supporters has been constantly increasing, as well as the quality of those who practice. Public support for this modality is scarce and, in some cases, investment is made in public works to preclude the practice of sport.

The action plan was structured in order to promote new artists and the skate culture in Northern Portugal, through research and analysis of intervention opportunities at public events, physical spaces and digital universes.

Sketchbook – DEKADAY

Initially, we decided to create a blog with the purpose of producing practical and experimental content for the project and, at the same time, provide a digital portfolio presentation of our work. "Pandora Complexa"³ is an illustration project developed by Júlio Dolbeth and Rui Vitorino Santos. One of the objectives quoted by the authors was a pledge to make at least one illustration per day. They then created a blog where they upload the pictures side by side.

Following this philosophy, we adapt the concept of blog/sketchbook for this project. We decided to use the web platform Tumblr in the first instance, for its freedom in terms of programming (HTML) and allow customizing the page without the constraints imposed by other platforms with template service. Another decisive factor is that Tumblr is a social networks where each user has its customizable page and it's able to follow, reblog, exchange messages, etc. Thus it is easy to get feedback of our showcase. Unlike other web social networks, Tumblr is prepared to display animations in GIF format. Finally, it is a platform where multimedia sharing is the main content and where a high proportion of users are young.

³ Available at <http://pandoracomplexa.blogspot.pt/>

A template was created with the shape of two skate decks where they are then assembled the illustrations. The theme and technique has always been free but in some instances we worked on the same concept. Dekaday was the name given to the blog that result by combining the words "deck a day", which literally reflects the main objective of this Blog – to illustrate a board every day.



Figure 1 - Illustrations from Dekaday

The DEKA brand

The next step is to create a brand with which we could sign and develop work related skateboard and illustration. We created "Deka" as the name, for the obvious connection to "Dekaday" and can also be interpreted as the feminine of "deck" ("tábua" in Portuguese). Through the study of various urban artists as Shepard Fairey, Barry McGee, Margaret Kilgallen, Rigo23, we developed a logo that identifies the brand through a pictogram, which resulted in a graphically stylized skateboard deck without wheels, in an unreal physical twist levitating in the air.

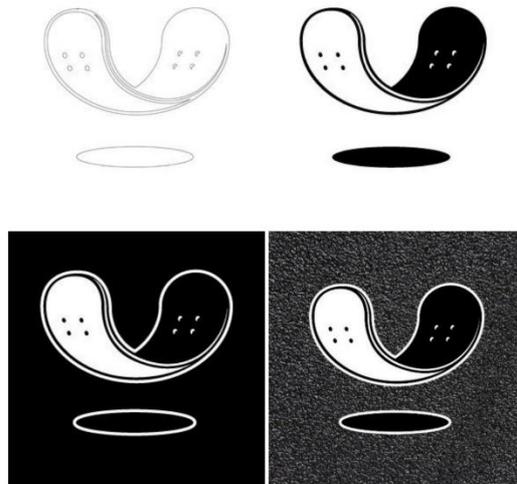


Figure 2 - Studies of Deka logo

After designing the logo we decided to create an animated version of it to apply in video or web formats. We use the process of traditional animation, where each movement corresponds to an image and we chose the GIF format. The movement consists in extending the idea of levitation in the air, implicit in the static image. The final version of the logo has no typographic information or brand name associated by choice. Thus, we can work typography with complete freedom for each situation that requires it. Following a more poetic vision of the pictogram without a textual identification, this can acquire an enigmatic and encrypted interpretation for those who don't identify with the world of skateboarding, or who simply don't know the project. During this phase we had the opportunity to collaborate with the brand "Cão Azul"⁴, which has expressed interest in creating a special collection of t-shirts illustrated by the authors of Deka. We developed a series of 10 t-shirts, 5 each author, reused and adapted from illustrations posted on Dekaday.⁵



Figure 3 - Assignment of the logo on photo

⁴ Cão Azul is a Portuguese online store of t-shirts known by the humour and social satire used in their products.

⁵ Available at <http://t-lab.caoazul.com/loja/font-color000000dekafont-c-219.html?language=en>



Figures 4 and 5 - Illustrations for Cão Azul

The project was also presented on art exhibitions and galleries, and for these interventions the art project became analogical, as the illustrations were drawn directly on wood skateboarding decks.



Figure 6 - Illustrations for "Dia D" and "Laissez Faire" exhibitions

In parallel with these activities, a Facebook page was created, regularly updated with news about the project, skateboarding and art related matters. We also developed music Podcast, mixed with illustration and skateboarding. We invited skaters to develop a short list of songs that they thought appropriate to the practice of skateboarding and later illustrate the cover of this podcast according to the choice of music and the skater in matter. We also had the collaboration of the artists Chuaga and Birita with occasional illustrations dedicated to skateboard theme.

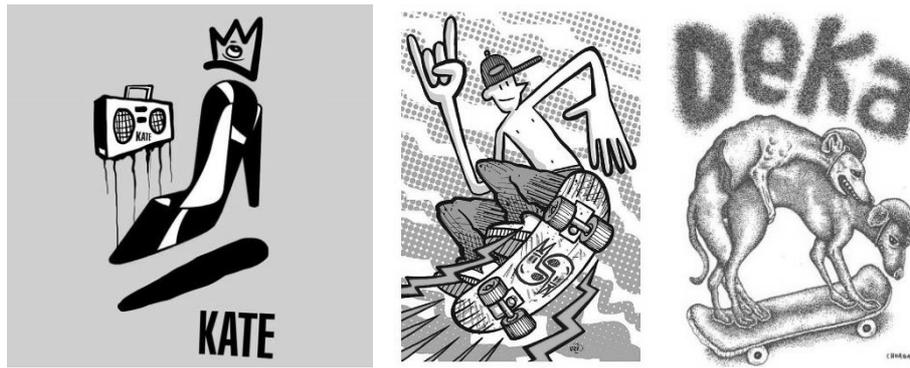


Figure 7 - Kate Skateshop Podcast cover; Birita and Chuaga illustrations

DEKALHÕES

Through the study of various case studies, we decided to implement the project on a music and urban culture festival. Since we had a short time to plan, we determined that it would be interesting to "infiltrate" in an already existing festival which didn't rely on our overall organization, but that could take part. The first option was "Milhões de Festa" in Barcelos, a festival organized by the record label "Lovers & Lollypops" that fits into the urban culture scene, which is connected to this project. For the physical space of our event we chose "Lugar dos Poetas". It is an area usually frequented by skaters from Barcelos for the qualities of the pavement, appropriated to the practice of skateboarding. The name "Dekalhões" arose from the mesh-up between "deka" and "milhões".

Initially we contacted the principal mentor of the record label and event, Joaquim Durães, and expressed our interest in collaborating on the event "Milhões de Festa" by boosting a space that embraces skateboarding, illustration and music in a relaxed environment in order to promote the practice of skateboarding and art. After we got a positive response to our interest to cooperate, we scheduled a meeting to introduce ourselves personally, explain the context of the research project and its practical component, expose our ideas for the event, place and answer questions.

Established contact and approved the proposal by the local skate community and the City Council, we moved to the preparation and implementation of Dekalhões event. We conducted research on structures to skate, what materials used, different construction methods, and from this information we prepared a document with the structures projects required for the event – measures, materials and quantities – which was later handed over to the municipal workshops.

Finalized the structures, we invited illustrators Birita, Chuaga, HeyMikel, Laro Lagosta and Joel Torres to create an illustration for each structure that addressed the theme of skateboarding. The aim was to create structures that would serve as an exhibitor piece while serving their skateboarding function. Thus, the illustrations assume an ephemeral character caused by wear from the practice of skateboarding on structures.

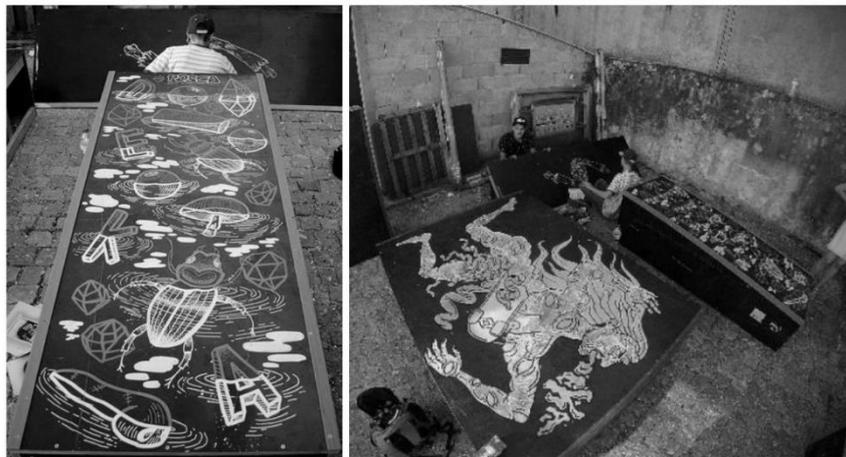


Figure 8 - HeyMikel, Laro Lagosta and Artur Escarlata illustrations

At this stage, we registered Deka on Youtube (Deka Tube) ⁶, a website that lets you upload and share videos in digital format, in order to publish promotional videos about the event, and the creation of new Deka videos, providing an online video library. For the event, we published a promotional video, a video preview showing some work in progress and a post event video that summarizes the best moments of Dekalhões.

The event lasted 3 days and activities happened between 2:00 and 7:00 p.m. We rely on the presence of several festival goers, bands and artists who performed live in public space in Praça dos Poetas, as well as the participation of several skaters from Barcelos and other regions of the country. On the first day performed "Spacin" ⁷, a psychedelic rock band with influences from the lo-fi panorama and garage rock that came from Philadelphia. On the second day it was "Robotic Sessions" ⁸ turn, a duo Dj that animated the afternoon for several hours, putting songs from Rock, Indie, Electronic and Hip-Hop. Later performed a one man Grindcore band "Anal Penetration" ⁹ originated from the Netherlands. Roel Nijdam, the only element of this band produces the rhythm of his music through digital means, which subsequently adds the dimension of voice and guitar solo. During the afternoon we also proposed a skate contest, where we assign prizes for the best tricks. In the third and final day we had the presence of "Camera" ¹⁰, a band from Berlin composed by Franz Bargmann, Drummer Michael and Timm Brockmann which, by invitation of Videoteca Bodyspace in partnership with Milhões de Festa, held a short concert to end the first edition of Dekalhões.

Closing remarks

The practice of skateboarding is an activity related to the sense of freedom, creativity and some irreverence that, throughout its evolution, was acquired as identity. These features are

⁶ Website oficial do Deka Tube <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9H0lihLGx1UIOCw72n1Bg/>

⁷ Website oficial da banda <http://spacin.bandcamp.com/>

⁸ Facebook oficial da dupla <https://www.facebook.com/RoboticSessions>

⁹ Website oficial da banda <http://analpenetration.bandcamp.com/>

¹⁰ Facebook oficial dos Camera <https://www.facebook.com/wearecamera>

easily transported and related to the creative process, an artistic and cultural context, inspiring and spontaneously influencing their various audiences. To develop the project, framed in this area, required the research of skateboarding culture background and framework, the intrinsic social and cultural phenomena, and even personal and individual relationship with the environment.

Action research was the methodology that validated this research process, from studies carried and adapted to the practice of the present case, the authors favored the involvement in the activities in question through experimentation. From the first moment, illustration was enhanced with skate culture, assuming an original, creative and artistic character, making a new vehicle for artistic expression.

Experimentation and exploration of design and illustration, as a creative methodology, built up a significant amount of work that graphically frame the study. The exploration of graphic design and digital media allowed to explore and to understand different areas of study, while acting in the field and interacting with the different audiences that support it. Through this experimentation was possible to build a solid proposal on the skateboard scene in Portugal, where illustration and art work converge with it.

The next steps of Dekalhões will include new concepts and new ways of relating skateboarding and illustration. This project, assuming the relationship between skateboarding and art, allows an intense interaction between authors and communities, in a do-it-yourself attitude that sets ground for the skateboarding pleasure and reveals new possibilities for engagement.



Figure 9 - Dekalhões photos by Nuno Figueiredo

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