deconstructing What we fear inside

by leslie hunt

David Julian's illustrations give a little tweak to the viewer's sense of reality, as in "Fear." The mind-boggle is hardly new in the arts, but where less masterful imagers might be coy or manipulative, Julian is thoughtful, subtle. (You must visit Julian's Web site, www.davidjulian.com. In addition to illustration, he's doing wonderful things in photography and assemblage art.)

Both artist and empiricist, Julian has a most unusual way of working out images. It's a sequence of steps that alternate between intellect and intuition, tactile and digital. The illustrator himself can't draw a map of the process, and certainly the route varies. But it always begins with a broad concept—fear in this case—which Julian then begins to free-associate with related ideas, symbols, places, photographs, and objects.

The search for those objects begins in Julian's own house, among a polymathic collection of old photographs and artifacts, such as arcane scientific apparatus, animal bone, and natural and manmade curiosities.

As the idea becomes clearer, Julian begins to photograph certain elements that will fit, like the hardwood floor of his living room, the stage floor in "Fear," and the ecru muslin that became the electric blue curtains. The woodwork at the top of the stage came from two theaters Julian photographed.

The concept of fear became trembling-kneed, not-in-control stage fright, epitomized by a girl in an old, faded black-and-white photograph, who's dressed for some long-ago recital. Julian colorized the costume in feminine tones, enhancing the highlight and shadow of the original with custom Photoshop brushes until the outfit glows like satin. The girl's face, content in the original, got a touch of Photoshopped angst. The Oz-red tap shoes are a clever jolt of both color and metaphor. The snake, popular object of fear and loathing, is useful as a design element as well, adding tension by disturbing the symmetry of the stage. The tiny ant in "Fear" is emblematic of Julian's sense of humor, and a reminder of his lifelong connection to field science. There's at least one in every David Julian illustration
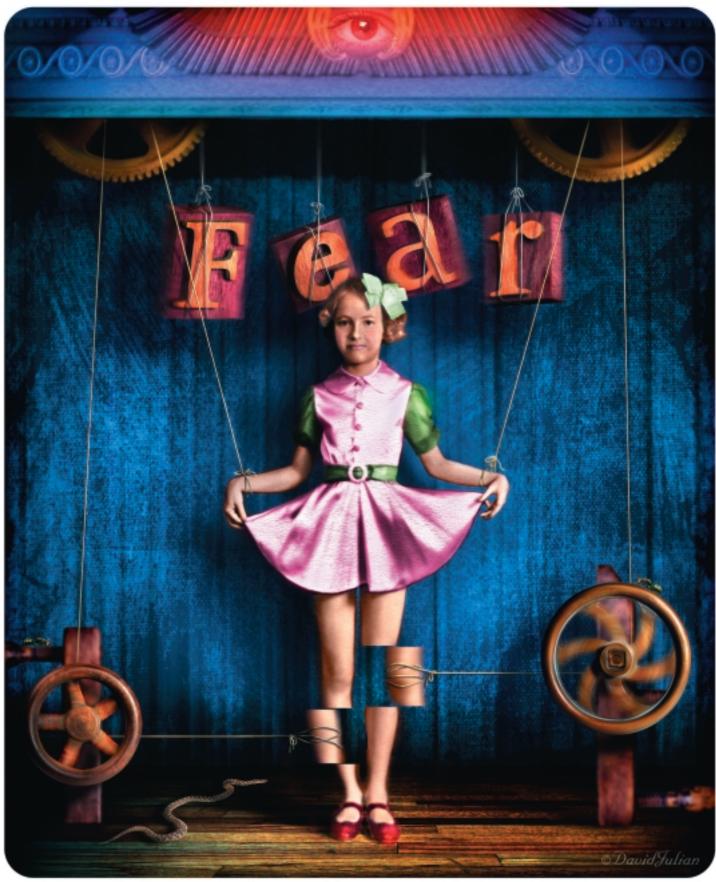
These objects and photos begin to migrate to the studio, where Julian will study them, think about the ideas they might convey and how they'll figure into the illustration. Scale is irrelevant at this stage. The cogs in "Fear" are tiny brass clock parts, the pulleys man-sized machinist's wheels. As the elements are scanned directly or digitized from photographs, Julian will add them to a digital canvas created in Photoshop 7.0. He'll also output the scans, and slide the prints under his working sketch like Photoshop layers, arranging and rearranging them as the sketch develops. This method allows Julian's ideas to evolve intuitively as he works.

Julian outputs the digital canvas at various stages as well, likewise slipping print under sketch and working by hand. He adds the word "fear" to the drawing, but he'll have to create it in-computer for the digital canvas. he sometimes uses Strata Infini-D software to make simple shapes and 3-D text. He'll digitally create the wires, too, as well as the strings around the dancer's legs. Julian draws on his experience in photography and technical illustration when he creates digital scenes, knowing where the light should fall, how objects in motion appear blurred.

Julian was first trained in the natural sciences—he studied and worked at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, "a weird and fascinating" place, he says—and he holds a BFA from the Pratt Institute in New York, where he worked as a designer, art director, and photographer, before settling in Seattle in 1994. He is self-taught in photography and digital imaging.

He's won three Society for News Designers awards for editorial illustration, the Award of Excellence and two Silvers, and has twice been in *Print* annuals. His work attracts some heavy commercial clients as well, including Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Oracle, and SGI; HBO Cinemax, ABC-TV, and Turner Broadcasting; Warner Books, Prentice Hall, Scholastic, and Penguin Books; Ziff Davis, Tribune Newspapers, and *The Washington Post*. To vary his lifestyle and interact with other creatives, Julian enjoys teaching both locally and nationally. His patience and detailed yet intuitive style win high praise from students and clients alike. See more of this artist's work on his cool Web pages, at www.davidjulian.com. ◀

Photography equipment
Cameras: One Julian made with a projecting lens and an old Pentax 67 camera, called "Kaputnick"
For this project: Nikon CoolPix 990 and Nikon FE2

Digital gear
Computer: Apple Macintosh G4 with twin Radius PressView monitors
Scanners: Umax Astra Flatbed Scanner, and Nikon LS-2000 and Imacon film scanners

Imaging software
Adobe Photoshop 7.0 and Illustrator Assorted specialized imaging programs and plug-ins

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