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## Tape It to the Limit

**For a solo show** two years ago, Swiss artist Nic Hess covered three walls of the Berlin gallery Griedervonputtkamer with a hypercharged scene made from strips of colored adhesive tape. Pinocchio's nose stretched into the intake duct of a vacuum cleaner, atop which a baseball player held a Nike swoosh logo like a machete. A line extending from the ballplayer's foot crossed over a geisha's eyes. Another line stretched from the Nike logo through a locomotive's cab. Below, yet another line connected the train's wheels and transected the athlete's helmet. then slipped into a Hokusai wave, from which erupted an Izod Lacoste alligator. And these are just some of the images that animated the piece titled Stadionneubau (New Stadium Building).

Like a DJ collecting records, Hess, 33, constantly stockpiles images to include in his wall drawings. When creating a piece, he turns on his overhead projector, slaps an image on the glass, and opens his suitcase full of tape. "I tear a lot of things down after putting them on the wall," says Hess. "That's part of why I like working with tape, because it's so easy to make fast changes. The final piece is maybe 40 percent of what I had planned."

Through this process, Hess uses corporate icons and cultural symbols to create intriguing but ambiguous juxtapositions. The familiar images in unfamiliar combinations often suggest open-ended narratives. "I choose signs mostly for their visual impact," says Hess, "but ultimately, I see myself as sort of a storyteller. To me, all the images in my tape pieces connect somehow."

Born in Zurich, Hess studied art at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam and then at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin. (An architect's son, he initially trained as a draftsman.) Since his first major solo show in 1998 at Zurich's Serge Ziegler Galerie, which represents him, Hess has been a darling of the Swiss city's hipster scene. Darkly handsome, with an electric smile, he is known for popping up at parties and performing in costume as "Hermeto z6 Maria," a lounge-crooner Casanova.

"People ask me why I use so many Pinocchio images in my work-if it means I'm a liar," says Hess, who is dressed in faded jeans, Puma sneakers, and a shirt with the B.U.M. Sportswear logo printed on it. "No, but selling myself in the art circus is a son of lying." His cocked eyebrow suggests he's only half joking.

Over the last few years, Hess's work has gained wide exposure. This year, Hess has a solo exhibition at Switzerland's Kunstmuseum Winthertthur (on view through April 21), a yearlong installation at the Jumex Collection in Mexico City, and gallery shows at Serge Ziegler and Griedervonputtkamer scheduled for the fall. His wall installations are priced by size-a 10-by-50-foot piece costs approximately \$24,000. Smaller pieces, such as those executed on five-foot-square metal plates, go for about \$3,000. "Nic's tape-based installations are among his best works," says Rein Wolfs, head of exhibitions at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam and former director of the Migros Museum

für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich, where Hess was in a 1999 group show. "They are monumental in terms of scale but remain down-to-earth with their almost fairy tale-like imagery."

Though his signature works are the wall drawings, Hess has also exhibited sculptural pieces. For the 1999 show at the Migros Museum he created Buddhy, a 20-foot-long reclining Buddha baby carved from 60 sections of half-inch-thick Styrofoam that were horizontally stacked, resembling an architect's contour model. Hess was partially inspired by large Buddha statues he saw in Tibet, where he traveled to help build an orphanage after graduating from art school. But he also based the piece on the Dancing Baby, an animated infant first made popular on the Internet. "I wanted its identity to be a little unclear," he says.

Hess mixes such disparate motifs to dramatic and often comical effect. "Although I can never see logos independently from the company they represent, as soon as they're up on the walls and mixing with other images, they take on different meanings for me," he comments. "And then viewers often create their own connections."

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