MAX SEABAUGH

CARGOYLES

CURATED BY MICHAEL MEHL

MAX SEABAUGH
FOTOSEPTIEMBRE 2024 MONOGRAPH

CARGOYLES

Curated by Michael Mehl

Max Seabaugh was born near the end of World War II in St. Louis, MO, and grew up in Kansas City. Born with a club foot, he picked up pen and paper rather than a baseball and discovered what became a lifelong affinity to art. His talent was recognized at an early age. He attended the University of Kansas Music and Art Camp, earning a rare certificate. In junior high he was commissioned to draw a series of 14 illustrations depicting Native American tribes for the Indian Hills Junior High School, undoubtedly his first paid commercial assignment. Being dyslexic did not help his academic career, but he always drew, and having the odd perspective of dyslexia didn't hurt his abilities as an artist. He eventually attended Kansas State Teachers College, but his college career ended with a degree in cards and beer drinking. He moved to California in 1972 to accept a job at Communications Design in Sacramento, where he illustrated comps and mockups. One of his favorite techniques was making cut paper collages.

He moved to San Francisco in 1981 to work for a design studio in the Oakland hills. Later, he joined the design staff at Macy's California on Union Square, illustrating posters for the Macy's California chain. He would sketch out the poster design in pencil or make a miniature color comp out of cut ColorAid paper; the finished large posters were silkscreened in limited runs. In 1984 when Macys California was bought out by New York, the entire San Francisco executive and creative staff were given their walking papers during the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre". Suddenly free from his corporate job, Max began working as a freelance illustrator, serving design studios such as Pentagram and ad agencies such as Landor. In 1985 he officially began MAX Design Studio. At first, he worked in traditional graphics media, including drawing, painting, and his cut-paper technique. He illustrated a series of maps and brochures for Superbowl XXII in 1988 using this technique.

During this time the Macintosh computer was developed. Max was one of only a few artists in San Francisco who accepted when MacWorld Magazine offered him an early Mac SE and a chance to draw editorial illustrations. Apple and Adobe soon asked him to illustrate their publications and beta test their software. He developed a niche creating computer illustrations, infographics, and maps for high tech companies, corporations such as Chevron and Raychem, and for publications such as Mother Jones, Sierra, and Holiday. He continued to do some personal work using his paper collage illustration technique. He became known in the design and illustration community, winning awards and receiving print coverage in publications in the U.S. and Japan. He was invited to teach in the illustration department of the California College of Arts (and Crafts) –then in Oakland, now in San Francisco– which he did for ten years despite no teaching degree. He has also given presentations at various Design and Art Director's Clubs, Mac Users Groups, and at Stanford.

In 1998 he moved to Santa Rosa in northern California. Working digitally made it possible to live and work in a remote location and serve clients country-wide. The focus of his work gradually shifted from primarily tech and corporate clients to the travel industry. On 9/11 the travel industry tanked. Max learned to drive a school bus and drove mornings and afternoons for over ten years, returning to work at the studio during the middle of the day.

After Max retired to Santa Rosa, CA, he began shooting digital photos of old cars and trucks. Then, using the computer, he would mine these photographs as source materials for digital collage illustrations, developing a technique inspired by his cut paper collages. He used tools in Photoshop to colorize, cut, and paste selected elements, moving and morphing them to create bilaterally symmetrical images, which can be vertical (like a butterfly), or horizontal (like a landscape reflected in water).

When used in woodworking, this effect is called book-matching (see George Nakashima's book, The Soul of a Tree), and results in two slabs of wood that appear to be mirror images of one another. The same effect occurs in series of letters, words, or numbers which repeat the same pattern at the front of a series as at the end, called palindromes, but these move in one direction only. Repeating similar effects over and over again from multiple directions allow the limited elements of the original photographs to become endless riffs on the same theme; we refer to these as palindromic art. In some ways they are like one-dimensional origami, flat images folded in on themselves repeatedly.

Max also likes to imagine that they are photographs of massive metal sculptures which he welded out of dismantled cars (true only on paper, alas). The lines where the images are cut and flopped along one or more axes develop what we call artefacts, or little digital glitches, which when enlarged create fascinating and unexpected crystalline patterns. Playing with his original photographic material of vehicles, and these techniques, eventually led him to create a series of digital illustrations reminiscent of primitive masks and skulls, tikis and totems, space aliens, demons and devils, bugs, fish, and other animal forms.

—

Special thanks to Ray Seabaugh and Laura Lamar for their assistance.
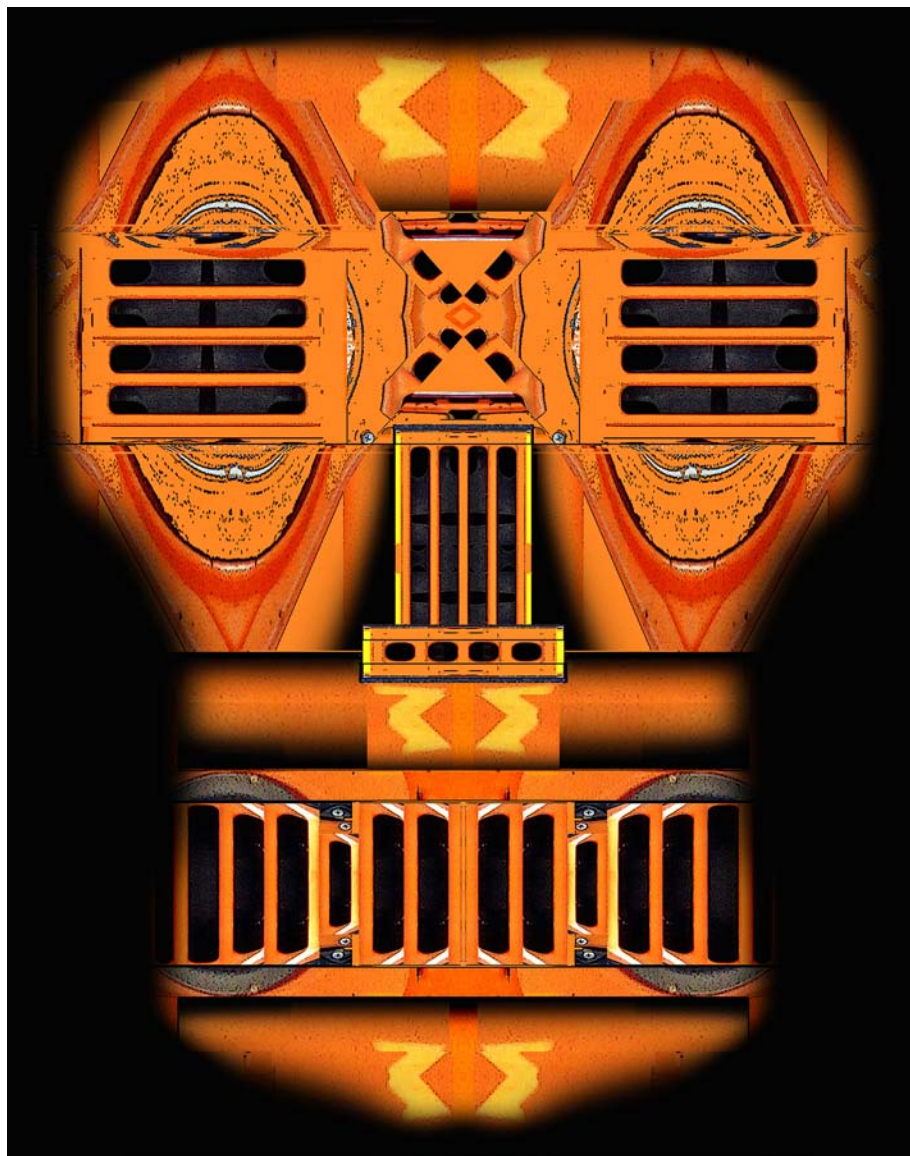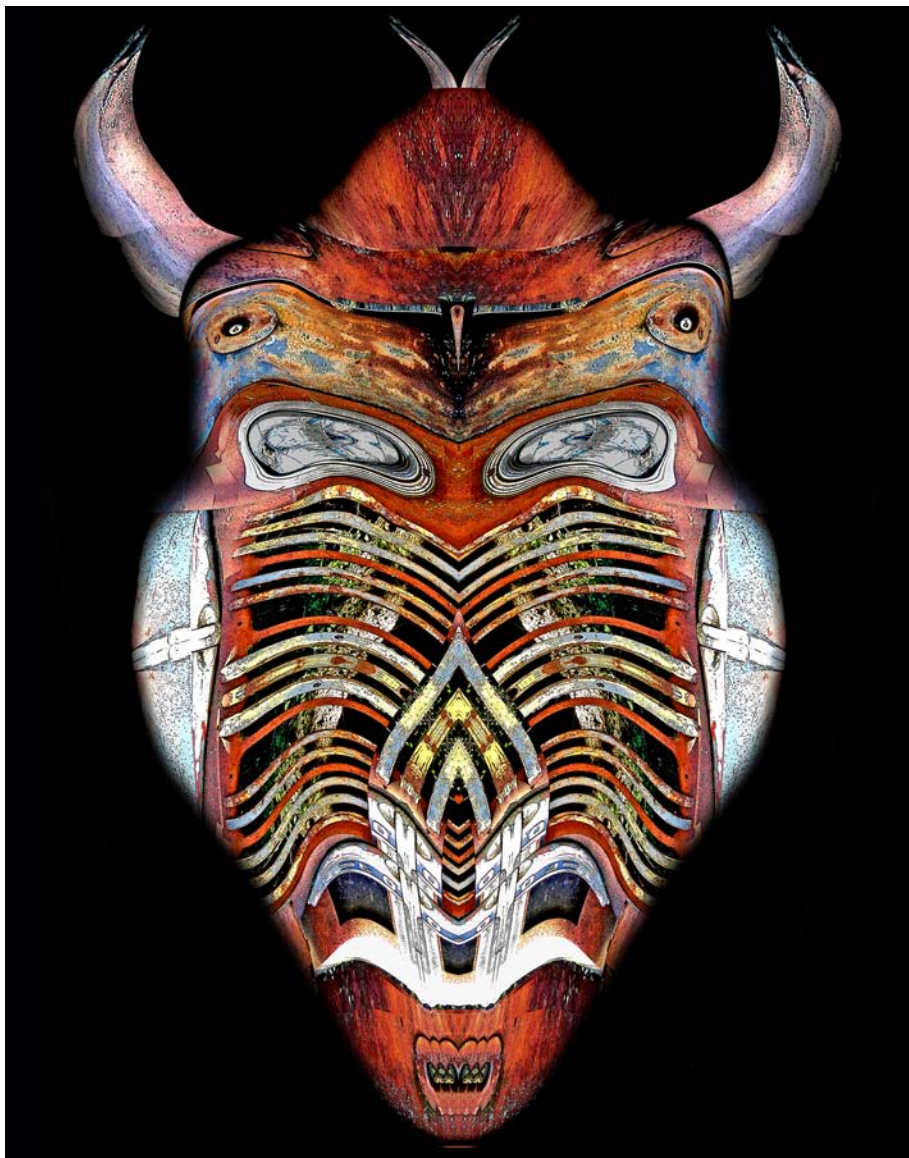
ALIEN DODGE

BIG CHIEF

BLUE DEMON

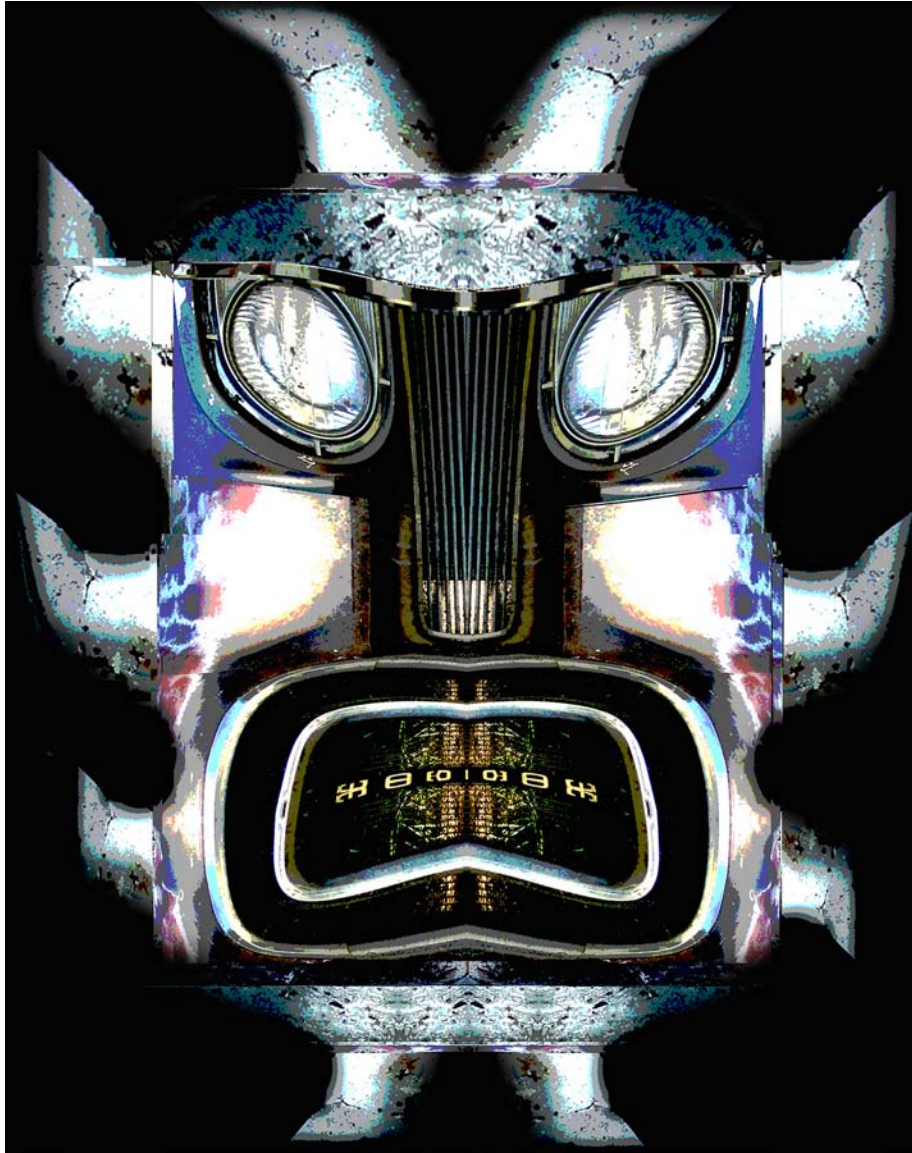BRONCO SKULL

BUFFALO

CHEVY SKULL

DEMON

DEMON FORD

DEVIL CAT

EDSEL TOTEM

GOLD SKULL

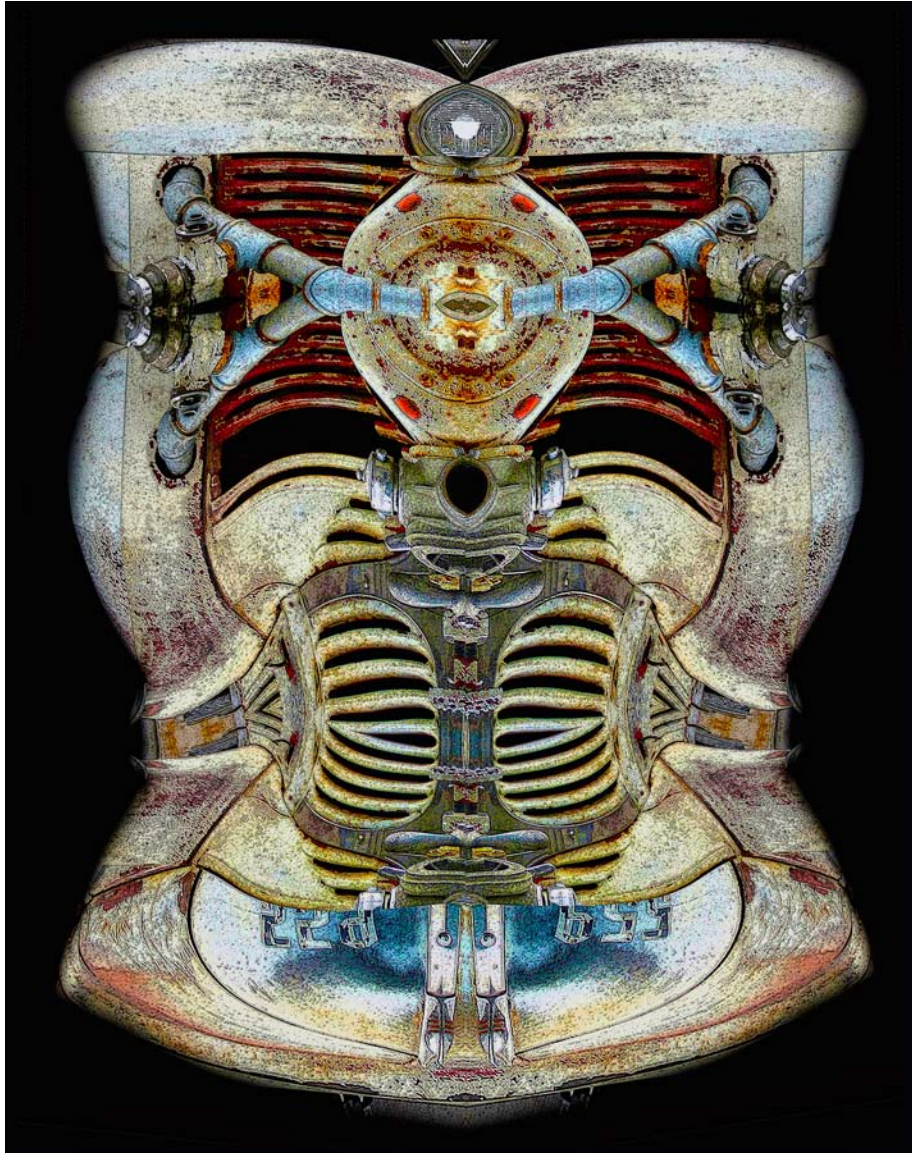GREEN BEAR

INDO DEMON

PINK TOTEM FORD

ORANGE SKULL

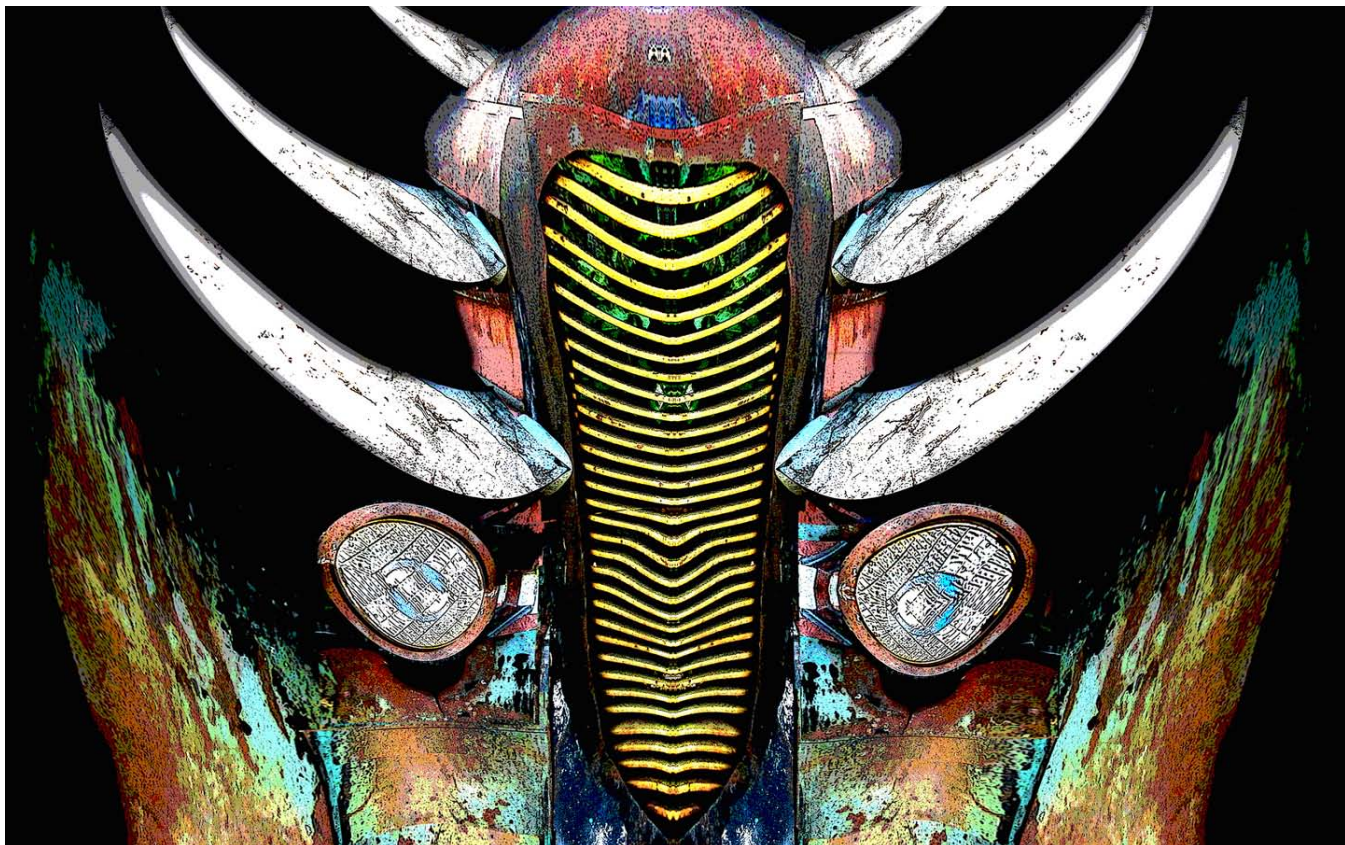PEKING MERC

PIRANHA

STEAM TROOPER

STUDAPALOOZA

V8 TIKI

30 YEARS

FOTOSEPTIEMBRE

2024 MONOGRAPH

MAX SEABAUGH

CARGOYLES

CURATED BY MICHAEL MEHL