

Profile Daniel Eatock

Text by Jonathan Bell

01 Self-Portrait
02 Tape Coil
03 Tape Race

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Daniel Eatock is an intrepid visual explorer, reporting back to the rest of us via list-making, documentary photography, obsessive visual quantification and playful experiments. Oh, and he does a bit of graphic design too. Jonathan Bell met him to get the Eatock story and discussed everything from his successfully non-commercial approach to the art of balancing on two chair legs.

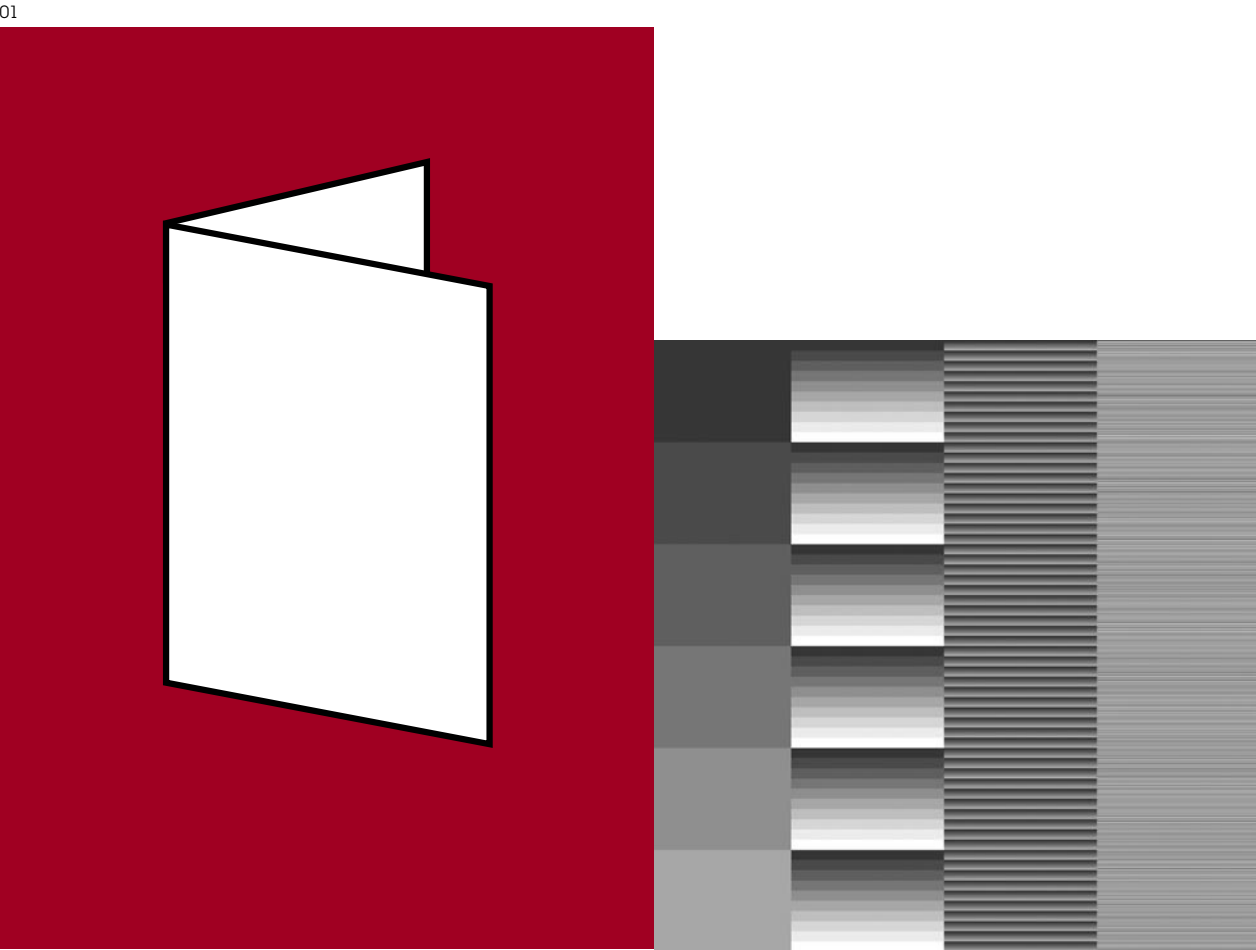
Our culture overflows with visual information, much of it superfluous, so perhaps we should be thankful that the vast majority of 'design' doesn't persist; it simply gets scrumpled up and recycled, peels off and fades away. This isn't Daniel Eatock's way. In the past decade the designer has created a sizeable body of work, both on his own and in collaboration with others, all of which is exhaustively chronicled on his website (www.eatock.com). Nothing disappears.

Eatock remains best known for two quite disparate projects, one personal, one commissioned. His modest Greeting Card series, sold through his website, presents the card writer with a checklist of options—significant birthdays, recipients, etc: a system that demands intervention. "I wanted to design a range that could accommodate every need for cards, but then the user could add their own element," he says. Like any original idea, the concept has spawned a huge number of (lesser) imitators, yet Eatock's originals retain an unequalled simplicity. The physical form of each Greeting Card is determined by the information it contains—instructions, format, text and content—all pragmatically arranged in a fashion that suggests Eatock has no time for self-conscious design. The other principal client in his portfolio is Channel 4, with whom Eatock enjoys a fertile creative partnership, producing a type-driven visual identity that had become synonymous with a suite of the channel's most recognisable programmes of the early twenty-first century, along with the 'eye' symbol that has accompanied the various series of Big Brother.



Eatock’s approach is varied yet contains several unified themes. After studying at Ravensbourne, Eatock graduated from the RCA in 1998, having taken a deliberately non-commercial approach throughout his course. He belongs to the tail of the generation who studied during the transitional period between analogue and digital, with the result that he takes neither method for granted. “All my work starts with pen and paper—I’ve never worked quick enough on the computer,” he says. Despite his studio’s dependence on the internet as a means of maintaining a database of past works, Eatock retains a very analogue edge, at odds with the fashion for slick, layered digital work that predominated in the tail-end of the Nineties. This style did not appeal. “I was so desperate not to get a job in a graphic design studio, both before and after the RCA,” he recalls, and describes his relief at securing an internship at Minneapolis’s Walker Art Center under the curatorship of Andrew Blauvelt.

His time at the Walker was to prove very fruitful. “It was almost like a perfect extension to the RCA... working for the curators and artists. It was a way that I could test my own work in a real situation,” says Eatock, and the Walker’s extensive programme of exhibitions and publications gave him a wide variety of scenarios and briefs to experiment with. “Once that had finished I’d done everything I could do in graphic design—the work volume was exhaustive,” he says. On his return to London he did little straight design work, preferring to teach and to build furniture with architect Sam Solhaug; the two set up Foundation 33 to develop ideas that originated in long hours in the Walker’s carpentry shop. It was at about this time that a chance meeting enabled Eatock to pitch for the Big Brother graphic identity (although he’d missed the first series by being in the USA). “I won that pitch, although I had quite radical ideas, then ever since I’ve done projects for Channel 4... it’s a perfect way to do other work, as the Channel 4 work supported the studio.” Foundation 33 was eventually subsumed into Boymeetsgirl, an “interdisciplinary creative agency” founded in 2004 by Andy Law and Kate Stanners. Eatock became the design director, a relatively short-lived post that gave him “an insight into the very different world of advertising”.



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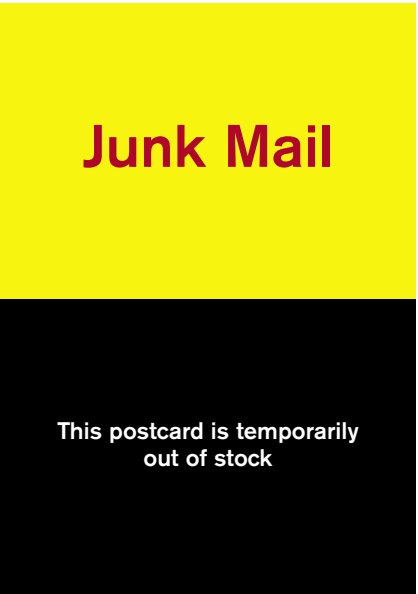


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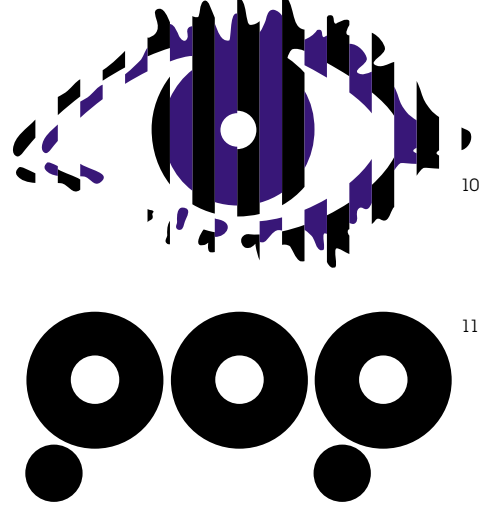


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- 01 Red Card
- 02 Email postcard
- 03 Envelope postcard
- 04 Numerical time-based sound composition
- 05 My Favourite Cup
- 06 One Stone
- 07 Junk Mail postcard
- 08 Out of Stock postcard
- 09 Very logo
- 10 Big Brother 6 logo
- 11 Pop logo
- 12 Aerial View



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I would like to know how many
nightlight candles I can light before
the first one burns out

I would like to make the smallest ton

I would like to eat lots of garlic then
blow up children’s party balloons

01



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- 01 Text Works
- 02 Selections from Image of the Week on eatock.com
- 03 Entrepreneurial Authorship
- 04 Chair Balance

03
Entrepreneurial Authorship

Alongside commissioned projects I am interested in presenting ideas that are conceptual and that have not been applied in a commercial context. Following are a few ideas and suggestions to whom they may be relevant:

An idea for a drinks company

I would like to pour a complete bottle/can of water/olive oil/orange juice etc. in one continuous stream from a pre calculated height, and take a single photograph before the first drip hits the ground.

An idea for a skateboard manufacture

I would like to make a skateboard coated with Blackboard paint that comes with pack of chalk and a board duster. I would also like to make a skateboard coated with a Whiteboard surface that comes with pack of dry markers and a board wipe.

An idea for a trainer/shoe manufacturer

I would like to replace the laces on a pair of trainers/shoes with some very long ones, tie them together and then throw them over a telegraph wire so they hang down until they almost touch the ground.

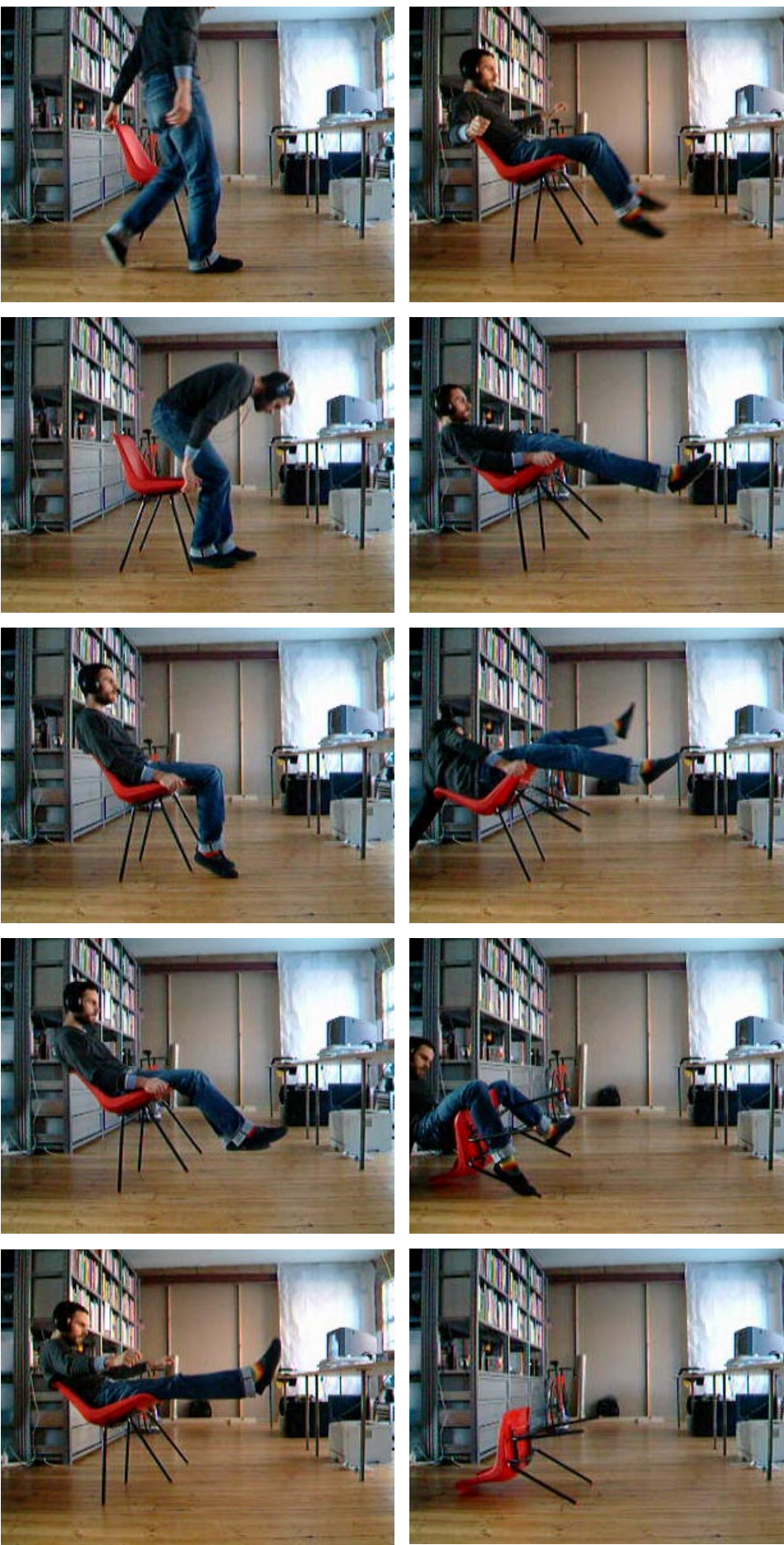
An idea for Heinz or another similar food manufacture

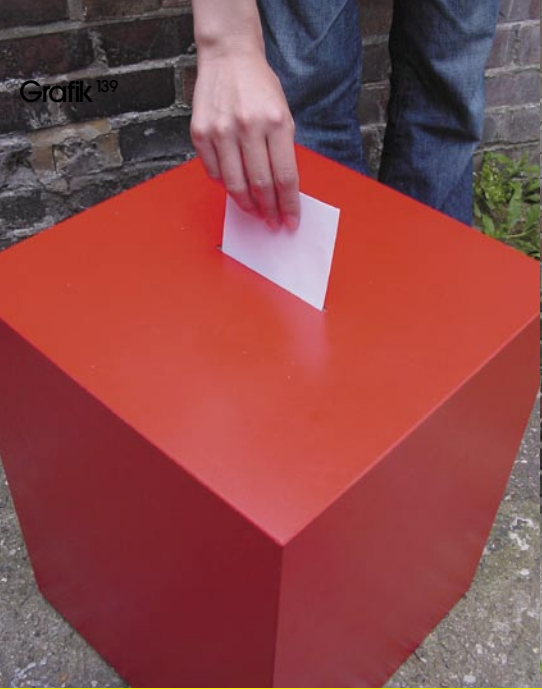
I would like to mix together every single Heinz food product, then package in small cans labelled as a limited edition of everything Heinz.

An idea for a football team

I would like to get the team to wear plain white t-shirts then stand in a line, I would then walk around them spraying a continuous red line across the fronts and backs of their t-shirts.

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Documentation and presentation are integral to the Eatock approach; projects tend to linger in their virtual folders long after the physical evidence of their existence has vanished. Either works chronicle passing moments or arrangements, most notably with the Picture of the Day series or the compositions of balancing objects, or they deal with editions, systems and series that seek out accidental or deliberate repetition. The latter forms the core of a work undertaken in September 2002 at the Whitechapel Gallery's Project Space: "the world's largest signed and numbered limited-edition artwork" involved ten people signing one million cards, all of which were then hand-stamped and distributed free. While The World's Largest addresses the profession's sometimes overly precious obsession with 'artist's editions', Eatock and his collaborators are also genuinely interested in the redemptive power of objects, a love of things that seeks to give even the humble postcard a place in your heart.

Twenty-first-century graphic design is increasingly characterised by its dissociation from the physical; for the most part, designers work using digital processes that may or may not result in a tangible object. Add to this the maniacal pace of cultural consumption, and nothing, it seems, sticks around for very long. Eatock is wading against this particular current, through his comprehensive website, through the numerous works that define a fixed point in space and preserve it, and through the studio's physical output. "I use the website kind of like a sketchbook—you can change it, it's not like printing a book," he says. "It's a constant document, updated often two... or three times a week." Although he claims not to "think about how to transform ephemeral things", Eatock acknowledges how his photography in particular is about catching a "fleeting moment", when two things come together, be they the miniature eclipse created by a streetlamp in front of the sun, or the deceptively casual observations depicted in Picture of the Week. These unvarnished, verbatim digital snaps are of editorial conceits, serve an attempt to "centre the concept in the middle of the image". "It's not about the photographs, but more about the concepts—that's the moment, it becomes the work," he continues.

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I would like to ask people what they are going to buy as they are walking into a supermarket and ask them what they bought on their way out.

I would like to make an archetypal steel roller one kilometer long.

I would like to be asked to spell every word in the concise Oxford English Dictionary as a standard high school spelling test. I would form a list of all the words I spell wrong a list of all the words I spell correctly.

I would like to curate a show called 'untitled' containing works that are all 'untitled'.

I would like to buy postcards in art museums of artwork on display then hold them in front of the actual artwork and take a photograph.

I would like to write non stop for 24 hours

I would like to know how many night light candles I can light before the first one burns out.

I would like to copy every single artist signature from every artwork displayed in the Tate Modern on a single page.

I would like to own a complete set of Edward Ruscha's artist books.

I would like to cut all my t-shirts in half and have them stitched back together.

I would like to read every book I own.

I would like to meet Yoko Ono.

I would like to empty a professional proof reader to read through all my sketch books and proof corrections.

I would like to collaborate with 3m to make the Fly Post-it a mass produced artwork.

I would like to make the smallest fan.

I would like to see 1 ton of feathers.

I would like to open a can of Piero Mantoni marta.

I would like to add more paint to a real Picasso.

I would like to commission Sol Lewitt to make a wall drawing on the ceiling.

I would like to ask Tracy Emin to make a bed.

I would like to hear Paul McCartney sing only John Lennon songs.

I would like to exhibit Richard Prince joke paintings at a comedy club.

I would like to own a John & Yoko War is over poster.

I would like to design a Royal Mail postage stamp with a drawing of an envelope on it.

I would like to make blank badges for people to wear over the logos and brand marks on clothing.

I would like to hang paintings from the Renaissance in a gallery with the smell of fresh oil paint.

I would like to put an Alkarseltzer in a pint of beer.

I would like to have seen Amy Kaufman read the great Gatsby.

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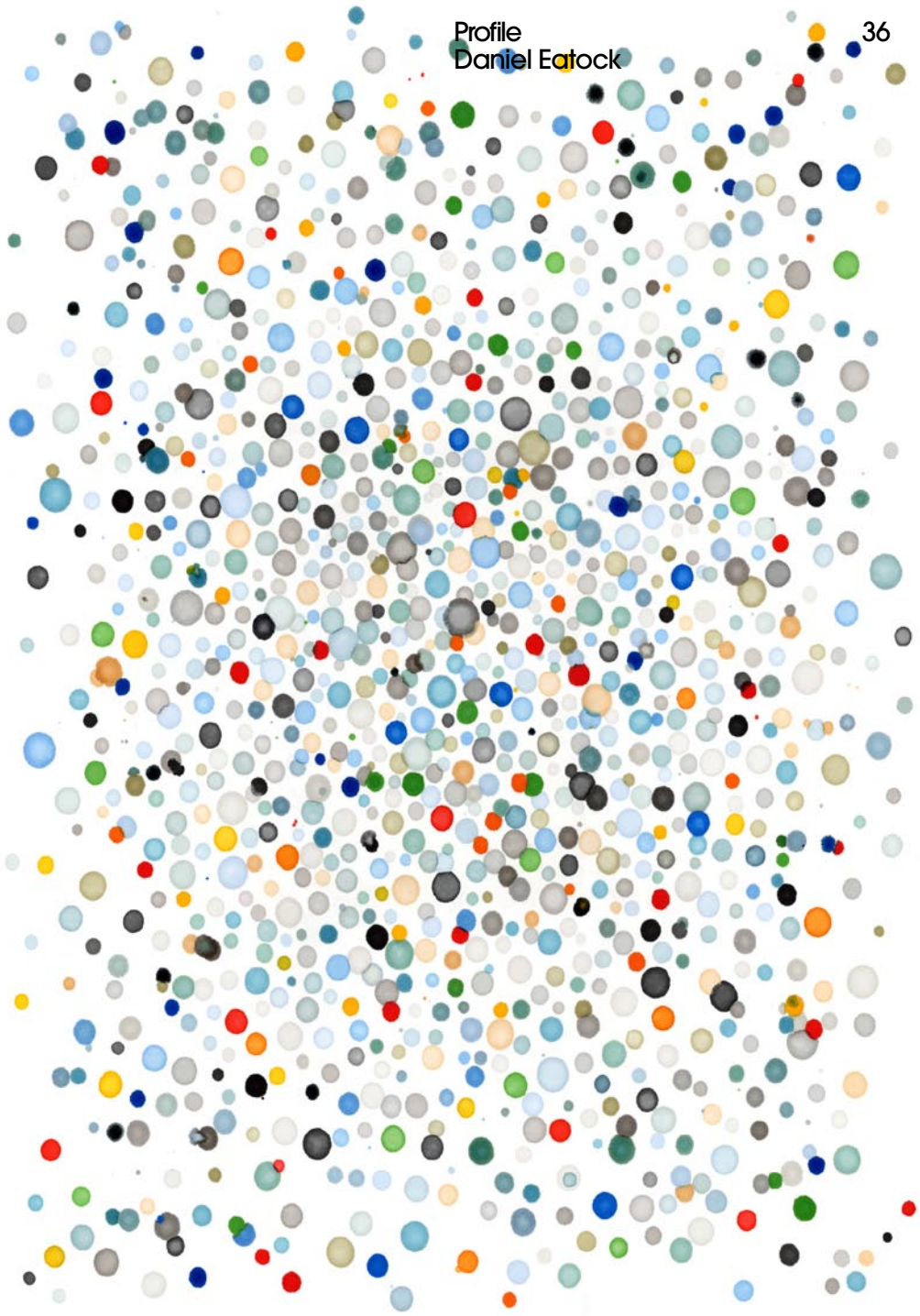
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01, 02, 05	Timecapstool
03	List
04	Burying Treasure
06	Alphabetape
07	Neckclasp



At the heart of Eatock Ltd's output is a dichotomy, a split between pragmatic visual honesty, straightforward typography, material simplicity and innate functionalism, and the sense that all is not what it seems. "I enjoy working with standard things and making them different," says Eatock. "I see traits that are evident in all the projects, such as A-size formats, and usually the same typeface [Akzidenz Grotesk]." These choices are deliberate. "I want to remove the subjectivity—choosing the font, paper size, colour," he says, "A limited palette is like a limited wardrobe—it saves time." Similarly, the image series, be they of car batteries, Father Christmases or damaged Fiat Coupés, generate their focus from the combination of repetition and subtle change. "The more of them you see, the more interesting they are," he says.

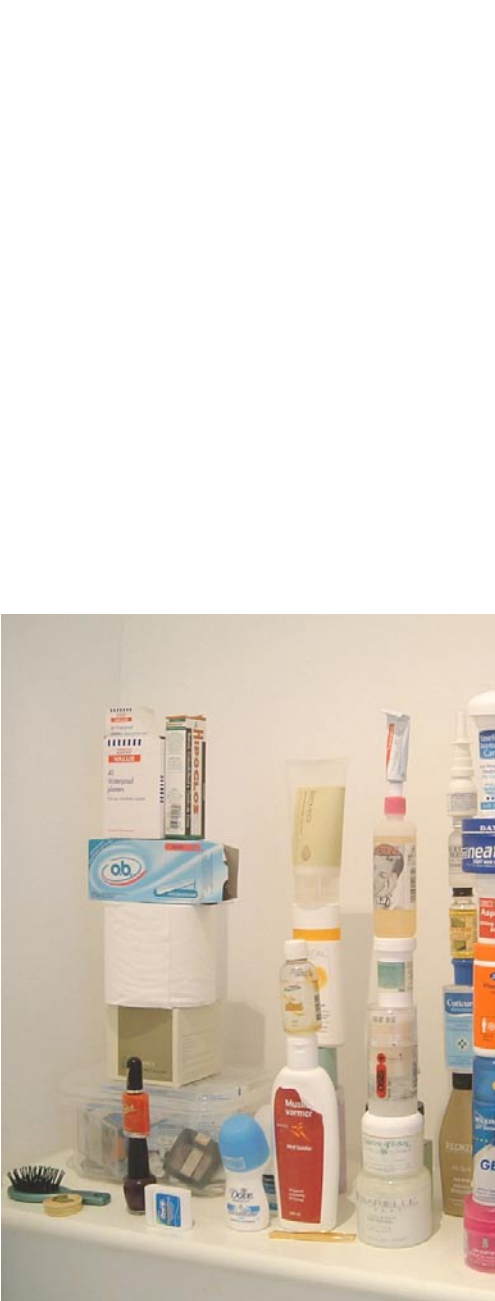
Meaning is never straightforward. His price-tag wrapping paper is playing a game—"Traditionally you don't want people to know the value; I wanted to show how ridiculous this convention was"—and the paper is festooned with hundreds of price tags of varying values. The ultimate meaning remains up for grabs: is this subverting our attempts to conceal how much a gift cost, or simply celebrating the sheer variety of price tags? Not all the projects share this ambiguity. "Some works are completely concluded," Eatock continues, citing One Stone—a stone weighing exactly one stone, which could be an "unlimited edition"—and the Neckclasp, a necklace formed solely from clasp fittings. "You can make a thing just by using fasteners—that's the perfect project for me. It's the perfect object; it's functional, beautiful." Other works revel in dual meanings. Alphabetape presents an alphabet embedded in a role of packing tape. "I was interested in the way people used tape to write with—I see it almost like a typeface," Eatock says. "It's not a digital font, but something you have to physically use." Hence difference and individuality come out of each application.



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Some concepts come around again and again. Felt-Tip Print consists of a piece of paper balanced on the nibs of pens, a development of a college piece called Bleeding Art. The multi-coloured inks seep through the paper, creating a galaxy of coloured spots of varying sizes. "It connects completely to graphic design," Eatock remarks, pleasantly surprised, "although it's a new version of very old work." Other ideas branch off into unexpected avenues. Eatock's ongoing fascination with the tension and release of the balancing act has evolved from objects to form. Through the website he continues to solicit images of balanced stacks of mundane objects (although most, he notes dryly, are of desktop objects, books and stationery, as his website visitors turn their attention to their immediate environment for inspiration). "I never connected the physical part of balance with the aesthetic," he says. "I'm interested in watching skateboarders, for example, something that's really fluid, even dangerous, but also poetic." His current Chair Balance series is part-performance, part-nostalgia. "Balancing on the [Robin Day] chair reminded me of being a kid, but I didn't want to have a safety net," he says, explaining how he has worked the balancing act into his lectures, beginning each talk with the act of keeping the chair on its two spindly legs. "As I did more and more lectures I started drawing comparisons between physically balancing and composition—to balance relies on constant movement and adjustment. There's never really that perfect moment in the middle."

The sense of balance extends to social conventions. While at Boymeetsgirl, Eatock created My Favourite Cup, a subtly subversive response to the territorial nature of big offices. "I started to use other people's favourite cups, as a means of friendly antagonism—i.e. picking someone's favourite for your own cup of coffee and then casually taking it over to them for a chat," he says, "I made a couple of hundred cups [all printed with the words 'My Favourite Cup'] to try and unify people." Most importantly, old and new projects continue to have a parallel existence, a central part of Eatock's philosophy. "With my new work I'm interested in letting the other work exist so that it can endure and perhaps have a different meaning," he says, with more recent works occupying the fuzzy boundary between art and design, deliberately evoking the heyday of minimalist and conceptual art. Eatock cites Lucy R. Lippard's Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object as his favourite book. "It made me look at graphic design again, and I started to apply those ideas to design projects," he says, and there are clear parallels between his more site-specific and self-initiated works and the elements of repetition, cataloguing, archetypes and juxtapositions found in the works of Joseph Beuys, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre et al.

Now back working largely on his own, his studio seems relaxed and happily immersed in personal work, as if the rude reality of commercial pressures are elsewhere. "I like juggling the two," Eatock admits, adding that he's "doing less and less of the Big Brother and Channel 4 work". Eatock is in the process of "exploring the relationship between my self-initiated projects and my commissions". Again, this approach suggests a tension, a need for balance and constant exploration. For now, this seems the right way forward. "I find this approach very comfortable," he acknowledges, before adding, almost unnecessarily, "but I have lots of contradictions."

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