

# PETER HORVATH

TORONTO, CANADA

[1] FRIDA  
101.6 × 121.9 cm  
2020

[2] JAMES DEAN  
NO. 1  
Detail,  
76.2 × 91.4 cm  
2020



[2]

It is impossible to look at the collage work of artist Peter Horvath without unpicking our relationship with advertising and consumerism. Vintage ads are one of the building blocks of his visual language, in particular imagery from the 1940s to the late 1970s. "Advertising is a compelling medium, and the message has evolved with the public's improved perceptiveness," the artist says. His work plays with the bold imagery and graphic nature of his material, often subverting its purpose. This is collage as a way to play with the building blocks of our cultural consciousness.

Horvath's attraction to historical imagery grew out of his own childhood. "When I see images from magazines I grew up with, I'm transported back to a more innocent time," he reflects. There is comfort in memory. Both his father and grandfather were portrait photographers, an undeniable influence on his work. Horvath likes to work in series, something that grew out of his earliest experiments with art. "When I was six years old, my father gave me an Instamatic camera which I carried with me everywhere. I decided to photograph each of my friends individually, in my room, while holding an object—a car model, piggy bank etc.," he recalls. "After that, when a bit older, I photographed parked cars individually. I would lay out these small pics on the floor and put them in an order that made sense to me, sometimes random, sometimes chronological. What I came to understand at an early age is that groups of images help tell a larger story."

That sense of organization and placement can also be seen in one of the running aesthetic motifs in his collage—the use of geometric forms. The artist says he is attracted to straight lines and linear structures, noting Alexander Calder's

take on modernism as a direct influence. He uses overlapping figures and adds lines to create visual depth. His more recent *Hide Out* series also uses text elements, adding a touch of graphic punk to his style. "I found texts to represent what I was going through psychologically at the time," Horvath observes. "I saw a projected installation by Barbara Kruger in New York City a few years ago that had an incredible use of giant text, and it really stayed with me. I use words for their meaning, but also for visual impact. I love the look of large type."

There is often an element of brooding or psychological unrest in his images, even at their most exuberant. All of his visual motifs and references are ways to diffuse and complicate his subject matter. Horvath's approach to image-making has such a directness and strength that the layers echo the complexity of reality. "Much of my collage work camouflages the main subject through the placement of other elements, be it pieces of text or other cut and ripped fragments," the artist points out. "Concealing underlying subtexts and partly shrouding the identity of the person creates a puzzle. It's also satisfying to completely change the intent of an ad, which feeds my anti-establishment streak."

Figures regularly appear in Horvath's work, though they are not easily read. Often, their faces are cut in half in some way or split. "To me, splitting the faces is indicative of the struggle between opposing forces, left side vs. right side of the brain, the battle between the predetermined and the spontaneous," the artist explains. Meaning in Horvath's collage is created through contrast and combination. The medium of collage itself is a metaphor for the psychological internal battles of being human.