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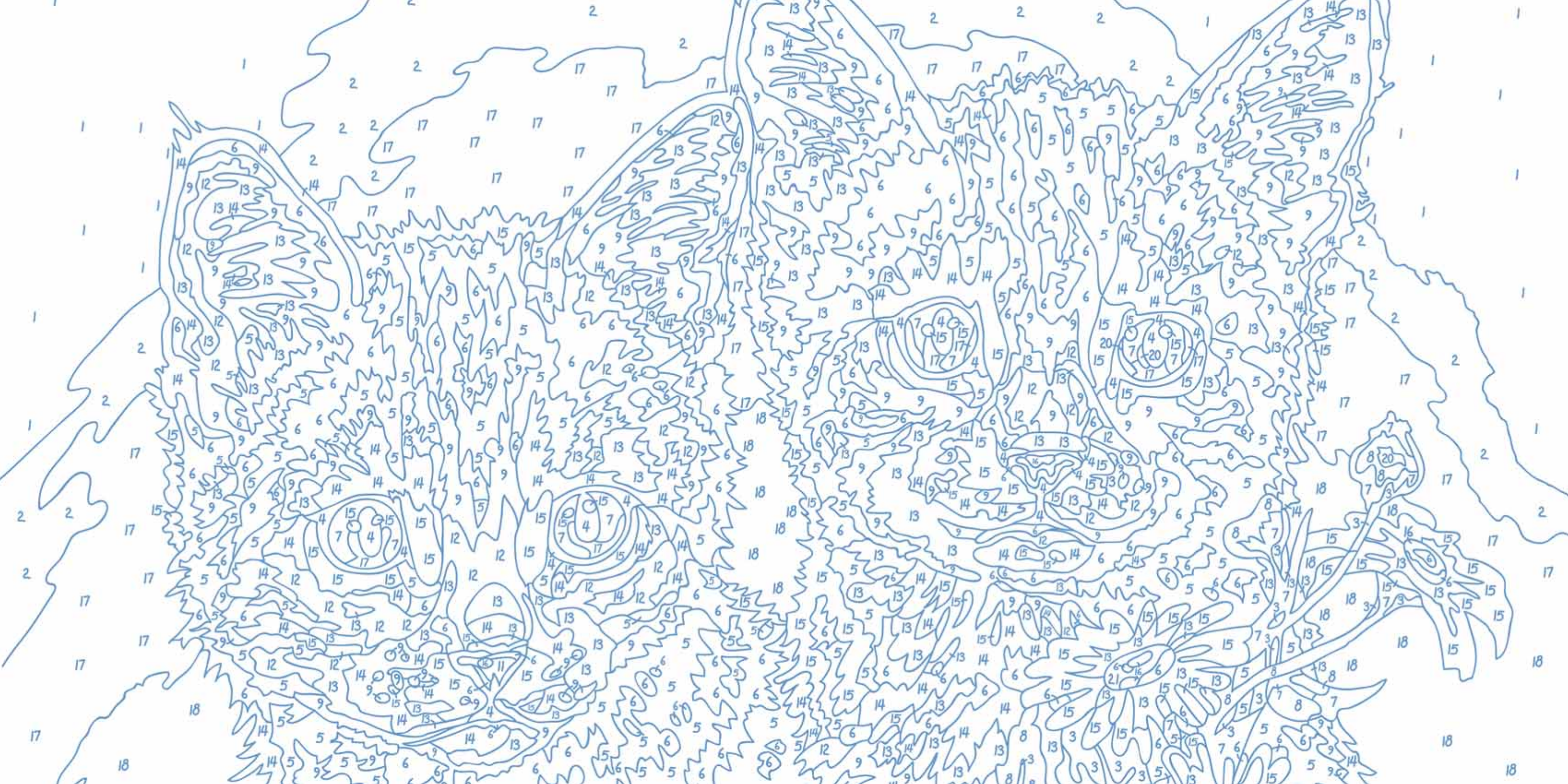


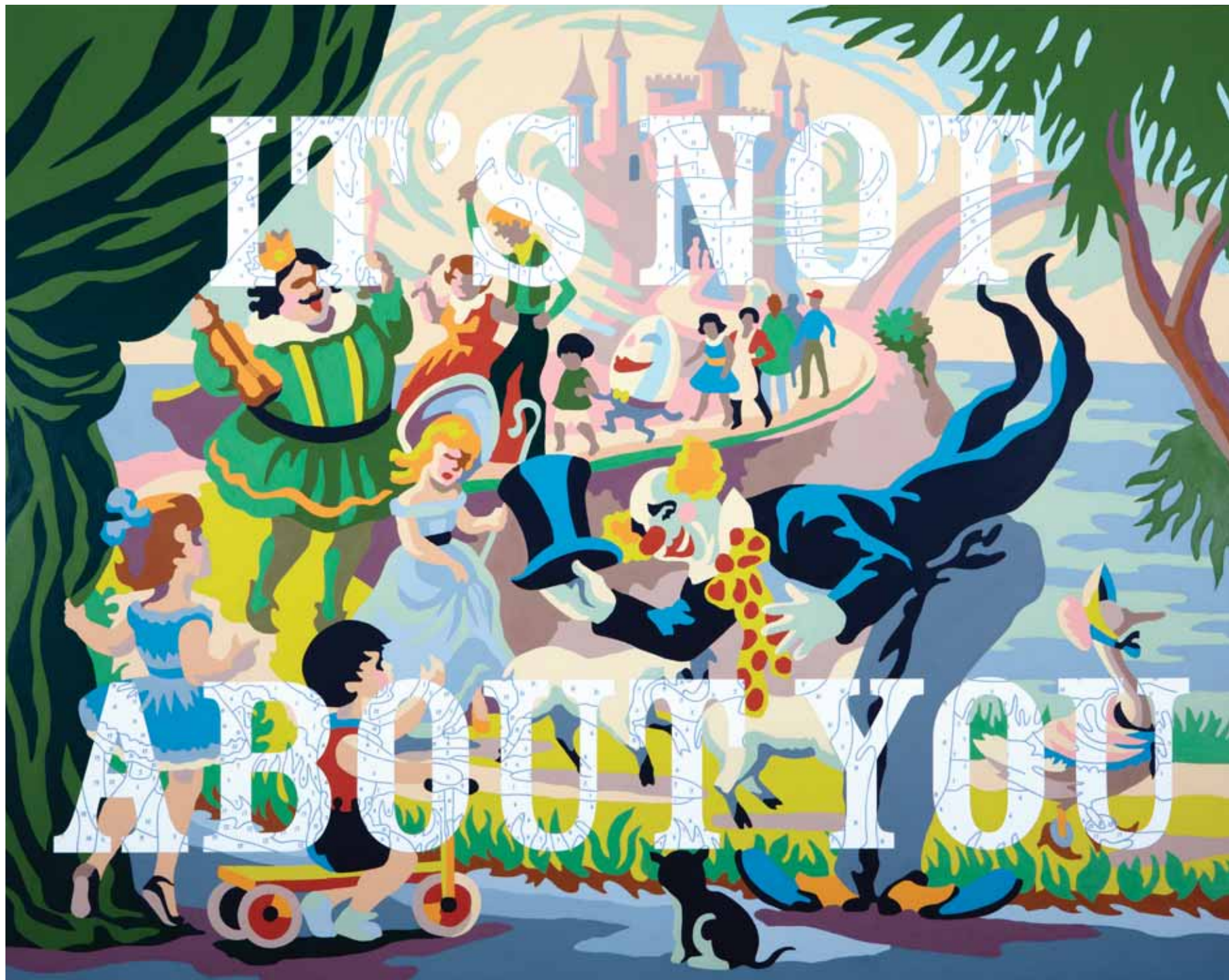
Trey Speegle

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

Text by ALLEGRA HUSTON

BENRIMON CONTEMPORARY





TREY: HERE & NOW *by Allegra Huston*

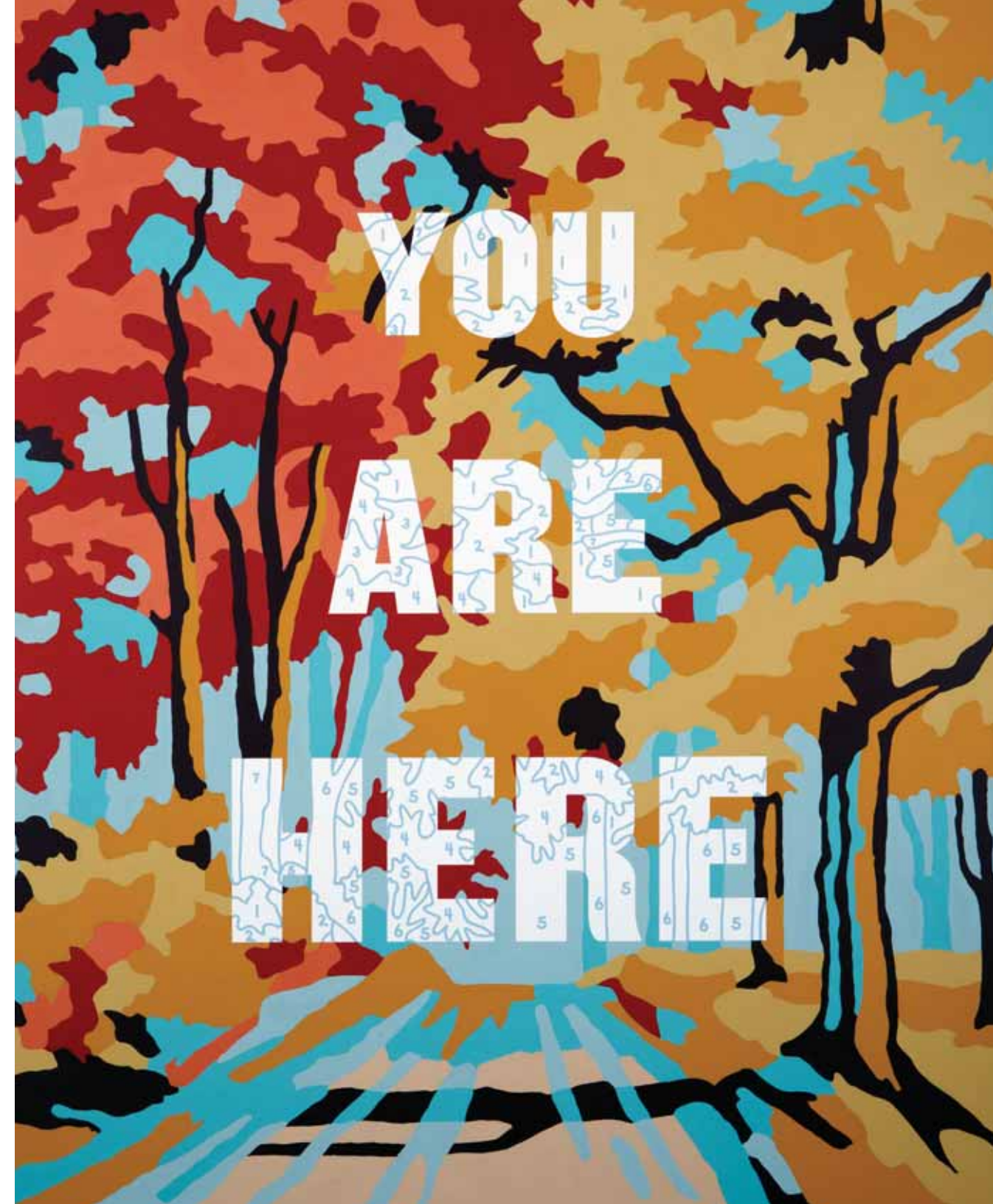
His texts are simple; they dare you to dismiss them as simplistic, like the pictures they emerge from.

“GENIUS,” ANNOUNCED THE FRONT OF Trey’s t-shirt, one glorious summer day in the west of Ireland about fifteen years ago. In small letters: not boastful exactly, but supremely confident, nestled in the topography of his chest. Then he turned around. Between his shoulder blades was an afterthought: “Or jerk?” It was not a t-shirt to be worn by the faint of heart.

FROM THE FIRST DAYS I knew Trey, it was all about the text. The previous night, wearing a chef’s hat, he’d set before me a handmade birthday cake, with Wonder Woman on it, that said, “Eat Me Allegra.” This was the first time we’d met, and we were instantly friends. In the years that followed, little cards would arrive now and then, saying things like “What Are You Waiting For?” and “It’s Now Or Now”. I put them up on pinboards and fridges, taking them with me as I moved house from London to the US.

“GENIUS OR JERK?” WAS THE title of a documentary Trey was shooting about the legendary Michael O’Donoghue, original head writer of Saturday Night Live. As I learned later, one of the nodes of connection between Trey and Michael was vintage paint-by-number paintings. Michael had bought two for a quarter at the Rose Bowl swap meet and hung them in his fancy Hollywood office, and so began a collection that eventually numbered over two hundred. When Michael died, his widow, Cheryl Hardwick, gave his collection to Trey--whose collection now numbers more than three thousand.

WHEN YOU ENTERED TREY’S BROWNSTONE in Brooklyn, you found yourself in a paint-by-numbers world: iteration after iteration of an autumn wood, the Eiffel Tower, puppies and kittens and weeping clowns, overtaking the walls in stiffly varying arrangements of color. Even the light coming through the high windows seemed segmented and flattened in tone. Like kudzu, the images covered a bench in the hall, and as I lay in my cozy visitor’s bed in the living room I used to imagine them procreating wildly at night by means of some cleaned-up, vintage, asexual reproduction.





WE ALL FIND SOMETHING DIFFERENT in this strange, ultra-American cultural phenomenon. For me, paint-by-numbers are unsettling, verging on creepy: life deliberately made lifeless, form without spirit. I imagine the people who created them as having something in common with those men who share their lives with anatomically correct dolls. (Trey thinks I'm the weird one, for thinking this.) But paint-by-numbers are also inclusive, oddly democratic: the you-too-can-be-an-artist promise, the bare-faced reduction of great works of art to prescribed colors, the corralling of wilderness and imagination within chunky, inelegant lines. Like any enterprise of social leveling, there's a grimness beneath the platitudes. Nothing, and nobody, is unique; our differences are no more than quirks of circumstance or degrees of skill. Classic, 1950s' paint-by-numbers are all about control and conformity. Not even the puppies and the kittens are really playing.

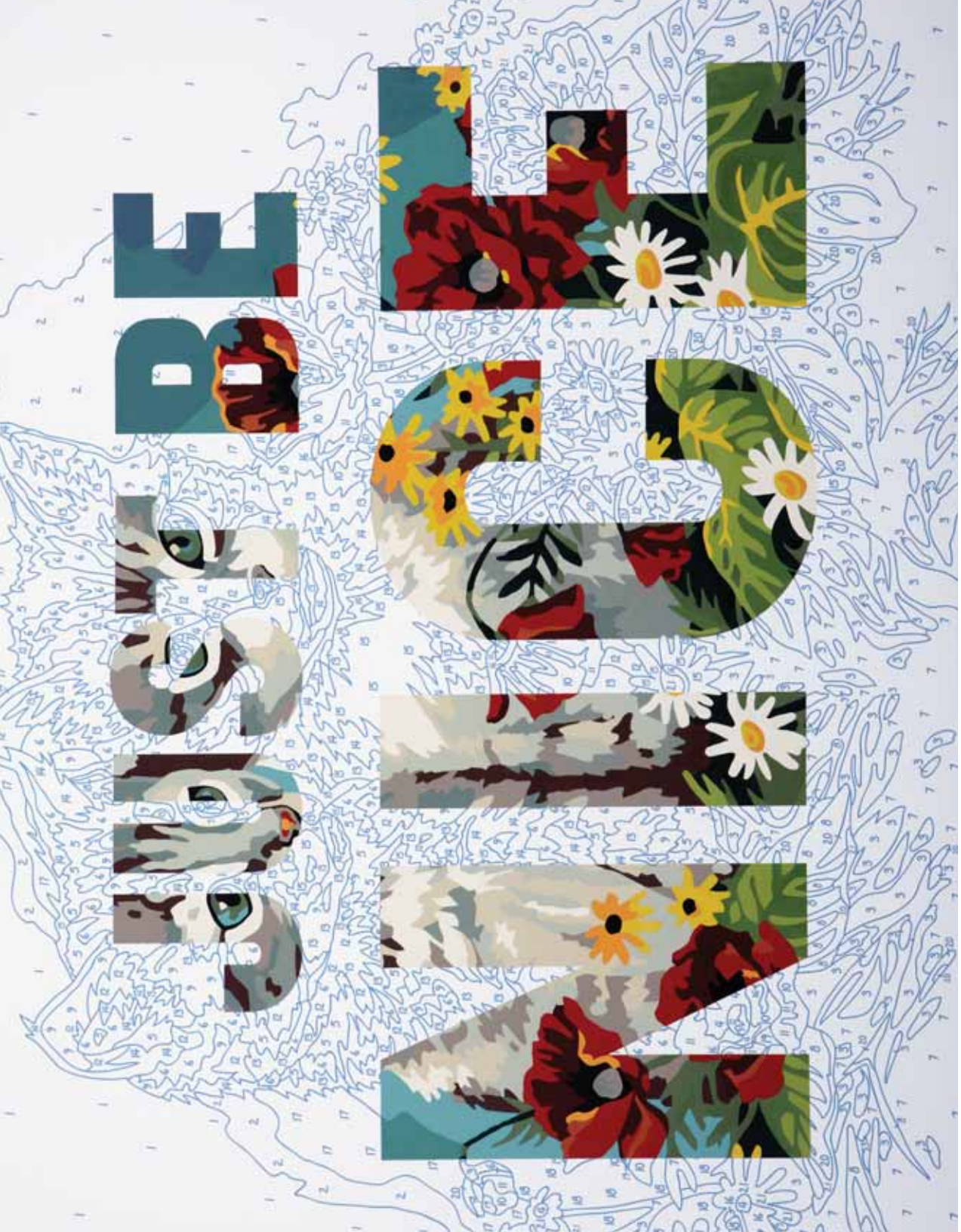
TREY TRANSFORMS THESE SAFE, suburban efforts at artistic adventure into icons of imaginative challenge. His texts are simple; they dare you to dismiss them as simplistic, like the pictures they emerge from. Yet it's the juxtaposition that animates them. Can you imagine the ocean? Of course you can, in a banal paint-by-numbers sort of way. Is that really the ocean? Can you imagine--can your imagination hold--an ocean that shatters every constraint, even the final constraint of being an ocean at all?

CATHOLIC ATHEIST THAT I AM, my favorite piece in this show is "It's Later Than You Think." As it skips through the millennia, from the time of Christ to the time of Leonardo to the time of those anodyne paint-by-numbers suburbs to the time of Trey, time collapses. Judas, with his hint of exposed shoulder, has the vampy metallic hair of Veronica Lake. The fragmentation of the color makes the planes of the faces almost cubist--but also gives them a blotchy quality that reminds me of leprosy, which faith might cure, as well as the falling away of faith over the centuries. And I'm fascinated by the dhurrie rug under the table, which seems to have come from Target. How late is it, though? Is it too late or are we just in time--for salvation, or for betrayal? Maybe we've just sat too long at the table, flirting with the wrong guy and eating too much, and it's time for bed.

NOW THAT HE HAS DECIDED to do without hair, Trey is known to some of his friends as the Bossy Buddha. This is also the perfect description of Trey the artist--and there he is as a Buddha clown in "You Who (Self-Portrait)", with a jaunty flower and a commanding stare. His work takes bossiness as its subject: it tells you what to do while reminding you of the deadness of doing what you're told. In the huge backdrop Trey made for Stella McCartney's fashion show, there was only one word: YES. The colors were festive and ebullient; it was springtime in paint-by-numbers Paris--and the shape of YES obliterated it all with blazing, empty white. What might fill that whiteness? What does YES mean, to you?

[The] work takes bossiness as its subject: it tells you what to do while reminding you of the deadness of doing what you're told.





















Exhibition List

- ① IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU, 2010, 60 X 48 IN, ARCHIVAL PIGMENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
- ② YOU ARE HERE, 2010, 60 X 40 IN, ARCHIVAL PIGMENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
- ③ YOU WHO, 2011, 48 X 36 IN, ARCHIVAL PIGMENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
- ④ IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU, 2010, 48 X 64 IN, ARCHIVAL PIGMENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
- ⑤ WHY CAN'T YOU JUST BE NICE, 2011, DIPTYCH 72 X 48 IN OVERALL, ARCHIVAL PIGMENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
- ⑥ IT'S LATER THAN YOU THINK, 2010, 104 X 232 IN, ARCHIVAL PIGMENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
- ⑦ LOOK WITH WONDER AT THAT WHICH IS BEFORE YOU, 2005-11, OVERAL SIZE 96 X 192 IN, ACRYLIC ON VINTAGE PAINT-BY-NUMBER, INSTALLATION
- ⑧ WHO ARE YOU?, 2010, 34 X 72 IN, ARCHIVAL PIGMENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
- ⑨ YOU. ONLY YOU., 2008, 52 X 68 IN, SILKSCREEN, MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE ON CRAFT PAPER
- ⑩ I.O.U. (EVERYTHING), 2011, 34 X 72 IN, VINTAGE PAINT-BY-NUMBER PANELS IN SHADOW BOXES
- ⑪ HEY, YOU! (LET'S PLAY), 2011, 18 X 28 IN, VINTAGE PAINT-BY-NUMBER PANELS, ARTIST'S WALLPAPER, IN SHADOW BOX
- ⑫ HEY, YOU! (LET'S SHARE), 2011, 18 X 28 IN, VINTAGE PAINT-BY-NUMBER PANELS, ARTIST'S WALLPAPER, IN SHADOW BOX
- ⑬ FUCK YOU (THAT GUN IS ALWAYS LOADED), 2007, 25 X 32 IN, GOLD LEAF FRAME, VINTAGE PAINT-BY-NUMBER PANELS IN SHADOW BOX
- ⑭ YOU SUCK (SAY IT WITH FLOWERS), 2011, 24 X 36 IN, FRAME, VINTAGE PAINT-BY-NUMBER PANELS FRAMED IN SHADOW BOX
- ⑮ THANK YOU, 2011, 48 X 60 IN, ARCHIVAL PIGMENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS





Trey with Lamonte, sitting on the You Are Here rug, in The RePop Shop at Benrimon Contemporary, February 2, 2011. Included were specially created merchandise for this exhibition, as well as one of a kind works, print editions and some sold out pieces made for Anthropologie Home, Fred Perry, and 20x200. 10% of the proceeds were donated to The Trevor Project.

Trey Speegle

American, born 1960

SOLO EXHIBITS

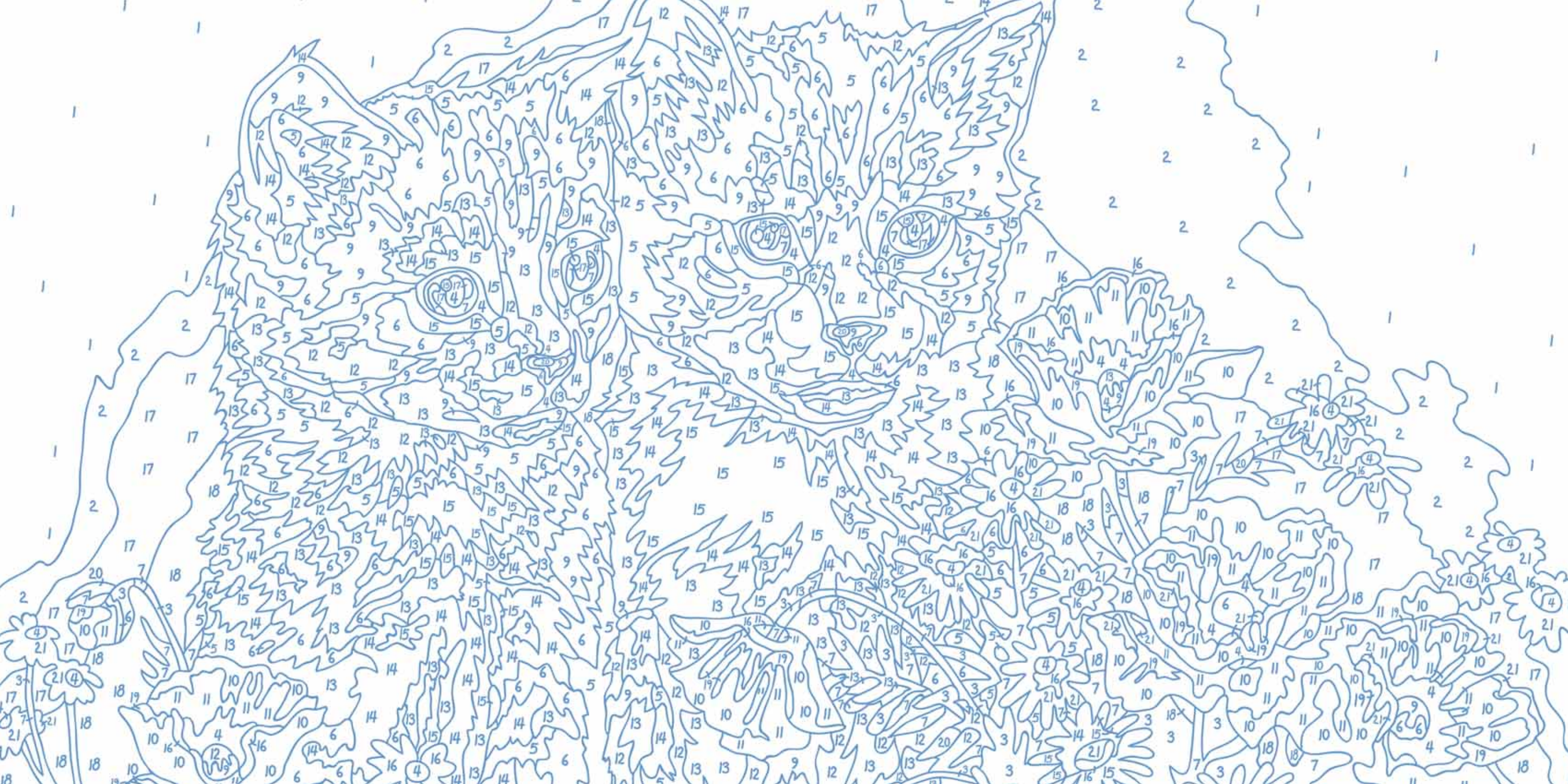
- 2011 It's Not About You, Benrimon Contemporary, New York, NY (February 3 - March 5)
- 2010 Buddha Waitress Wanted, Global Home, Beacon, NY (September 10 - February 1)
- Once Wants More, Benrimon Contemporary, New York, NY (September 14 - 16)
- Outside the Lines, Koelsch Gallery, Houston, TX (August 7 - September 19)
- 2009 Trey Speegle, Anthropologie.com Online Gallery (October 09 - September 10)
- Trey Speegle, A-Z, Global, Jeffersonville, NY (September 3 - November 21)
- 2008 Can You Imagine, Niba, Miami Beach, FL (December 2 - January 11)
- Why Not?, Comerford Hennesy, Bridgehampton, NY (July 3 - September 2)
- What Are You Waiting For?, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (March 19 - April 16)
- 111 Reasons to Love You, auto., New York (February 1 - March 6)
- 1981 REPOP 1981, Farrell Dyde Gallery, Houston, TX (June 12 - July 8)

GROUP EXHIBITS

- 2010 Fleurs: 1880 - 2010, Benrimon Contemporary, New York, NY (May 5 - June 6)
- Manifest Equality, Manifest Equality Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (March 1-7)
- 2009 Mixtape, Jen Bekman Gallery, (November 20 - January 9)
- The Red Show #9, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (December 17 - January 25)
- Spring Sequence, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (April 23 - May 25)
- 2008 The Red Show #8, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (December 18 - January 20)
- Itty Bitty, Yes Gallery, Warren, RI (November 7 - December 21)
- Manifest Hope, Manifest Hope Gallery, Denver, CO (August 25-28)
- Illuminate, Mercantile, Easton, PA (June 4 - August 30)
- 2007 The Red Show #7, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (December 19 - January 15)
- The Writing's on the Wall, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (September 6 - October 9)
- Petal Fusion II, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (June 20 - July 28)
- 2005 Art on the Avenue, Houston, TX (November 15)
- 2004 AmBUSH!, Van Brundt Gallery, New York, NY (August - September)

ART FAIRS

- 2011 Pulse, New York City, Benrimon Contemporary, New York, NY (March 3-6)
- 2008 AAE, New York City, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (June 12-15)
- 2007 Bridge Art Fair, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, New York, NY (December 5 - 8)





CREDITS

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FEBRUARY 3 - MARCH 6, 2011

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18 FULL-COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS

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