



# as the canvas gets bigger, so does the risk – and the reward.

As the canvas gets bigger, so does the risk – and the reward. **Mark Penfold** talks to the designers and illustrators whose work succeeds on a grand scale



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**01-02** Studio Output overhauled the visuals at restaurant chain **Scruffy's** including a refurbishment, and created murals for seven individually designed rooms at a boutique hotel in Bangkok

**03** Michael Bierut dressed the *New York Times* building for **Pentagram**

**04** Tania Willis created a livery to celebrate Dragonair's 20th anniversary flying between China and Hong Kong



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→ **Supersize projects require a designer with vision and audacity. To embrace the implications of scale and put them to work in the creative process is a test of bravado on a grand stage.** Whether you're dressing the front of a large shopping centre or the fuselage of an airliner, the desire to create awe-inspiring solutions must be tempered by a fear of having mistakes amplified many times over.

Once a piece exceeds everyday human dimensions, it takes on some of the characteristics and concerns of other disciplines such as architecture, environmental design, public art and civic planning. The creative individual is suddenly faced with a new set of considerations well outside their traditional expertise. How they react to this challenge determines the success or failure of the project. But if they rise to the occasion, they can take the world by storm, changing the landscape metaphorically as well as literally.

How does it feel to be involved in a supersize project? Harry Pearce, a partner at international design agency Pentagram, says: "There is always a tingle of excitement. Grand gestures are often few and far between." Any job with scale will almost certainly be seen as a chance to win industry prestige. It's the commercial equivalent of turning the volume up. Environmental designer Morag Myerscough explains it succinctly: "Size is a response to the message and voice being conveyed." You don't shout about something you're uncertain of, confirming the need for a designer to have confidence and courage.

But it's not bravery that attracts designers to big projects. When the object to be designed reaches a certain size, it begins to

Personally, it's an important consideration as to whether the environment which a piece sits in will be enhanced by its placement

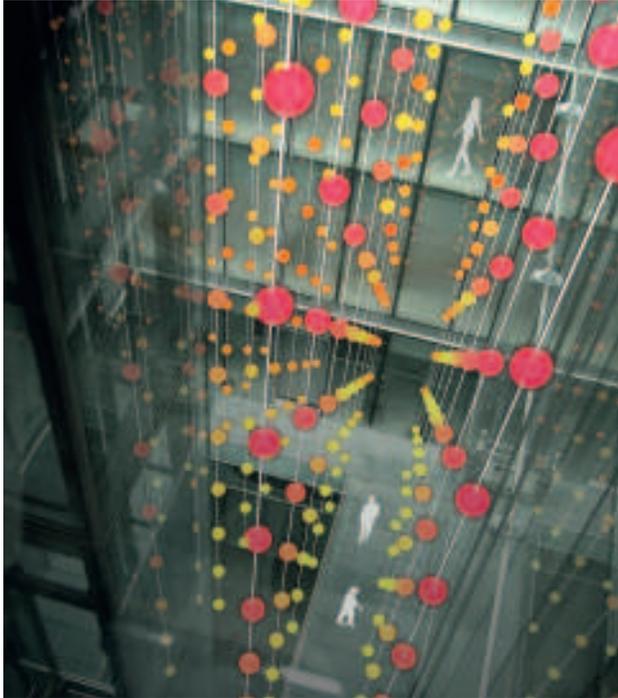
Sara Oakley Studio Output

take on a life of its own as a part of the environment. That means most often the built environment, and this calls for some understanding of or collaboration with the world of architecture: a discipline with which many designers feel an affinity.

The question of how graphic communication relates to architecture is important because the result of a seamless integration can cause jaws to drop with awe. For an example of where it goes wrong, take a look at the average high street. "They're a visual affront," argues Pearce. And this is a direct result of a clash between the two disciplines. "Graphic design can actually become part of the structure of the building – its very surface," he adds. When this is achieved, as Pearce has himself managed to do with the Dana Centre at London's Science Museum, it can have wonderful implications for the space in which people live, not just some of the objects within it.

One example: imagine a 3D matrix of 624 globe-like pixels eight storeys high and suspended in space. This is precisely what Daniel Hirschmann and his colleagues at Shoreditch's Jason Bruges Studio created for City law firm Allen&Overy. If this gigantic data-fed chandelier was hanging in the atrium of your office building, you could be forgiven for being a bit pedantic about its function. Especially if you were sensitive to strobing, or if you were just easily distracted.

The point is this. If you don't like someone's business card, you can just put it in a drawer and forget about it. If you don't like a company's magazine ad, you can wince and turn the page. But once a design project reaches a certain size, it's a lot more difficult to ignore. What do you do then? Designers involved in projects of this scale on a regular basis have to get to grips with the full environmental impact of their work if it's going to be a success. →



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**05** This spectacular eight-storey-high matrix of 624 globes was created for the law firm Allen&Overy by **Jason Bruges Studio**

**06** December 2007 saw **Light Up Bristol** use some of the world's most powerful projectors to beam 400ft animations and motion graphics onto the city's buildings

**07** Sponsored by J&B Whiskey, this joyful piece by artist Matt W Moore will appear on billboards around Barcelona as part of **ROJO** magazine's Urban Art Exhibition

**08** Pentagram created this spectacular design for the Science Museum's **Dana Centre**



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→ "The relationship between the context and the design itself matters more than size," observes Hirschmann. The simple fact is that the bigger an item is, the larger its context and, therefore, the more variables a designer needs to consider. Consequently, there will always be an element of uncertainty until the final item is in place. This can lead to a pleasant surprise when things go well. Hirschmann says, "We have seen enough projects to realise that the end result is often far more impressive than any renderings or prototypes." That said, it remains the designer's job to hold all the unknowns in check. Nobody is going to say "Oh well, never mind" if you massacre the side of their building.

Overcoming the difference that inevitably exists between the planned design (models, visualisations and so on) and the final physical object depends on the exercise of the artist's instincts and imagination. And the satisfaction can be enormous. "The uncertainty is the excitement," says Pearce. "Seeing your intuition pay off is exhilarating." The creative process can be encouraged and fostered, but its inner workings are mysterious. Ironically, access to it remains the designer's chief asset.

**Working at scale, the contribution of this unconscious aptitude is magnified.** "Part of the excitement is the anticipation of the final product," agrees Alvin Tan of Singapore's :phunk studio. But too much uncertainty leads not to excitement but to terror. Keeping you on the right side of that equation are the tools of the trade – the interplay between basic design skills and an array of technological utilities. Every designer will choose the balance between these ingredients to

suit their own make-up. When illustrator Tania Willis was asked to come up with a livery to celebrate Dragonair's 20th anniversary flying between mainland China and Hong Kong, her experience did not extend to custom paint jobs for Airbus jets. Nevertheless, she had confidence in her abilities and relished the chance to work on such a huge, fast-moving canvas. As the constraints began to roll in, including the fact that the paint on an aircraft can add enough weight to make it uneconomical to fly, she learned how to work with them, incrementally building up an intuitive model of the project.

So Willis, with a history of regular print jobs, began working on a flat side elevation of the aircraft. She remembers, "It took me a while to realise that this will bend, and elements might not be visible." But when Dragonair flew her to Toulouse where the plane waited only partly painted, it became clear: "We went into these enormous hangers where the plane had had the outlines put on it, and that was just the most mind-blowing moment."

**This may be an extreme example, but it emphasises that when you're working at scale, every job is unique.** There will, in all likelihood, only be one example of your work. Consequently, not only is the piece itself amplified by its size, but the focus is pulled tight because of that restricted distribution.

Scale can exaggerate the details in a piece. Partly this is down to technology, which inevitably has a distancing effect. The designer may use physical models, Photoshop montages and 3D renderings to visualise the work, but the whole process begins again when it gets to the manufacturing stage. This is similar to the relationship between a print designer and their printers, but it is more difficult for the creative talent to build up a full understanding of the complexities involved because they cross so many disciplines. →



## United Visual Artists create the big show

Huge graphics for live music events is a speciality of London-based United Visual Artists. "We like to consider the screens first and design everything backwards from there, creating material as elements that can be composited in real time to the screens or the lights. We often look at the whole stage as one canvas," says UVA's Matt Clark.

To find out more about live performance graphics and the artists who create them, like UVA, pick up the latest issue of *Computer Arts Projects* which is devoted to Design for the Music Industry (issue 108, March 2008). The image featured here is a pre-gig shot at U2's Vertigo Tour.



→ potential to become public art," says Sara Oakley of Studio Output. "Designers are a mixture of the pragmatist and the artist, which is what makes them the ideal candidates for this type of work.

Opportunities to produce work that is both exciting and on a grand scale continue to arrive, and bring with them an increasing capacity for innovation. Look at the five-day event Light Up Bristol, which last December used some of the world's most powerful projectors to beam 400ft animations and motion graphics onto a selection of the city's best-known buildings. The festive celebration, organised by local creative network Bristol Media and the West of England Design Forum, was spearheaded by Mike Bennett of digital agency E3 Media. It was such a success that it will be back in 2008.

While the company may be better known for its work producing stage shows, onedotzero industries is involved in projects the world over intended to use aesthetics, motion graphics and technology to take the edge off our increasingly urbanised world. These 'interventions', as the company's creative director Shane Walter describes them, attempt to marry scale with ambition: "When you get those two together, you have something which can capture the imagination of a much wider audience."

onedotzero's attempts to marry big ideas with big execution can have a profound effect on those who experience them. Walter says, "This is the area I find the most inspiring and exhilarating: the crossover between art, architecture and design." What's equally fascinating is that the majority of these projects are commercial in nature. But if these brands and entities are the new Medicis, who will be their da Vinci?



## Ones to watch

### Atelier BLINK

Participated in the Crossover Crosswalk project in Belgium's Hasselt.  
[www.atelierblink.com](http://www.atelierblink.com)

### Jason Bruges Studio

From seven-storey interactive chandeliers to Bluetooth-enabled bridges.  
[www.jasonbruges.com](http://www.jasonbruges.com)

### E3 Media

Digital agency E3 Media took the lead in Light Up Bristol in 2007.  
[www.e3media.co.uk](http://www.e3media.co.uk)

### Seb Lee-Delisle

Famous for a digital interactive fireworks exhibition at the Brighton Pavilion.  
[www.pluginmedia.net](http://www.pluginmedia.net), [www.sebleedelisle.com](http://www.sebleedelisle.com)

### Matt W Moore

A creative polyglot with large-scale jobs including posters for ROJO and J&B.  
[www.mwmgraphics.com](http://www.mwmgraphics.com)

### Morag Myerscough

Recent projects include signage for the Barbican Centre.  
<http://studiomyerscough.com>

### onedotzero industries

Known for concert backdrops and the Re-Imagining the City tour.  
[www.onedotzero.com](http://www.onedotzero.com)

### :phunk studio

Painted giant zippers all over a nightclub for Nike.  
[www.phunkstudio.com](http://www.phunkstudio.com)

### ROJO magazine

Turned billboards around Barcelona into a distributed art gallery.  
[www.rojo-magazine.com](http://www.rojo-magazine.com)

### Studio Output

A studio that embraces scale, whether in bars, restaurants or Bangkok Hotel.  
[www.studio-output.com](http://www.studio-output.com)

### Tania Willis

Illustrator Tania Willis' creations include the 20th anniversary livery for Dragonair.  
[www.taniawillis.com](http://www.taniawillis.com)