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Shag: Cocktails with a splash of Tiki

12/05/11 **Kastle Waserman** | specs+spaces Reporter, Dunn-Edwards Corporation

A beautiful girl, a smitten gentleman, some fruity cocktails and a setting of opulent, brightly-colored, mid-century modern décor are the core of artist Shag's work. Add some Tiki statues, a knowing pussycat and the unexpected bull in a swimming pool or a man riding a giant chicken and you see this isn't your typical painting. It reflects a little twist and a bit of dark humor, and it's what gives the art of Shag its offbeat appeal.



Shag, whose given name is Josh Agle (take the last two letters of his first name and first two letters of his last name to create his handle) started out as a commercial artist, first designing art for band flyers and album covers and any other job that came along, but it was his pal Otto Von Stroheim (creator of the Tiki Oasis event we covered in [Part 1 of our Tiki Design series](#)) who gave him a surprise chance to do fine art. "He called me and said, 'I booked you a gallery show, now you have to paint some paintings!'" Shag told us when we interviewed him in his home studio in Orange County. "So I had to think, 'What kind of painting am I going to make? What would I like to own?'" As a participant in the local Tiki scene, Shag went with what he knew best, his first painting was a Tiki bar setting - a female serving a Tiki bowl to a couple at Trader Vic's. "I did five paintings for that show and they were a success," Shag reflected. "That started a transition in my career."

Shag's fondness for retro is easy to spot in his work. "I like the visuals of the '50s and '60s," he said. "When I started out, I did a lot of freelance work for record labels like [Dionysus](#) who specialize in that style of music. I was good at capturing that design esthetic because that was my thing too."

This may be why Shag is closely associated with the Tiki scene, a group of enthusiasts who like to escape into their own Polynesian-inspired world inspired by the Tiki bars and restaurants that grew popular in the '50s and '60s. Shag explains his entrance into the scene was quite organic, "When I was 21, my friends and I started going to bars we liked to call "old man bars" where the trendy hipsters didn't go. A lot of them had a Tiki theme and if you paid an extra \$5 for your drink you'd get to keep the Tiki mug it came in. So that's where my collection started."



Now a Tiki statue seems to pop up in a lot of Shag's work, he even designed his own collection of Tiki mugs, in non-traditional but definitely Shag-like colors of peach, green and lavender. Even when there isn't a Tiki in sight, he's still known as a "Tiki artist" and that's OK with him. He explained how he enjoys painting Tikis, "It's broken down into three parts. I have the main color that establishes what shape the Tiki will be. Then I have the shadows, which are black, and that gives the Tiki its form and where the eyes and mouth are. Then I have another color that highlights and further defines the shape. So just that process of painting a three dimensional object in a two dimensional way, to me is very satisfying."

Shag's color choices further define his work - bright oranges and greens, deep blues and purples jump off the canvas. He likens them to what you might find while having a cocktail in a Tiki bar, "The green might represent the lime in your drink, the dark turquoise might represent flower leaves, orange might represent a puffer fish lamp and the blues and purples represent the mysterious lighting you often find in bars."

Of course it all comes off the color wheel, but we're talking *Shag's* color wheel and he uses it in his own way, "You can

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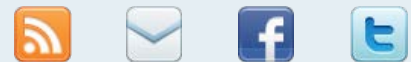
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draw geometric figures top of a color wheel, like a square, and wherever the corners go point to a perfect palette and its complementary color. Or if you draw a triangle, the colors may not be complementary but the percentage of distance they are from each other would balance out. I just found by doing this, I started developing color palettes that worked in a pleasing way."



As for his settings, a tagline often seen to describe Shag's collections is "artwork that celebrates consumerism and consumption." We asked him to explain the philosophy. "In most of my paintings people are having a good time, consuming food and cocktails in settings that are beautiful. I don't want to say that this is all you should aspire to but I don't want to negate it either if that's what makes you happy. The majority of the people who buy my paintings don't live like that, but this provides their little escape."

See the slideshow:

For more on Shag, visit his website: www.shag.com

Photos courtesy of Shag

Read the rest of our series on Tiki Design:

[Part I: Tiki Oasis](#)

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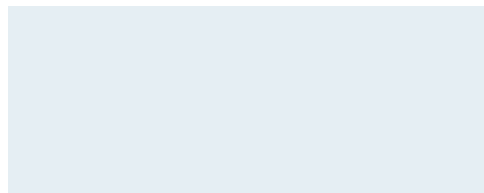
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