

Powder

THE SKIER'S MAGAZINE

3 GALLERIES OF TIMELESS IMAGES

PHOTO ANNUAL

THE PEOPLE, PLACES, AND PHOTOS OF THE YEAR

ANDREW MCGARRY. JACKSON HOLE
BACKCOUNTRY, WYOMING

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INGREDIENTS: WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A PRO PHOTOGRAPHER

THE **PHOTO** *Annual*

FEATURES

62 PEOPLE AND PLACES

Portraits of some of the sport's best, in and out of their element.

92 LENS FLARE

Stories behind a few of the year's most intriguing photos.

72 2006 GALLERY

98 MIND STATE

Somewhere between what photography shows and words describe is an alternative reality called art. Meet freethinking Canadian Scott Dickson—painter, illustrator, skier. By Mitchell Scott

**52 MORPHEME/
WEATHER**

**108 BACKCOUNTRY/
WHEELER PEAK, NV**

**110 THIRTY SOMETHING/
BRIDGER BOWL, MT**

26 FALL LINE

15 INTRO

**112 STASH/
SNOWBASIN, UT**

DEPARTMENTS

**114 BAR CODE/
PRO PHOTO GEAR**

128 POST HOLE

**134 VOICE/
HENRIK WINDSTEDT**

**138 THE WAY
HIGH PATROL**

**ON THE COVER/
ANDREW MCGARRY SELF-PORTRAIT,
JACKSON HOLE BACKCOUNTRY,
WYOMING**

THOMAS KLEIVEN

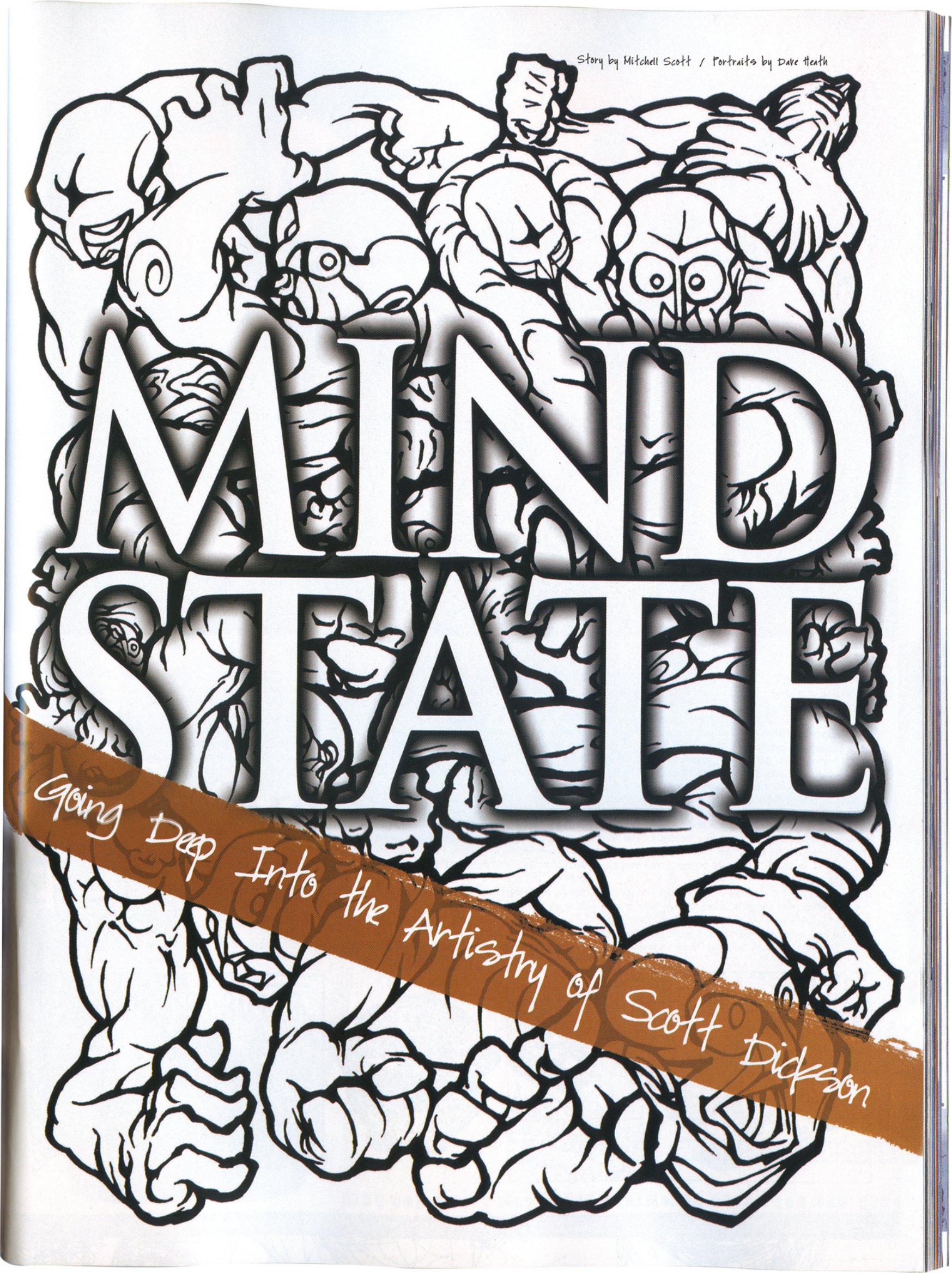
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Story by Mitchell Scott / Portraits by Dave Heath

MIND STATE

Going Deep Into the Artistry of Scott Dickson





THE FIGURE DESCENDING TOWARD ME DOESN'T look like an artist. Anything but, actually. No easel, no beret, no contemporary disposition. Deep in the Valhalla Range, just north of the funky village of Nelson, British Columbia, Scott Dickson sidesteps down a steep choke with blue ice on one side and overhanging granite on the other. He wears a motocross jacket and chuckles as he arrives through the crux, ready to charge the chute's lower flanks.

"Pretty tight, eh?" he says, exposing a crooked smile. Dickson is one of B.C.'s most celebrated "A"-type artists (A for adventure, adrenaline, askew). I can't imagine how the view before us manifests in a brain able to produce incredibly detailed, colorful art. But before I have the chance to inquire, he blasts the shot full throttle, arcing long, smooth telemark turns to the bottom. Like I said, not your typical artist.

Granted, the "typical artist" may not exist. But neither does an adjective to describe Dickson as any type of anything in the art world. He's that different. Firstly, the majority of his work contains subject matter based on skiing and mountain biking. Secondly, he avoids using photography or

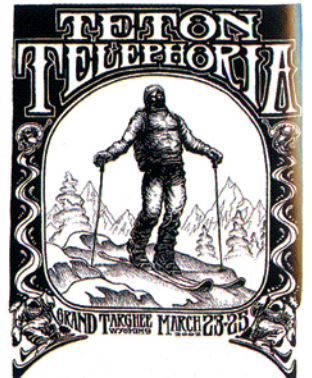
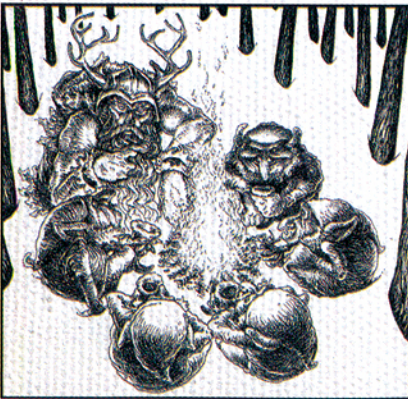
any physical reference when creating his work, preferring to experience something and then draw or paint it from memory. Dickson's art takes moments his followers are all familiar with—staring across a snowy ridgeline, ripping a singletrack that never ends, busting snorkel-deep powder—and joins it with a sensibility that elevates reality in a fantastical way. As a result, his pictures are becoming increasingly recognizable in the outdoor industry for both their style and their detail, as well as their ability to capture the intangible rush of adventure.

Originally from Mississauga, Ontario, a cross-country skier and motocross rider since he was a kid, Dickson's path hasn't been completely atypical. Only in the last few years has he not lived hand-to-mouth, working as a ski tech, cranking out time-consuming, low-paying art jobs drawing posters and logos for local businesses and bands, doing whatever necessary to balance being a ski bum and a bike bum and an art bum all at once.

"I've been a real dirtbag," he admits unabashedly. "For a while there my favorite meal was a peanut-butter-and-jam sandwich with a few Doritos on top." But a lifetime of

drawing, painting, and sketching is finally paying off. Today Dickson is a full-time artist, with regular gigs as the art director of Freeride Entertainment, a mountain bike film company based in his hometown of Nelson. He's also a regular artist with Troy Lee Designs where he's had the honor of producing the Glen Helen poster the last three years—one of the biggest stops in the AMA motocross series. On top of that, Dickson is privately commissioned to create about 10 significant works each year.

A professional action sports artist is a description few can rightfully claim. But as magazines, ski manufacturers, and the outdoor industry in general continues to grow, so does the need for unique ways of expressing moments and identities that step beyond the limits of words and photography. In a nutshell, art. Ski media especially, it could be argued, is very much stuck in a photographic paradigm. As readers, we pick up ski magazines and tear through the images before reading a word. We want to know just how deep it was. How big the mountains were. The size of the air. It's almost as if we're dependent on the photo, like we need someone to pro-





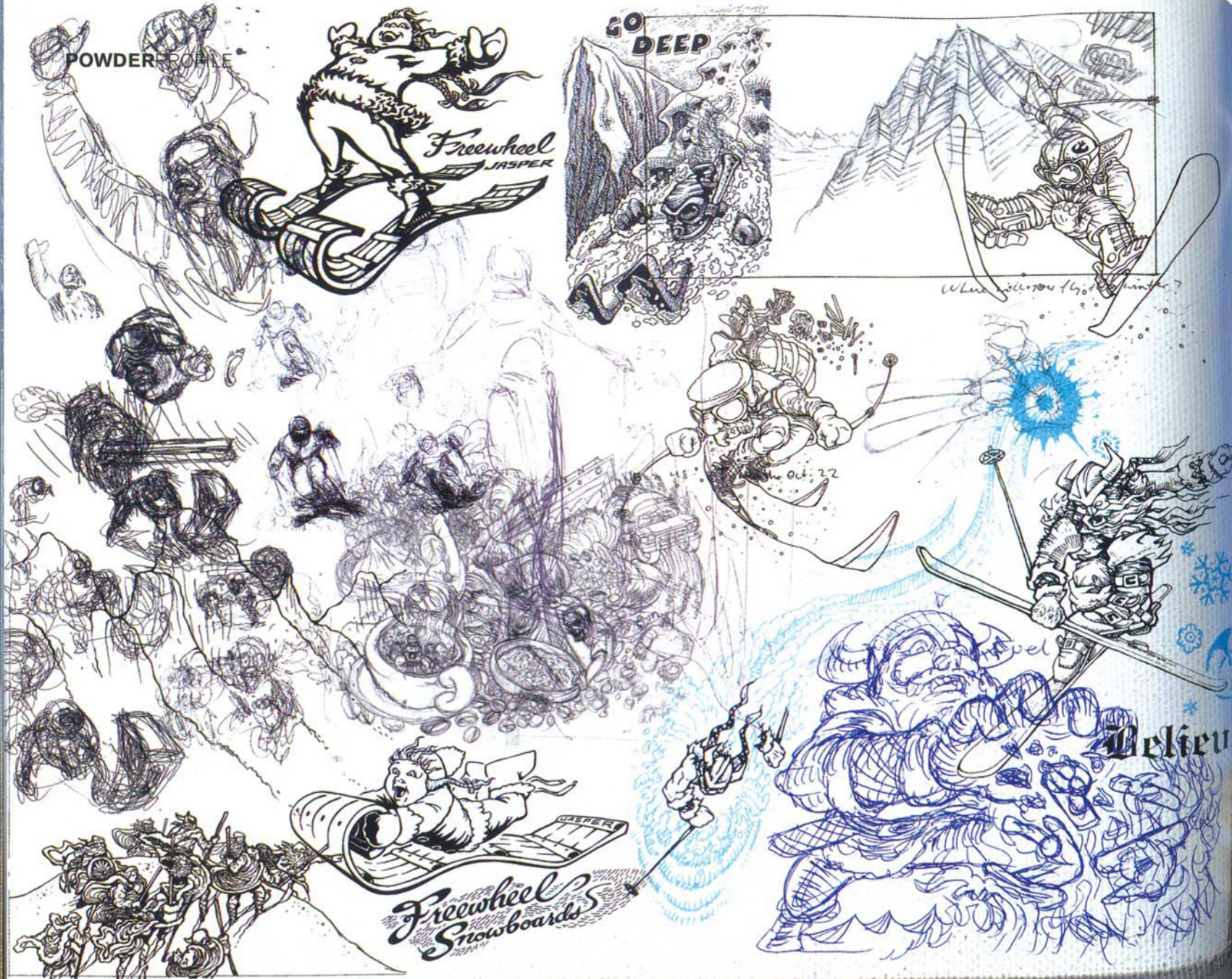
Dickson's art takes moments his followers are all familiar with—staring across a snowy ridge, ripping a single-track that never ends, blasting snowed-deep powder.

vide factual evidence of an experience before we can believe it. "Oh, it actually was over the head." And it's a hard paradigm to escape. You can't simply tell someone how incredible the skiing was...you can't draw them the day. It's easier to press a button and trap the moment on film.

Like most of us, Dickson knows this. But when it comes to his work he records memories a different way. "Art is not in competition with photography or writing, it's just another way of trying to put an observer into the moment you're describing," he explains. "But because you can draw anything, you can exaggerate certain elements to make you feel that the pow or the cliff were as big and as fat as they really were. It's like reading poetry rather than a novel. With art you have a chance to closely hit on the emotion and the feeling of something."

The son of a motocross racer dad, hippie mom, and a "sweet and straight" stepmother, today Dickson shares a similar trichotomy to his parents. His work takes outdoor experiences and injects them with the pace and detail of urban lifestyle. On top of that, he's capable of incredible renderings of human action. Think *MAD Magazine* meets the mountains: a reflection of an urban childhood morphed into a decade of living in a small town of artists and ski bums, dreaded hippies, and mullet-rocking rednecks.

At the root of his talents, however, is this lifetime addiction to doodling—untold hours emulating strips from *Heavy Metal*, *Easy Rider*, and the *Fabulous Freak Brothers*. By the time of his first formal art training at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, Dickson already had a firm grasp of technique. After finishing school in 1992 he moved west, sinking his time and imagination into the deep snows of the Coast Range. He worked at a backcountry shop, drawing whenever he could. With influences ranging from Rick Griffin and Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris to Troy Lee and ski painter Brett Lynch, Dickson's art has achieved a style and a

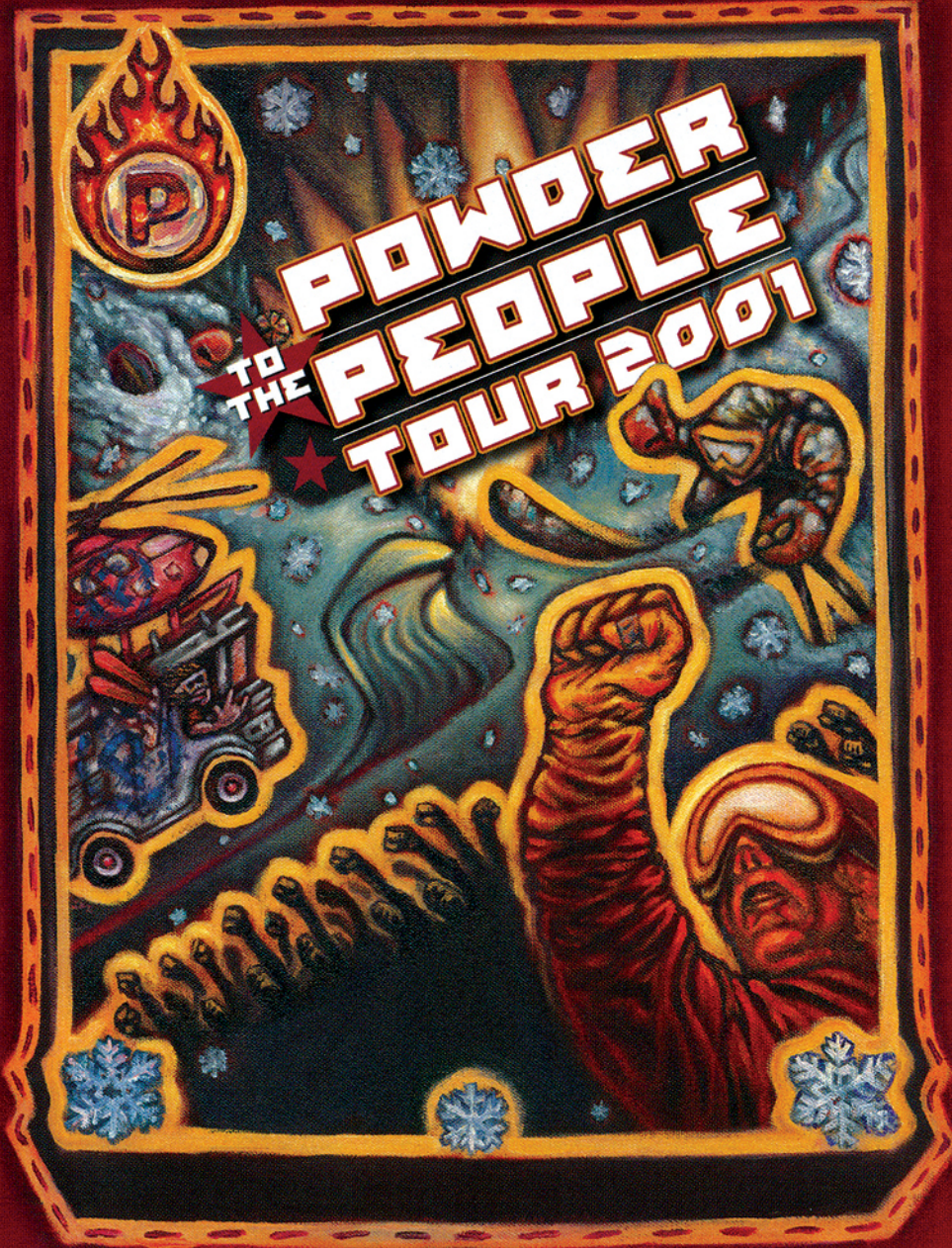


...because you can draw anything, you can exaggerate certain elements to make you feel that the pow or the cliff were as big and as fat as they really were. It's like reading poetry rather than a novel. With art you have a chance to closely hit on the emotion and the feeling of something.

life of its own. Marmot Basin ski resort in Jasper, Alberta commissioned him to paint its flagship ad, turning the piece into a giant billboard erected throughout the province. Readers have seen his work in Powder to the People Tour posters and in magazines like *Off-Piste*, *Freeze* and *Bike*.
 Now, the bulk of Dickson's commercial work is in the mountain bike industry. He creates all the cover and logo artwork for Freeride Entertainments New World Disorder series of films, a company with affiliations to Matchstick

Productions. But when he first moved to Nelson in 1996, at least half his work included skiing as its subject.
 "I've always loved all kinds of skiing since I was a little kid" he says. "As a subject, skiing has everything to do with flow, and as an artist, that's a real goal of mine, to convey that feeling of flow in my pictures." Involved with the cult publication *Ski Freak Radical* back in the mid 90's, it wasn't long before Dickson's flowing representations of deep Kootenay powder became synonymous with the region he recre-





ates in. "The landscape here can be so mellow but so drastic at the same time; I like that balance and the influence of having it around me," he says.

But it's not just the wavy, dreamlike landscapes of the Kootenays that Dickson's work captures so well. Few of his paintings and drawings fail to include a human interacting with nature. "As humans we're fascinated by humans," he says. "Simply because we know how complex and intricate we are...we can relate, we like looking in the mirror." And it's not just human beings standing idly, it's a bearded cat plunging through powder, a tricked-out rider airing a ravine. "Intrinsic root motions in physics and physiology are deeper than the medium—they're transferable," Dickson says. "I'm into still art forms that look like they're moving, the crux moments of riding, those instants that make the eye jump."

Back in the Valhallas, the practicality and good-humored nature that've come to define Dickson reveal themselves. As well as his humble perspective on life and success—accentuated by the arrival of his newborn son, Wayland. "Making it for me means keeping my shit afloat," he says, as the sun goes down over a distant ridge. "I'm really just trying to learn how to paint!" 🌸

