

# WHERE PRINT COMES ALIVE

TEXT BY YANDA AND JUSTIN ZHUANG  
PICTURES BY SAM KANG LI



# THE PROCESS OF PRINTING EVOKES THE IMAGE OF MACHINES CHURNING OUT REAMS AND REAMS OF PAPER. BUT FOR THIS PRINTER, IT IS THE HANDS OF ITS LABOUR THAT HAVE BEEN CRAFTING ITS AWARD-WINNING PUBLICATIONS. YANDA AND JUSTIN VISIT ITS FACTORY TO FIND OUT.

My first encounter with print that really stirred and moved me was when I flipped through a catalogue for On Pedder at its store. That copy of *Pedderzine* had a deliberately worn-out leather cover with distressed foil stamping, dyed and stained pages to look aged, and unique-punched holes on the edges of random pages – all these little nuances that fit snugly together into a delicate piece of work. It was so convincing that I mistakenly thought this browsing copy of the catalogue had gotten so old after being flipped by countless others before me.

As always, I jotted down the title and went online to find out who its creators were. It turned out to be designed by WORK, and produced by the printer alsoDOMinie. Since then, I have never failed to be amazed by the work produced by this duo. The meticulous die cuts on *WERK No. 13, Jan de Cock*, the aesthetic deckles handmade for *WERK No.16, Joe Magee*, a Club 21 magazine wrapped with a thread, and even an invite for fashion house Wunderkind printed on paper that had been wet, dried, and then dyed. Each of these beautiful and sensible creations is a testament of WORK's creativity, but also proof of alsoDOMinie's dedication to craftsmanship to have brought these to reality.

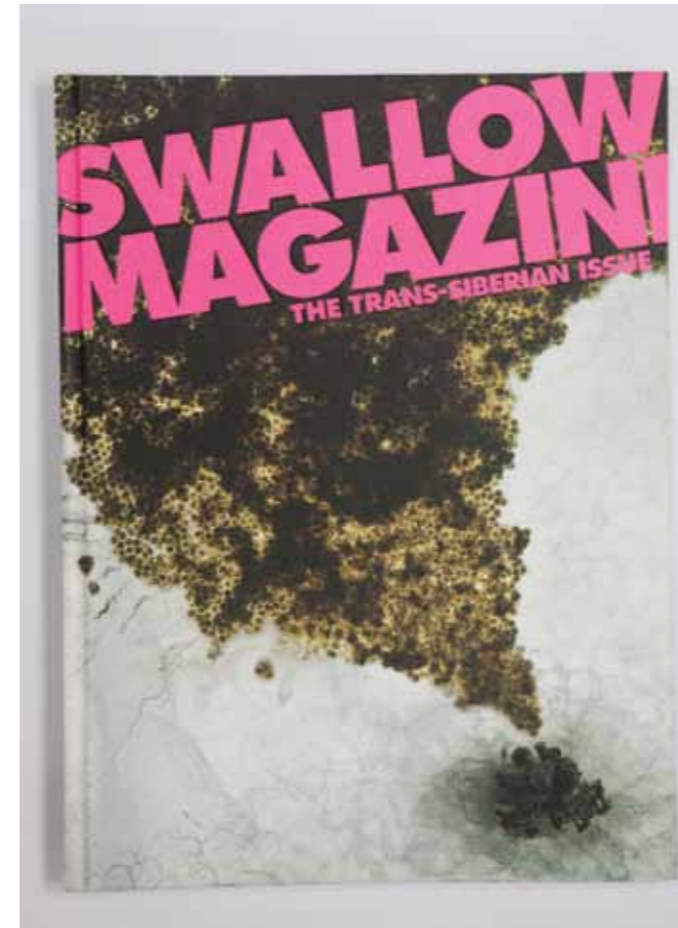
This local printer was set up in the early 2000s when the founder and managing director of Dominie Press, Oh Teng Hin, decided to diversify the business that he founded in 1979. alsoDOMinie, the creative engineering arm of Dominie Press, was set up specifically to take on specialised print jobs. One of its first was to print fabric ang pows for a major corporation. Soon after, they met Theseus Chan of WORK who was looking to print a book for photographer John Clang. Prior to this, Theseus had already tried to print the project at three other printers, but they all failed to deliver to his standards, recalls Teng Hin. "When he came to us, he warned us that if we can't match the quality, he will reject it, so it was a huge challenge." alsoDOMinie successfully delivered the book to Thesus's standard, and



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- 01 On Pedder store catalogue, *Pedderzine*
- 02 *Swallow Magazine* The Trans-Siberian issue
- 03 Club 21 Magazine

it started the partnership they've had ever since. Most notably, the printer has been producing his bi-annual *WERK* magazine, each issue an experiment in print itself.

While the new millennium was also a time when people thought print would die, Teng Hin says that this was not why he went into specialised printing. The 78-year-old confesses that he is very used to ordinary mass market printing and is thankful that alsoDOMinie's director Junny Saw pushed him to take on these difficult jobs to diversify the business. "My reaction to many of these jobs has often been 'What is this?'. She will say, 'Okay. We'll let you know' and she will find a way out," he says.

Such patience and willingness to experiment has begun to pay off as the company has seen a growing demand for its services around the world in the last few years, says Teng Hin. While most of its clients are currently local, some 35 per cent of them are global, including the likes of Melbourne-based Vince Frost and recent D&AD winner *Swallow Magazine*.

alsoDOMinie's print work may look like products of a technically complex production process, but Teng Hin reveals that it all boils down to the human touch. "It is printed on the same machines, and any company can do it because the technology is there," he says. Agreeing with him, Junny says the jobs they do are simply more laborious, less efficient and requires a lot of careful planning. "It's not just take and print," she explains. "Maybe a lot of other printers don't want to take on the hassle because to them every bit of time is money."

Indeed, there have been occasions when a project has lost money because it took more hours than planned to complete. Still, Teng Hin takes it in his stride, "Every project is a new challenge. It's a chance to explore new techniques." By and large, however, most of alsoDOMinie's jobs are moneymaking, but it is still supported by the ordinary mass printing jobs that Dominie Press does.

To Junny, getting the company to take on such difficult jobs is also a way of supporting creatives who want to push

the boundaries of their work. Moreover, mass market print jobs come and go, and are not samples of work she would keep to remember. “But if you print something like these, it becomes something so part of us,” she says, admiring the table full of publications by designers like WORK, Asylum, Higher, ohplay, and Immortal. “We are so proud that we are able to do stuff like that.”

Every piece of work that alsoDominie showed that day seemed like a personal engagement, an invitation for the printer to express its adventurous spirit and heighten the experience of print and paper. There is no doubt that the publications were the fruit of much brainstorming, research and countless failures. By tearing, burning, wetting and drying, painting on, tampering with, and lacquering paper by hand – alsoDominie is like an artist in its own right, taking on such risky and laborious experiments to pave the way for new possibilities in design. While designers are often credited alone for the creative output, in my opinion, this printer certainly deserves equal recognition with the people whom we label as ‘creatives’ today.

# PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF PRINT:

DIRECTOR JUNNY SAW WALKS US THROUGH SOME INTERESTING PRINT JOBS ALSO DOMINIE HAS CRAFTED OVER THE YEARS.

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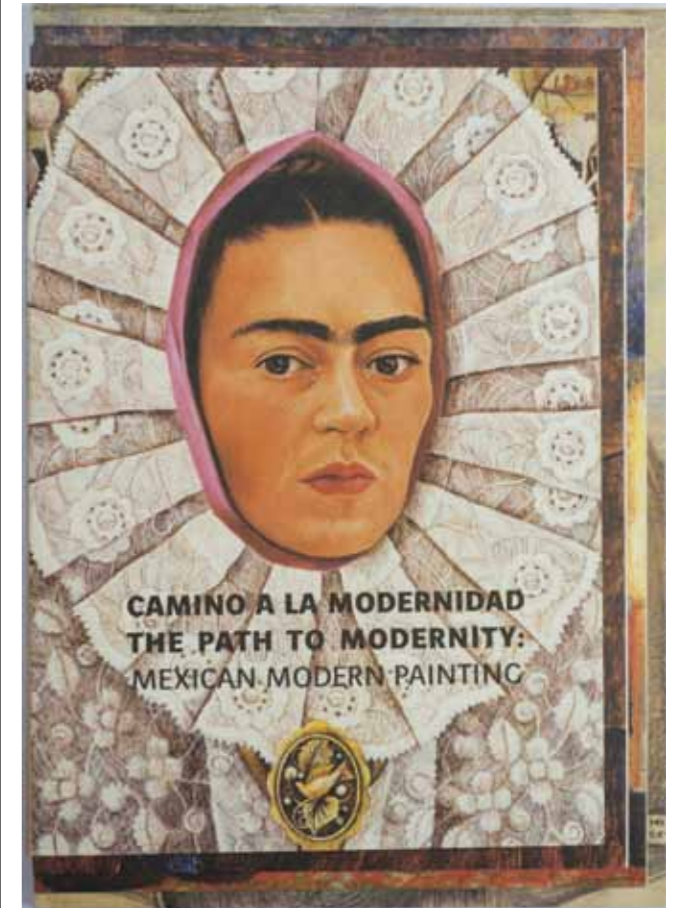
07 *The Path To Modernity,* Musuem catalogue

“All the other printers that the designer approached refused to do this job for her. The problem was that the books were of different sizes and she wanted the steps in between each book to be equally wide. Also, you normally cannot bind a book of different sizes together by thread sewing.”



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09 Fabric Ang Pow

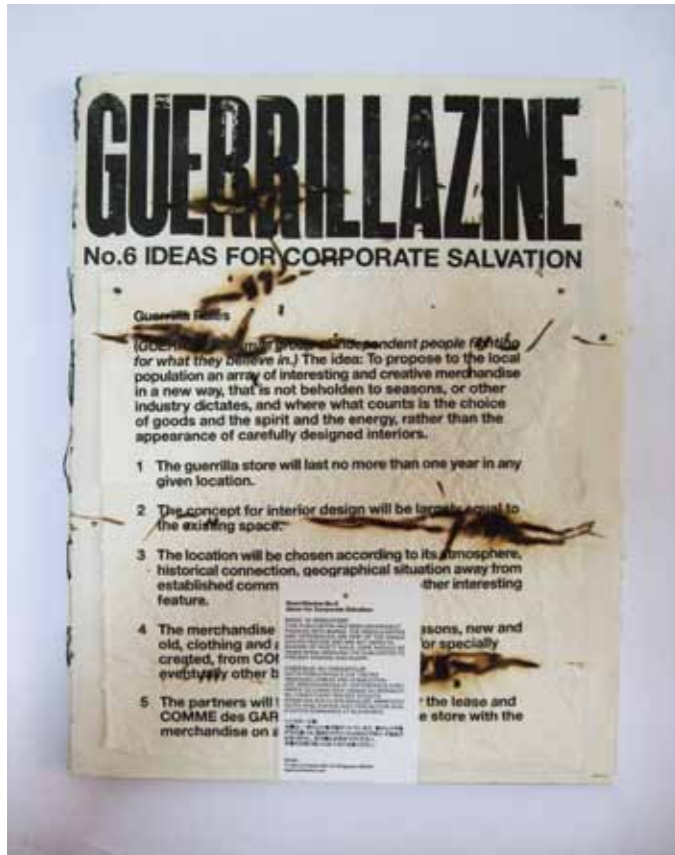
“This was one of the earlier works we did in 2005. It was difficult to print on this because it is a fabric, which absorbs ink very quickly when dried and looks washed out as a result. We used a special ink to print. The embroidery design was also very difficult. We were up at midnight supervising the hot stamping to make sure it looks so subtle that it resembles gold threads.”



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12 *Ideas for Corporate Salvation, Guerrillazine No. 6*

“This book involved a lot of creative processes! Two sides were hand torn, and the bottom was silk screened black. The covering sheet ‘Guerrilla Rules’ was printed, drenched in water, and then stressed to look old. We also had to find the right size nails and make them rusty. Finally, the book was burned on the front and back.”



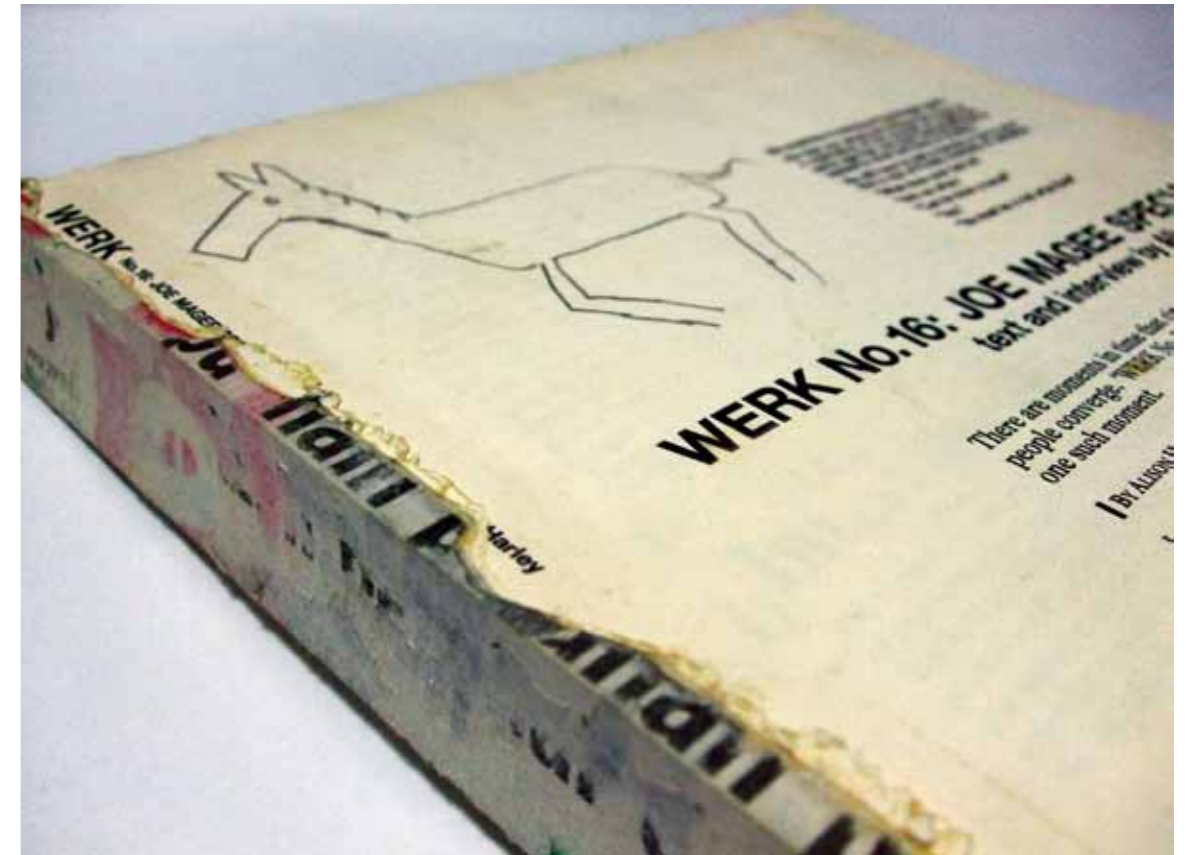
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15 *Joe Magee Special, WERK No. 16*

“The four sides of this magazine are finished differently: the top was hand-torn; the bottom was die cut; the right of the magazine was not trimmed; and the spine is covered with a newspaper, which could be from one of four languages. The newspaper was hand torn after binding, leaving just the spine. It had to be torn at a certain angle to attain a certain fluffiness too.”



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16 *Property brochure*

“This is a property brochure whose cover is silkscreened. We had to make sure the glitter on the cover doesn’t crack, that it’s even, there are no scratches, and when you hold it and rub it, it doesn’t come off.”



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Production department, alsoDOMinie

