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. . . New York artist Tom Matt takes a more direct approach: He makes newsprint part of the art. Several years ago he was looking to break away from the figurative and portrait work he had been doing to create artwork that was more closely linked to his experiences in New York. One day in a Manhattan café, he was casually drawing on a torn scrap of newspaper when “it dawned on me that I could use the whole page of the newspaper as my ‘canvas,’” he recalls. He has since made about 28 pieces.

This ongoing series contains views of Manhattan drawn on top of front pages of New York newspapers, with the headlines and copy peeking through the imagery. “I’m trying to show the randomness of life in the city, and whatever news is on the page that day, that’s what I use. I want to show life as experienced in layers, where events overlap,” the artist explains. Sometimes there is a connection between the view depicted and the news on the page. For example, the artist completed *The Verrazano Bridge* as a commission for a client who ran in the New York City Marathon. He used the newspaper from the day after the race, which happened to feature a photo of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge on the front page. Although the convergence of the two was purely coincidental, “drawing the bridge with the photo on the page made the work surrealistic in a way,” Matt says. More often there is no connection between the news and the image, however, such as in *Below the Brooklyn Bridge*.

To begin a new piece, Matt selects a view that appeals to him, then approaches the newsstand and buys the paper of that day. “There’s a kind of ceremony for this,” he says, “because I don’t know what the news will be or how it will merge with the view.” Before heading out to the site, he tapes the paper to a board, which is attached to his easel. He usually makes three to five trips to the site, working for three-hour periods. Although he completes most of the drawing on location, “once I have enough information to work from in my memory, I can play with composition and embellish it when I’m back in the studio,” he says.

Forgoing a preliminary sketch, Matt simply crops the view with his hands. He spends a lot of time deciding where to stand and how to position the view on the page. He then begins drawing directly on the newsprint with Sennelier pastels and notes that the surface, surprisingly, has a kind of tooth. The pastel tends to absorb into the paper, so he uses fixative to add layers in areas where he wants an opaque tone. For the most part, however, he prefers a transparent effect, allowing some of the text or headlines to show through. In all the decisions for this part of his process, he defers to the drawing. “The drawing has priority. I won’t let a headline go through a building, for instance,” he explains. “But it’s a dialogue. Some headlines I would like to show, but I’m not sure how they will work in.” Using his finger, he erases some of the pastel, and he makes adjustments by adding more pastel. At a certain point, he says, “the drawing takes on a life of its own, and becomes all it can be. I strive for accuracy and a proportionally accurate view, but mostly I want to capture the character.”

As for the archival quality of these works, Matt is not overly concerned. “The buyers know that these are not archival,” he says, “and I started the series almost naively. I was driven by the idea.” Nevertheless, he makes limited-edition giclée prints of the originals to preserve the imagery and uses museum-quality framing for the originals, with Japanese hinges and acid-free backing. Overwhelmingly, though, buyers like the fact that the newspaper lends the work a certain fragility and time-sensitivity. “The fact that the newspaper is not archival appeals to them,” Matt explains. “For me, I’m motivated by the poetic nature of the idea.”



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