



# Dreaming Reality

## Jon Keegan

Writer: Regina Goodman  
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His is the kind of art that, when staring at it, you're either conjuring up tales or feeling a sense of symbiosis. "I wonder what that girl's thinking. She's probably..." "I know exactly how that guy feels. He must work for..." There's a realism to his art that extends beyond its human cast of characters. Something about Jon Keegan's work draws you in, both literally and figuratively—I am not that girl on the subway platform, but I am *that* girl on the subway platform. And there's good reason. Keegan explains, "I take scads of pictures with my digital camera when walking around the city, which, in a few seconds, can yield years' worth of unimaginably weird and interesting people to draw from." Weird and interesting indeed.

Keegan, a New Yorker, has been illustrating for twelve years, and his work appears regularly in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *US News & World Report*. He is the red handkerchief, that splash of color, to their pinstripes and wingtips. His telltale moment of great things to come was courtesy of a postcard. "In 1998, I got a call from Sam Reep, the kindly art director, at the time, of *The New York Times* 'Sunday Styles' page. After receiving a postcard of mine depicting two squabbling hot dog vendors, he gave me a half-page cover of the section. It had been a dream of mine to get published in the *Times*, so I was flying. The thrill of going to the deli to pick up the paper with your drawing in it is still there for me." Imagine if Keegan were the deli owner; forever ensconced in a frame on the wall wouldn't be a creased Washington but two hot dog vendors.

Looking at Keegan's art, I appreciate it for its simplicity. These are technological times. Paint is now pixel, and canvas is now liquid crystal. But Keegan finds a way to marry tradition with technology. "I spent a lot of effort making my computer painting follow the same process I used when doing a 'real' painting in gouache or acrylics. I start with an underpainting, then build up the color on top of that and include lots of real painted texture. After much experimenting and





some certifiable stinkers, I was able to bend the computer to my will and achieve the look I wanted, and faster than with paint.”

For some artists, the computer ushered in a way to bring to life the creatures and realms that existed only in their sleep. Though that may produce compelling and complex pieces, you find yourself spending more time interpreting the images than you do appreciating the work. Am I looking at a person or something representative of a person? Is he/she/it in a state of sadness? Sometimes, the simplest pieces, the ones where you immediately get it, are the ones that stay with you.

But what of Keegan himself? Weird and interesting art aside, does he want to stay with you? “My impression of the world is what defines me. I love to travel and see as much of the world as possible. That’s one of the most important things I have done thus far to keep my world exciting and inspiring. I think living among so many different people in such close proximity leads to a kind of human understanding that is hard to achieve otherwise. I am humbled that people find delight in my work. I just feel very lucky to have had the unfaltering support from my parents to pursue this career, which has been a dream for me.” □



*Jon Keegan is a contributor and founder of the collaborative art blog [invisibleman.com](http://invisibleman.com). To see more of Keegan’s art, visit his site at [www.jonkeegan.com](http://www.jonkeegan.com).*