

4. Chasing Arcadia, Noma Bar, *The Guardian*
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5. Male Leadership, Noma Bar, *The Guardian*
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12 **MARK PORTER**
on Noma Bar

NOMA WAS BORN IN ISRAEL IN 1973 AND graduated from Bezalel Academy of Art & Design in 2000. He moved to London in 2001. He recently told *The New Yorker* website how he found his style, "It started back in Israel. During the first Gulf War I was sitting in a shelter with my family, reading the newspaper, and I came upon the black 'radioactivity' symbol on a yellow background. As I was looking at it, I discovered two eyebrows and a moustache, and saw in it the image of Saddam Hussein. So I sketched his silhouette around the symbol and found that it looked a lot like him. That Saddam image was one of the images I showed people when I moved to London and contacted magazines and newspapers looking for work."

He developed this signature style for London publications including *Time Out* and *The Guardian*, but is now known all over the world. There's a great book of his work *Guess Who: The Illustrations Of Noma Bar*, and a new book *Negative Space* is due out soon. Noma is best known for a strong visual style in which he assembles pictograms into images, often of famous faces. But it's not just about optical tricks – every graphic tour de force is backed up with a meaningful idea.

STRATEGIC PLACEMENT OF SHAPES

Sarah Habershon, former art director of *The Guide*, was the first to commission Noma in 2003. It was a cover image to go with an article on a new film about Ned Kelly. Sarah says, "I'd previously received a few postcards from Noma and they blew me away. It was the kind of package you have to show your colleagues immediately. One of the big strengths of Noma's work is the immediate reaction it provokes. As an art director, that's a quality you're always looking for but is hard to come by. You look at it and marvel at how accurately he has captured a likeness with the strategic placement of a few shapes. After the Ned Kelly cover we found other subjects for him to play with. On another *Guide* cover he combined a boxing glove with the neck of a guitar for an article on what bands fight about."

When *The Guardian* launched its new design in 2005, we wanted to introduce some new illustrators to the comment section alongside the existing contributors such as Andrzej Krause and Peter Till. Noma was an obvious choice. There is a real intelligence and sensitivity about his



4
The simplicity of a logotype with meaning and emotion

work when he tackles political and cultural issues, and the results are astounding. His images are everything that we ever hope to achieve with an editorial illustration – attention grabbing, bold, illuminating and meaningful. There are very few illustrators who manage to tick all those boxes.

White Male Privilege was Noma's first piece for *The Guardian* comment pages. The article was about male leadership, in the context of the war in Iraq. It's almost the perfect Noma Bar illustration – delightfully simple yet immensely powerful. The way the male symbol becomes the tip of a gun would have made a successful illustration in itself, but the use of white, red and black, and the trickle of blood add a strong emotive quality to the illustration. Like so many of his images it has the simplicity of a logotype but packs in a lot of meaning and emotional resonance.

ILLUMINATING REDUCTION

Noma's use of colour and graphic form really project in the typographic environment of a newspaper or magazine page, but his great strength is the intelligence he brings – he has a real grasp of the subjects he illustrates. He finds the message at the heart of the article and translates it into something that is not only visually satisfying, but also invites the reader to participate in solving a kind of puzzle.

I enjoy Noma's work as a reaction to a period in which decorative illustration and design have been very popular. In many cases, style, texture and complexity have been taking precedence over content and meaning in our visual culture. The wonderful thing about Noma's illustration is that it is reduced to the bare minimum. Sometimes you can't believe how little he needs to make an image. His work is in the best tradition of illustration in that it genuinely illuminates the subject. Noma's range of subject matter is also a comment on the times – he is equally comfortable with global geopolitics and celebrity portraits, and in straddling the worlds of pop culture and current affairs he reflects the experiences of his audience in a fragmented post-modern world. (!)

MARK PORTER is Creative Director of *The Guardian*. Noma Bar was selected by *The Guardian* Creative team.

