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August 6, 2009

By [Rebecca J. Razo](#)

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Like most writers/editors, I have a deep love of language. And since English is my first—and sadly, only—language, this love is for my native vernacular. So one of the first things I do when I start my day is read Merriam-Webster's Word of the Day, which, true to its word (no pun intended), is faithfully delivered to my email inbox every morning.

Now, I would love to say that I've mastered the art of using every unfamiliar word that M-W sends my way, but this is far from the case. For one, using new words competently takes practice. I don't go to many parties where I might potentially dazzle new acquaintances with my command of the language; my family gives me a hard enough time about the words I already use in my daily discourse; and the dog doesn't seem to care whether I tell her she looks "slovenly" when she tramples through the bushes or "ambrosial" when she's sleeping. In fact, I'm forced to bribe her with a biscuit just so she'll sit long enough to listen to me impress myself. So, when I'm actually able to use a new word in my vocabulary, I get pretty excited.

Take, for example, the word "fugleman." According to Merriam-Webster.com, fugleman (pronounced *FYOO-gul-mun*) means "one at the head or forefront of a group or movement." This word has been idling in my inbox for weeks now, just begging to be borrowed. And, by golly, I think I've finally found an occasion to use it.

As a writer/editor, few things are better than to have a network of friends who also are writers, editors, and fellow word geeks. But as a writer/editor for an art-book publishing company, it's professional nirvana when a writer/editor friend is also married to an up-and-coming artist, or, in my opinion, a sort of fugleman.

The fugleman of which I speak is Mark Mendez: a young, extremely gifted artist whose thought-provoking works are especially compelling for their socially, globally, and environmentally relevant messages. Although Mark has previously had his works on display in other forums, he just wrapped his first "real" show at the Hibbleton Gallery in downtown Fullerton, California, where he exhibited with fellow artists Camilo Bejarano, Chris Leavens, and wotto. The joint exhibit, titled "01100011 0110111," featured a dynamic presentation of all-digital artwork that was nothing short of a kaleidoscopic feast for the eyes.

In keeping with the exhibit's theme, Mark created all of his images digitally and then had them printed onto what are essentially giant stickers; he then adhered the images to cuts of wood that he treated, sanded, and stained. "I mostly work on wood because I love vinyl [records]," Mark says. "Vinyl has so much of a warmer feeling than a CD or Mp3. I feel the same about wood. I felt that the contrast between a newer, digital medium and presenting [the images] on something as old as the earth itself would have a great impact."

Impact indeed. For in addition to integrating wood into the work, the art reads like the front page of a newspaper, with revealing headlines of the oft unpleasant though truthful stories of global concern we aren't always so sure we want to hear.

"Social and global issues have been a huge part of my life for quite awhile now," Mark says. "The passion I have...has allowed me to create art that can be just as thought provoking as it is enjoyable to look at." But irrespective of his personal convictions, Mark believes his art can mean "something different to everyone."

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Whether one agrees or disagrees with Mark's artistic statements about the conflict-diamond trade in Africa, the war in Iraq, or the corporate machinations of big oil companies, for example, it cannot be denied that his art packs a powerful punch. And I have a hunch he's on the cusp of something huge. Not because he's the first artist to weave his moral convictions into the fabric of his work, but because of both his attitude and the artistic methods he employs.

First, he's humble almost to a fault. "I wasn't worried about selling my work," he says of the Hibbleton show. "I was more afraid people wouldn't like and/or get my work." Second, his art is neither pretentious nor gratuitously esoteric—a lead some other artists of his generation could stand to follow. "I work in flat, normally one-color iconography," he says. It is, in fact, the understated nature of Mark's style that not only gives his work its integrity, but adds to its greater significance. And this is what puts Mark Mendez at the forefront of a new generation of socially conscious artists. He is an artistic fugleman.

And for a first show, he didn't do too poorly, either. "I sold six pieces," he says.



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