

INDUSTRIAL FABRIC PRODUCTS

# REVIEW

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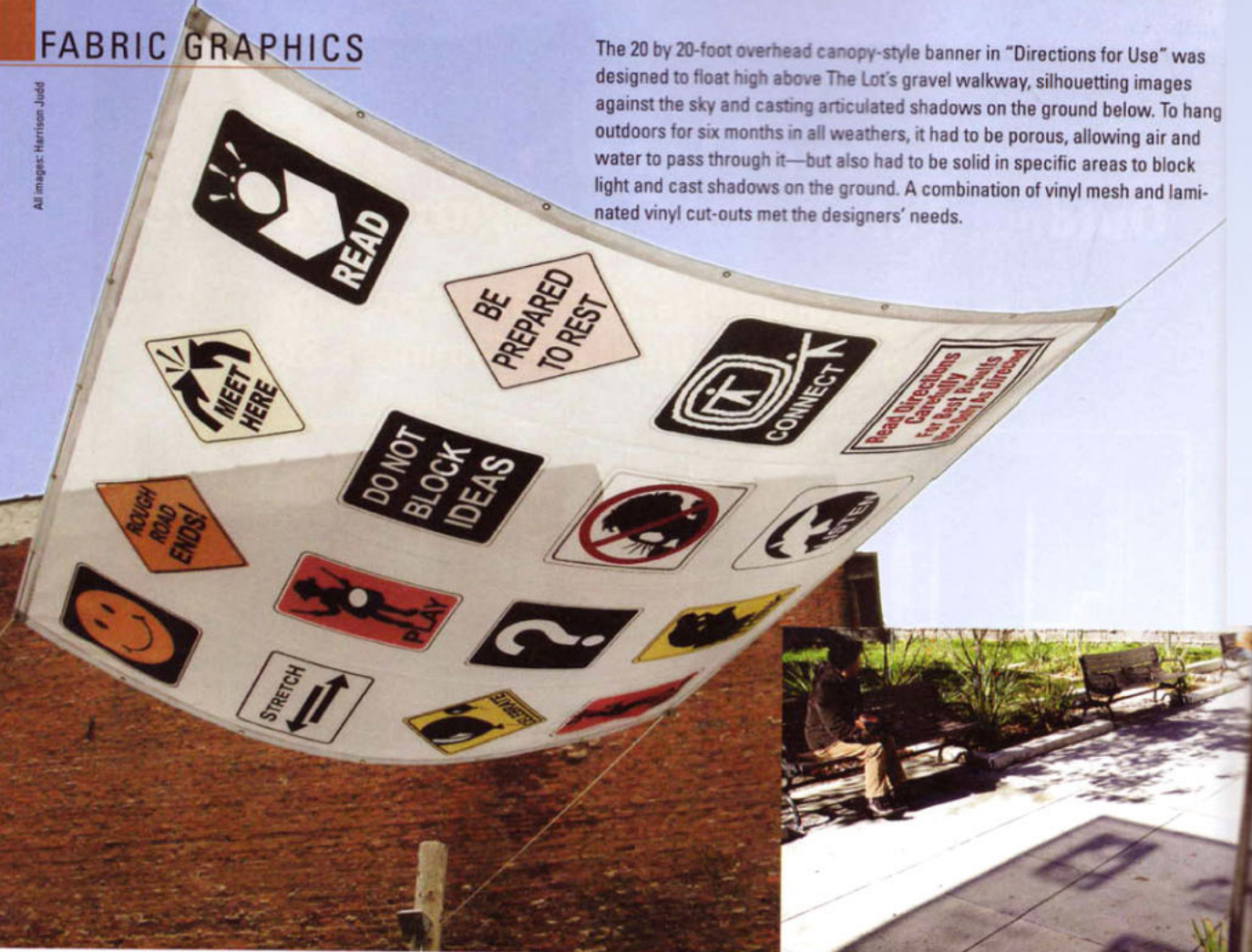
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The 20 by 20-foot overhead canopy-style banner in "Directions for Use" was designed to float high above The Lot's gravel walkway, silhouetting images against the sky and casting articulated shadows on the ground below. To hang outdoors for six months in all weathers, it had to be porous, allowing air and water to pass through it—but also had to be solid in specific areas to block light and cast shadows on the ground. A combination of vinyl mesh and laminated vinyl cut-outs met the designers' needs.



## The art of printing on fabric

New technologies in digital printing offer the reproductive quality that makes fabric a highly desirable printing medium for both commercial and fine art.

By June Bisantz

*June Bisantz is a professor of digital art and design at Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic, Conn. She is a digital artist who creates images for outdoor installations on billboards, banners and public transit.*

Printing on fabric, an indispensable staple of the advertising industry, is now also an exciting medium for artistic expression. Textiles are versatile, fluid, animated by light and air, and visible from great distances. New technologies allow large-format printing and color-rich photographic reproduction, making fabric a highly desirable printing medium for both commercial and fine art.

As the boundaries between fine and commercial art soften, the union of text and image becomes an increasingly accepted form of creative expression. Contemporary artists have embraced digital media, commercial technologies and industrial materials with enthusiasm as highly useful tools for artistic statement—tools that can reach large, public audiences with relevant messages about art, life and the world we live in.

In two recent public art projects, *Directions for Use* and *Vision of Optimism*, I used fabric to serve aesthetic vision and to accomplish practical goals. These two very different pieces—a community-centered outdoor installation and a student-designed indoor installation—used the flexible,



Installation of an 8 by 20-foot vinyl banner for a temporary outdoor public art installation in New Haven, Conn., called "Directions for Use."

A detail of the overhead mesh banner at The Lot, with shapes silhouetted against the sky.

kinetic medium of fabric to address the unique challenges of each project.

## Directions for Use

Directions for Use, a temporary outdoor installation at The Lot in New Haven, Conn., used altered traffic signs, along with two large fabric banners, to enliven the space and provide "directions" for community-friendly use. The Lot is a public outdoor space on a busy downtown street, with pedestrian paths, green space and park bench seating. Customized traffic signs were installed in the space's grassy areas, a large vinyl banner was hung against a masonry wall, and another banner, made of vinyl mesh, was suspended overhead like a canopy.

Directions for Use was installed in October, 2006 and displayed through March, 2007, spanning fall and win-

ter climates. The 8 by 20-foot wall-hung vinyl banner was printed with the project's symbol-based imagery along with the installation's title and dates, advertising Directions for Use to passers-by and serving as a visual "key" to the project's use of the space. Outdoor-grade, weather-resistant vinyl was the obvious choice of material for this banner—economical to produce, bright, colorful and highly visible from a distance.

The 20 by 20-foot overhead canopy-style banner served a more complex function, and was a greater challenge to produce. It was designed to float high above The Lot's gravel walkway, silhouetting images against the sky and casting articulated shadows on the ground below. The idea of using natural light to project images onto the ground, and

"opaquing" discreet areas of the banner, was difficult to explain to vendors; and once explained, seemed to have contradictory requirements. Since the banner would hang outdoors for six months in all weathers, it had to be porous, allowing air and water to pass through it—but also had to be solid in specific areas to block light and cast shadows on the ground.

After much research and dialogue with industrial printers, sign makers, and theatrical fabricators, the solution was simple—if somewhat experimental—requiring two separate vendors and a leap of faith. The banner was printed on vinyl mesh, hemmed and grommeted for hanging and sent on to a sign company. The symbols, already printed on the banner, were produced again as mirror-image vinyl cut-outs and laminated onto the corresponding images on the banner.

The result was the beautiful canopy-like banner I had envisioned: floating above the space, silhouetting the project's symbols against the sky, and on sunny days casting articulated shadows on the ground. The combination of solid vinyl and vinyl mesh allowed the banner to perform its subtle function, transforming the walkway into a user-friendly, visually interesting environment that has been enthusiastically received by the local community. At this writing, both banners have withstood rain, wind and snow, and continue to function beautifully.



For the "Vision of Optimism" installation in the Juvenile Courthouse lobby in Willimantic, Conn., student Claudette Weir created a 30 by 72-inch fabric banner entitled "You Are Not Alone." The project's purpose: to communicate the importance of hope, caring and courage to the young people passing through the Juvenile Justice System.

A technical note: These banners were created as vector files in Adobe Illustrator. Because vector art can be resized without losing sharpness, the files were sent to the printer at 25 percent of actual size as .ai files in CMYK color mode. Vincent Printing in Hixson, Tenn., did the printing, and the vinyl graphics were done by The Graphics Workshop in Middletown, Conn.

### Vision of Optimism

Vision of Optimism is a permanent indoor public art installation, designed to transform the lobby of the Juvenile Courthouse in Willimantic, Conn., into a less intimidating and more welcoming



Suzanne Connors' "Inspired," a 52 by 60-inch fabric banner hung outside the juvenile probation office.

space. For this project, I worked with Digital Art & Design students from Eastern Connecticut State University, who created large, colorful graphic images intended to communicate the importance of hope, caring and courage to the young people passing through the Juvenile Justice System.

The students had little difficulty developing exciting and relevant images, but the vast, empty courthouse lobby, sorely in need of artwork, presented us with several logistical challenges.

Since the long exterior wall of the lobby is made up entirely of windows, glass or other reflective framing material that produces glare, it makes artwork difficult to see and appreciate. Constant exposure to light also causes original artwork and most printed images to fade. And since the lobby/waiting room is bordered with benches, artwork had to be

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More "Vision of Optimism" works from the students at Eastern Connecticut State University: "Grow, Nurture, Triumph" from Alyssa Morello, a 40 by 60-inch fabric banner; and "Words of Wisdom," a 38 by 87-inch banner created by Kyle Osolin and Christopher Turiello.

installed at a greater-than-normal height. Finally, the size required to command this large space made the cost of printing the artwork on paper, along with mounting and framing it, prohibitive.

Choosing fabric as our printing medium provided solutions to all of these problems. To address the issues

of reflectivity and light exposure, the images were printed with a lightfast, dye sublimation process onto "poly soft-heavy," a wrinkle-resistant fabric with a matte, non-reflective finish. They were installed with simple pole-pocket hanging systems suspended from the lobby's ceiling grid, high on the wall, without

additional framing or mounting. Best of all, they were economically printed at large sizes. The softness of the fabric warms the space, and the banners' celebratory presence and bright colors transform the lobby into a cheerful and welcoming environment.

The specifics: These banners were created as both Photoshop® (pixel art), and Adobe Illustrator® (vector art) images. Photoshop images were delivered to the vendor as .jpg files, actual size, at 150 dpi. All type was rasterized. Illustrator files were delivered at actual size as .ai files with all type converted to outlines. Both .ai and .jpg files were delivered in CMYK color mode. The vendor was Enhance-A-Color (EAC), Danbury, Conn.

### Medium and message

As an artist working primarily in the public realm, I have been using digital media and commercial materials for more than a decade. Billboards, buses, movie theater screens and street signs have all been venues for my work. The two projects outlined here have heightened my awareness of fabric's potential to communicate creative ideas: its range and durability, almost infinite variety of indoor and outdoor uses, and most of all, its effectiveness in connecting with a public audience. Fabric now occupies an important place in my conceptual "tool box," ready and waiting for my next project to unfold. **IX**

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