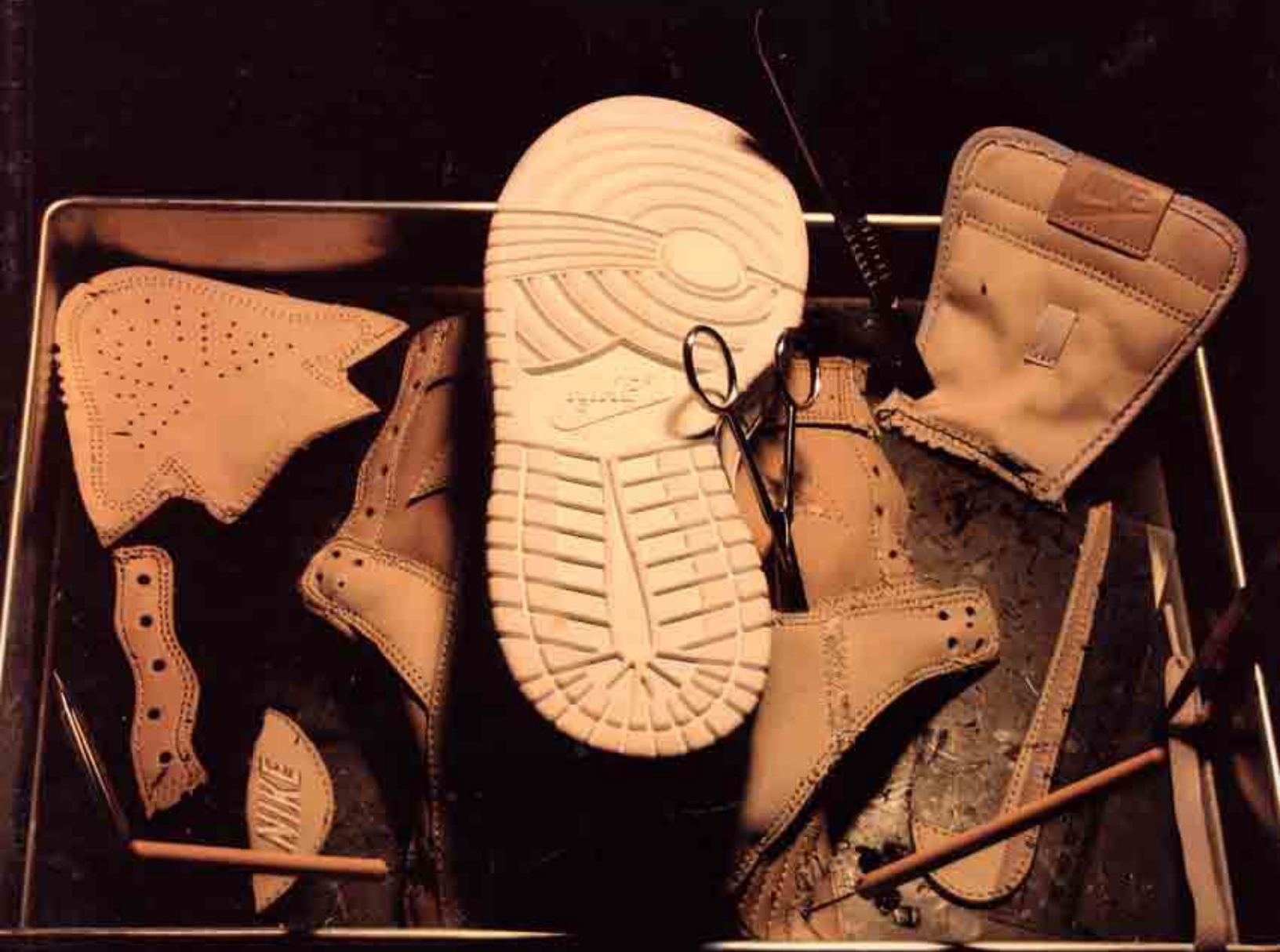


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Sneakaholic

Morax

Words: Dominique Hendelman

When Nike introduced the laser technology, it was the illest thing to happen to kicks since the pump. Then they took it even further with the Nature of Communication laser pack released this spring. One of three artists chosen to design was Mo Morales - known for his Labyrinthine Projection drawings (a single, non-intersecting, continuous line). The goal was to show artists' connectivity to the world, which he did with images of Oregon countryside and left versus right side of the brain. Mo's kicks are so detailed, they get better every time you peep 'em. I caught up with the man called Mo to find out what's really good.

Kicksclusive: How did you get involved in Nike's "Nature of Communication" laser pack?

Mo: One day while I was away from the studio, a guy dropped-off some audio mixes that needed polish. I never spoke to him until a few days later when I got a call saying that he was very pleased with my work and wanted to know my shoe size. A few days later, a package arrived from Nike with a pair of Jordan XIII's, the note inside said, "nice work - Mark (Smith)." He brought another project in a few weeks later and we hit it off immediately. He learned of my various skills and began contracting me to work on projects for Nike. Knowing of my Labyrinthine Projection™ drawings, he felt that the linear nature would lend itself seamlessly (pun intended) to the laser process.

K: Would you delve further into your statement that "through the strictly personal, the universal is revealed?"

M: That statement is one I champion, though not one I invented. The quote comes from a contemporary Norwegian figure painter, Odd Nerdrum. It means that although the specifics of our lives inform our individuality, we are all basically the same - we all feel the same emotions. Have you ever experienced a soliloquy that spoke to your soul? It's possible not to acknowledge the effect, but it's impossible not to feel it on some level. This is the strictly personal - the more personal it is, the more you'll find its universality.

K: How does that tie into the quote on your Air Force 1's?

M: It's an abbreviated version of my driving philosophy that's based on the inter-connectedness of all things. In varying degrees of directness, everything in the universe is connected. But our culture is in a very self-rewarding mode and it's tearing us apart. The purpose of my work is to counteract this. Like a pack of campers - we eat better, make warmer fires, and pitch better tents when we help each other.

K: Judging by your AF1's, you seem fascinated by the duality of the right and left sides of the brain. Is that true?

M: I accept the common (if not scientific) notion that the two hemispheres of the brain process differently - the left logically and the right emotionally. I'm comfortable understanding the world in terms of continuums anchored on the extreme left and right ends. Sometimes we think, sometimes we feel, but how we act is always an amalgam of both.

K: How long did it take you to complete the AF1's?

M: When Nike approached me about the project, I worked on several different concepts. Then with their encouragement, I began to develop more traditional landscape imagery. That took several weeks, but the real work came in splicing the Labyrinthine Projections so that discrete parts of it could be burned into the leather pieces that make the shoe. I started in June of 2004 and was revising designs until September.

K: I know you derived your Labyrinthine style from the Etch-A-Sketch, but were there any other sneaker designs that inspired you?

M: I think the art and the sneaker are two different worlds that in some cases collide. I was interested in using the shoe as a canvas, so I can't say I was particularly inspired by it. I do like the Dunk quite a bit, but my all-time favorite is the Chuck T.

K: The t-shirt is ill, what made you decide to do a shirt to accompany your kicks?

M: Thanks! I hope I can find a partner to help me realize it in its original concept - there've been attempts, but the real one has yet to materialize. It just seemed like a no-brainer, like a concert tee that's more a souvenir than an article of apparel.

K: Was your release party poppin' off?

M: Oh, baby, it was huge! The event was at the Compound Gallery in downtown Portland. When I arrived, there was a line around the block. As I made my way to the front, I heard these whispers, "Hey, look! That's VirtualMo!" It was trippy. I was happy to acknowledge the heads and their enthusiasm about the shoe cuz that's essential for this work. The viewer really needs to have a pair in their hands to appreciate the quality and intricacy of the design. Overall, the party was a blast - I couldn't have asked for a more successful event.

K: You're big on your art being part of a continuing story. Where's your story going?

M: As an artist, it's my responsibility to receive and perceive the energy of the world, and respond to it in a considerate way. By considerate, I don't mean nice, I mean literally to consider and think about it. I've begun creating more political art, particularly criticizing the Bush regime. I see my story meandering into politics. I believe it was the 20th century German artist, Max Ernst, who said, "Art plus politics equals power." I'm not power-hungry, but I am interested in having the power to illuminate this spiritual darkness that's consuming us as we consume the world.

If any of your readers are so inclined, I invite them to check out www.virtualMo.com for images of the tee and the poster (both still available), and as a means to contact me and share their stories. Also, peep the new Jordan XX low, which features my portrait of MJ.

