

Javier Jaén

Javier Jaén's mother tongues are Spanish and Catalan, but his work transcends language. His illustrations and editorial graphics are as clear and clever to speakers of English—or Hungarian or Cantonese—as they are to those who share a language with Jaén. The designer is a champion of double meanings, multilayered metaphors, and upended clichés. "I have always felt very close to the word, and I'm interested in language and identity as cultural and communicative phenomena," he says.

Seven years ago, Jaén left his small town outside the Catalan capital to study fine arts at the University of Barcelona (with sidelines



AGE: 29

Illustrator and graphic designer

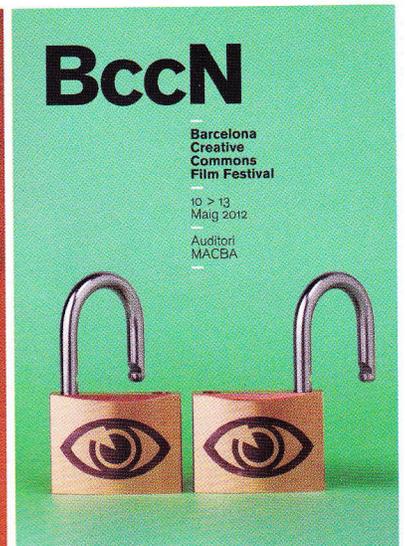
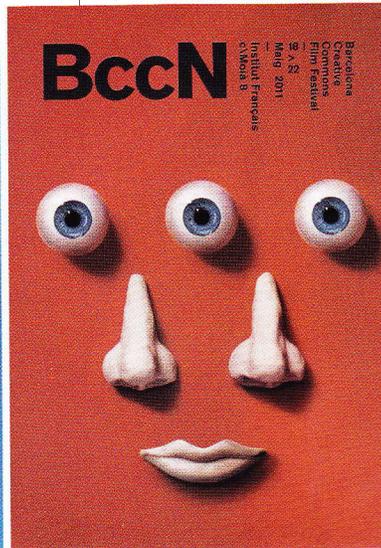
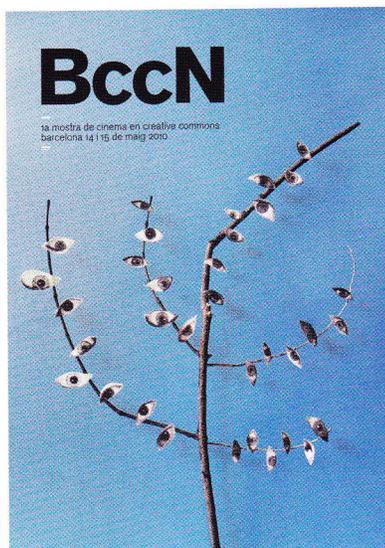
FROM:

Barberà del Vallès, Spain

LIVES IN: Barcelona



Clockwise from top left: A 2012 illustration for *The New York Times Book Review*; an icon for the No Soul for Sale arts festival; and posters for the 2010–2012 editions of the Barcelona Creative Commons Film Festival

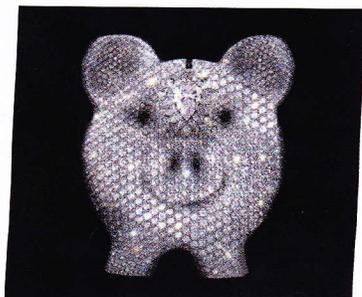
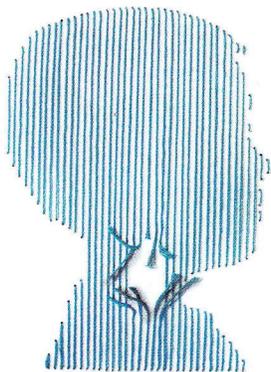


in cake baking, journalism, and radio). Further study at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest, Hungary, and the Cooper Union in New York City, reinforced his dedication to a career in design.

In his smart and sly editorial illustrations for a number of international publications, Jaén often tackles serious subjects with novel constructions. Matt Dorfman, who has art directed Jaén at *The New York Times*, says that he himself “raged with the kind of envy that illustrators sometimes have when they come across a whole well of ideas that they wish they had thought of on their own. Javier creates these stark, wordless little masterpieces that always find a way to comment on the text

they’re accompanying rather than simply regurgitate the talking points.”

Jaén is currently teaching illustration at a Barcelona university and is enthusiastic about the responsibility. “School should be a place to take risks, where you can take things to a point of tension,” he says. “I like to think of classes as a laboratory experiment.” When asked to elaborate on his plans for the coming year, Jaén, much like in his work, produces an illuminating answer that twists and transcends the topic at hand: “I’m about to turn 30 years old,” he says, “and still I have not written a child, planted a book, or given birth to a tree. Everything is waiting to be done.” —Jane Lerner



Left: Illustrations for (from top) *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Bloomberg View*, and *The New York Times*. Right: Covers for *Dinero* magazine.

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