

A CONVERSATION WITH THE MAN BEHIND HEADS TOGETHER,
A NEW BOOK THAT COLLECTS WEEDY EPHEMERA FROM
THE COUNTERCULTURAL PRESS OF THE 1960S AND '70S.

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cover by malcolm smith



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LEAVES

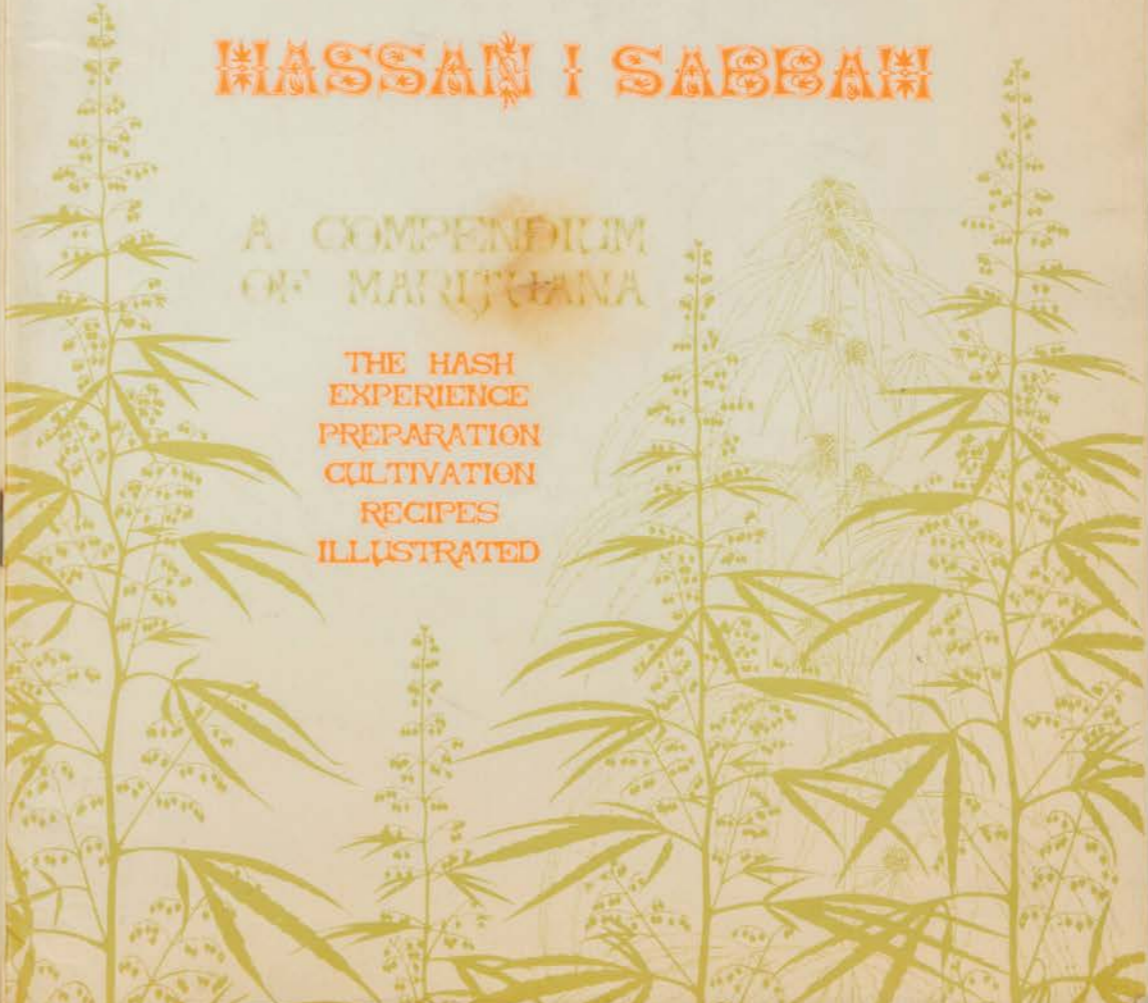
OF

GRASSES

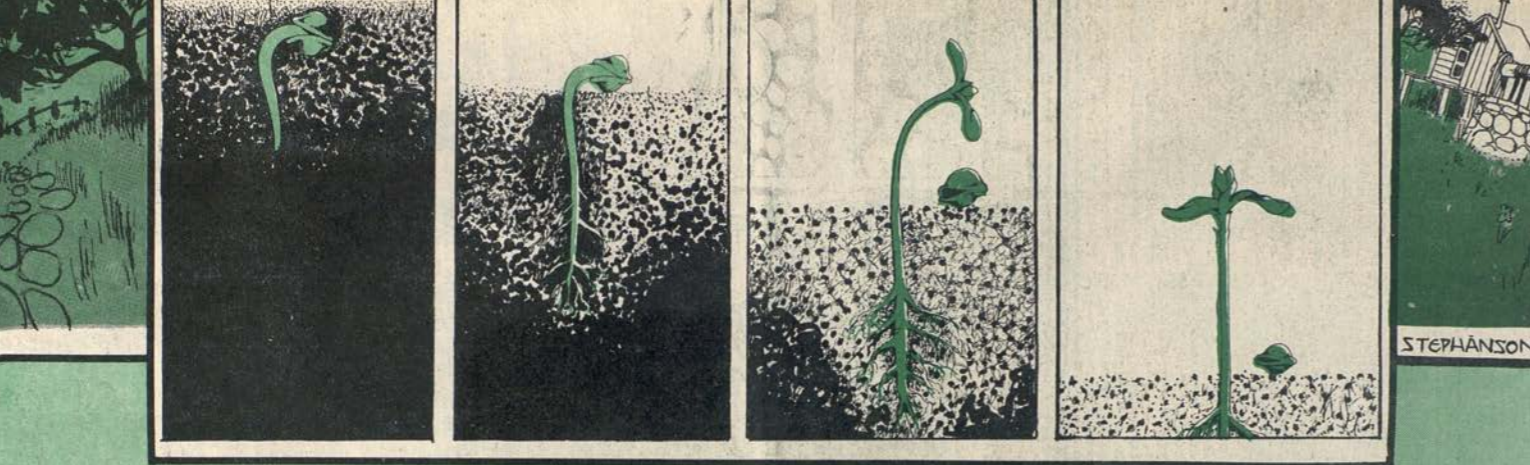
HASSAN I SABBAN

A COMPENDIUM
OF MARIJUANA

THE HASH
EXPERIENCE
PREPARATION
CULTIVATION
RECIPES
ILLUSTRATED

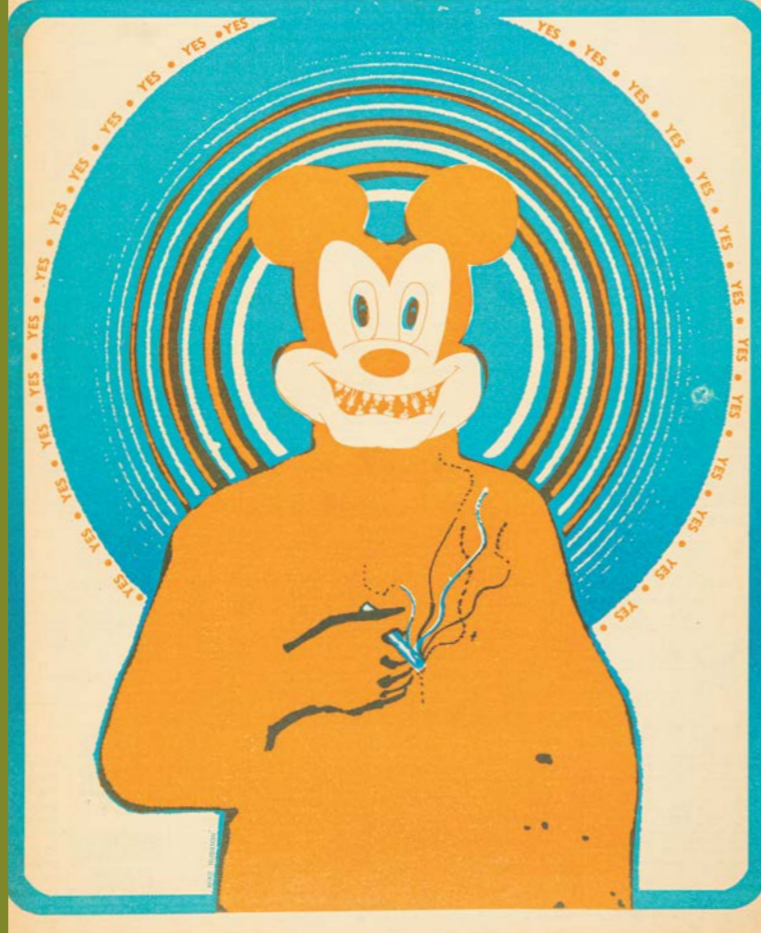
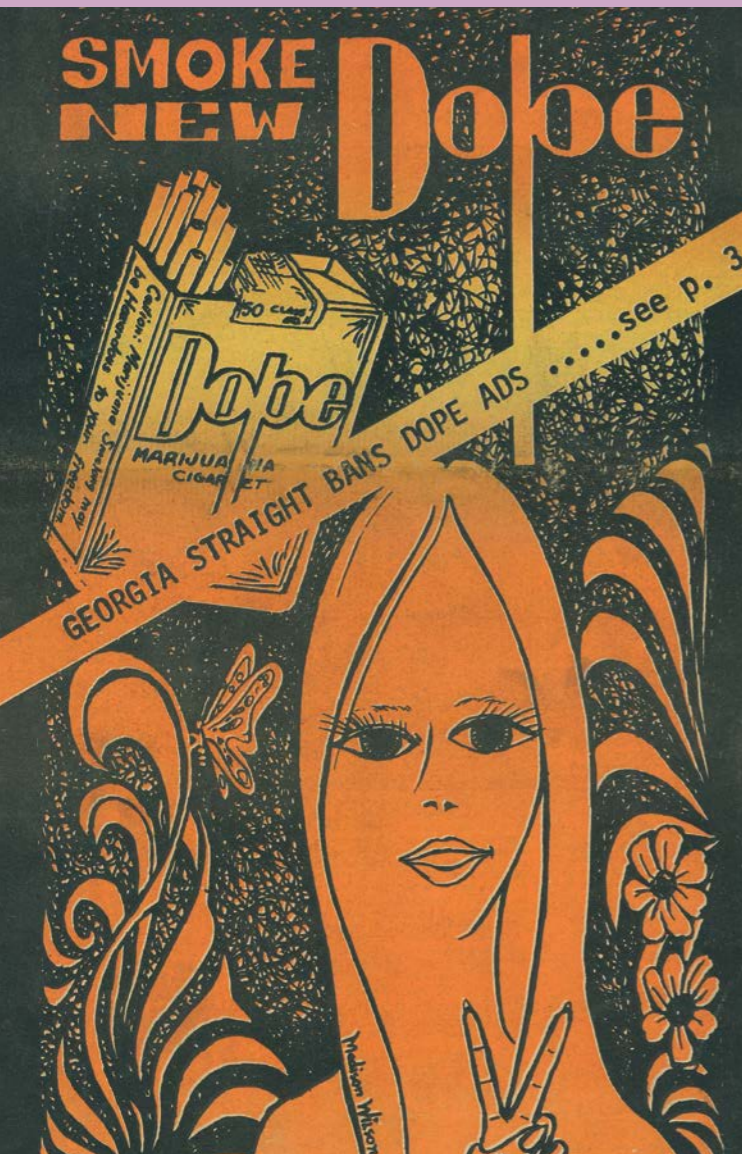


WORDS BY DANA COVIT. IMAGES COURTESY
OF HEADS TOGETHER: WEED AND THE
UNDERGROUND PRESS SYNDICATE, 1965-1973.



PLANT THE SEED

1. SELECTING SEEDS: Seeds are the content. A high clay content in your soil must be avoided, too much clay in the earth with the pointed end up because as the primary tap root emerges from the pointed end, its natural ten-
 2. PRE-PLANTING STEPS: Soak the seeds overnight in a bath of distilled water. If you have a fair amount of sunlight or its
 3. ENVIRONMENT: They should be provided a constant input of fresh air. This will clean the air of the plants of
 4. TRANSPLANTING: When moving from the germinating bed in both beds should be as possible. Beginning plants need 8 hours of sunlight or its



Some things are fated. Like the son of a hippie stoner and the proprietor of an underground bookstore going on to write a sprawling, psychedelic tome dedicated to the commingling of weed and countercultural media in the 1960s and '70s. That is the story of David Jacob Kramer, author of *Heads Together: Weed and the Underground Press Syndicate, 1965–1973*. David's interest is understandable: A student of printed matter—he ran the cult favorite LA bookshop, Family Books, from 2007 to 2021—David was already familiar with the somewhat mythic Underground Press Syndicate, or UPS. The UPS—a nonproprietary global collective of eccentric newspapers and magazines that grew to some 500 publications in just a handful of years—was one of the most effective ways the counterculture communed before the advent of the internet. Within their manifold pages, fledgling writers, journalists, artists, and photographers shared stories that mainstream media wouldn't waste ink or airtime on. Throughout, there is a wide-ranging infiltration of weed content, from observations recorded by the only psychiatrist doing government-sanctioned marijuana studies to detailed Grower's Guides, "Narcbuster" bulletins, and scratchy spot illustrations of Disney characters getting high. This was a different time, when people believed the revolution just might come from getting high. *Broccoli* sat down with David to understand this little-told radical history of weed he excavated from the archives of fringe media.

Tell us about your path to discovering this subject.

It was mostly a way of processing the way I grew up, of processing my parents, who were hippies, and in particular, my dad. My dad was a pothead, and that's a pretty weird thing for a kid because, in other ways, we were pretty normal. But the awareness of, like, "my dad does drugs" was weird—especially when you start smoking weed yourself when you're

15. Then, as I got older, I started thinking about the way I was brought up, and I got more and more interested in hippie culture. And as I explored that world, I found that it was not at all the flower and peace sign clichés of hippie culture, but much weirder, far more radical, and way more deranged. And that derangement really appealed to me.

When did you first find yourself descending into this rabbit hole?

During the pandemic, I was smoking and growing weed, more than I normally do, and really absorbing and becoming obsessed with these ideas. I was reading all the books, going through all these newspapers. It was an extremely immersive, visceral experience for me making the book, and it kind of just grew and grew once I got my hands on the grower's guides.

You dedicate a lot of space to those.

They are this fascinating mix of technical information, psychedelic illustrations, and very literary contributions from poets like Ed Sanders and Tuli Kupferberg. They were sold through the *Whole Earth Catalog* or in headshops. They weren't technically illegal because of free speech, but you could get busted for making them. I interviewed one guy who produced probably the most popular grower's guide—he sold like 2 million copies and lived off of them for, like, ten years. But he had the FBI tailing him, and they threatened his printers—told them they would be shut down if they printed the guides. Ultimately, he ended up going to an extreme right-wing printer of some right-wing newspaper that had its own press. He told them what was going on, and this guy was like, "I hate hippies, I hate drugs, but this is un-American; I believe in free speech." So the right-wing guy told him he'd print it and ended up chasing off the FBI. He told them they better leave, or else he'd cause mayhem.

"THE MUTANTS TAKE OVER..."

GOOD TIMES INTERVIEWS ALVIN DUSKIN page 12-13

WEED PUBLICATIONS WERE THE BEGINNING OF THE LEGALIZATION MOVEMENT.

That is begging to be a movie.

There's these insane stories, you know? All the authors used aliases to avoid what that one guy went through. And I just realized that no book had collected, analyzed, or interviewed the creators of these books comprehensively or told the story of the Underground Press Syndicate through the lens of cannabis.

The imagery and iconography of weed seem to have been everywhere in these publications.

Well, the director of the Underground Press Syndicate was this guy Tom Forcade, who eventually went on to found *High Times* after the UPS collapsed. He funded a lot of his activity with the UPS through smuggling weed—he could fly airplanes, and he used to smuggle weed in from Colombia. And then there were all of these political activist groups, like the Yippies (Youth International Party), whose symbol was a weed leaf on top of a red star, and the White Panthers, whose symbol was a white panther in front of a weed leaf.

Weed publications were the beginning of the legalization movement. Before the Underground Press Syndicate starts, you have the newsletter about legalizing weed that Allen Ginsberg, Ed Sanders, and William Burroughs mimeographed in the back of a bookstore on the Lower East Side. And through the UPS, the movement gets a bigger platform. Then, the way that the government tried to quash the Underground Press Syndicate completely fueled the entire hippie movement, globally.

How did the government approach these publications?

While they couldn't arrest these people for publishing anti-government material, they could bust their offices, arrest people for weed possession, and give them draconian sentences. Timothy Leary gets 20 years; John Sinclair, the editor of *Fifth Estate*, gets ten years; Lee Otis Johnson, a Black Panther, gets 30 years. It was a means to control groups that were perceived as threats. This tactic was practiced as far back as 1913 with Mexican immigrants and then with Black people in the 1930s.



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The way many people engage with weed now is so removed from this history.

It does erase the bodies incurred on the path to weed's legal status. But there is that history of it being the contraband that fuels revolutionary ideas. And meanwhile, all along, the government was propagandizing smoking weed as this force of evil, of radicalization. The UPS was an antidote to what the mainstream press was offering, which typically regurgitated government positions. People were hungry for dissenting voices, and the principles of the Underground Press Syndicate—that it was nonproprietary, meaning anyone could take any article or image and reprint it in their paper—helped it grow.

Ultimately, what made the UPS so cool was that nonproprietary principle, and this unspoken, but still implicit, mission. Was there a stated mission?

No, it was very non-monolithic in that way. And that's why so many of these small presses collapsed and why there was so much infighting. And it's also what made them so different and diverse. But there was a sense of community across them all. When the reporters from *La Raza* were jailed, the *LA Free Press* published their issues for them.

What was the process like tracking down or getting your hands on these issues?

I became obsessive. I spoke to people I knew might be into this type of stuff—lots of amateur archivist-types, people drawn to collect

and hold onto things. I went to Berlin and sat in a basement under fluorescent lights looking for pictures of, you know, tomatoes smoking weed, wondering what I'm doing with my life.

There's an entire chapter on rolling papers. Tell me about those.

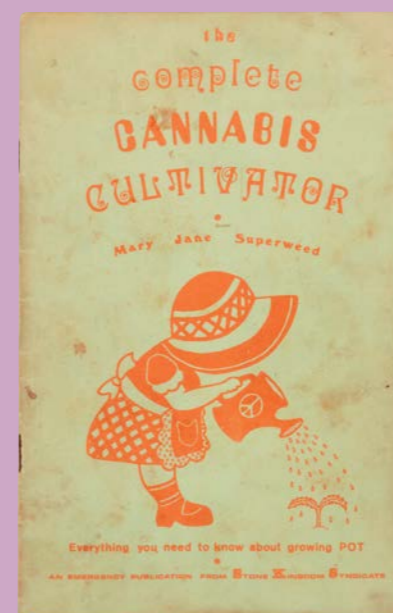
A lot of rolling papers had politically charged rhetoric. One is a draft letter that you could roll up and smoke. Another one is like an American dollar bill. It just kind of evidenced this perception that smoking weed in itself was a political gesture, that the sensation of being high was revolutionary. During this time, when they were pushing legalization, the slogan was "Free backyard weed for everyone." They thought that the more people smoked weed, the healthier our society would be.

Cut to today, and more people are smoking weed than ever before.

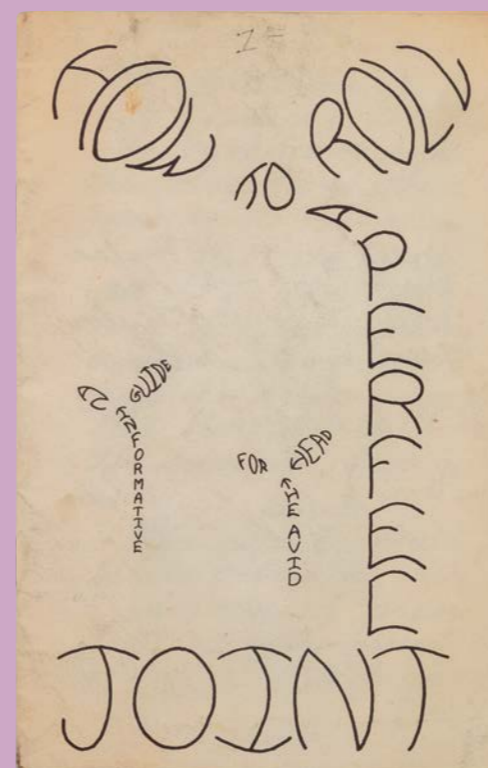
Yeah, I guess we're gonna find out. You know, you can smoke weed and play video games, or you can smoke weed and organize a revolution. It can be whatever. But it's so interesting to see how during this time, on both sides, weed was seen as either this thing that was going to cause the downfall of society, or would bring revolution and a utopian society.

Did weed radicalize you in any way?

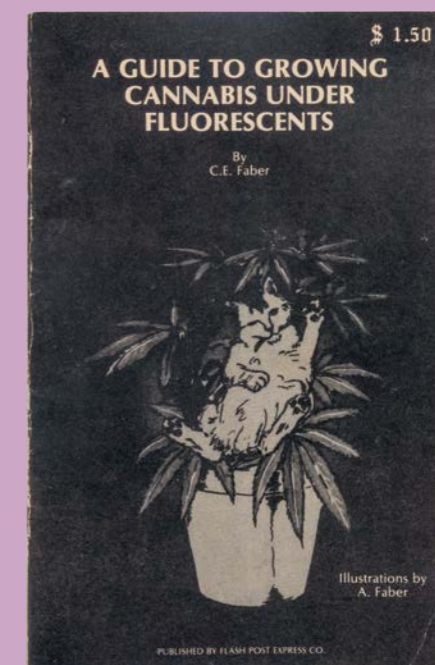
Well, for one, it was clear to me that my dad, who is a very responsible father—who made sure I did my homework, who coached my basketball team—was more fun to be around when he was high. And sitting through talks about the dangers of drugs does make you question, and it does create a kind of distrust. I think that is partly why weed was such a symbol for the counterculture: It was clear to some people that this was something that really didn't need to be illegal, but it was kept that way to control people, and often

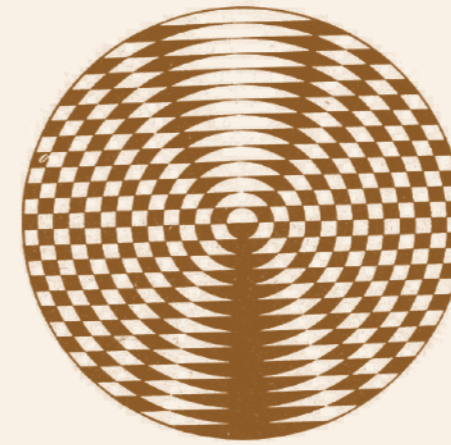


Where did all these materials come from? David connected with Roger Steffens of The Family Acid (as seen in *Broccoli* Issue 03), the owner of Groove Merchant Records in San Francisco, and the Archive of Independent Publishing at the University of the Arts in Bremen, Germany.



For even more snippets from underground publications of the past, tune in, turn on, and follow @patientcreatures on Instagram.





to control people to racist and nefarious ends—to prevent interracial dialogue and mingling, to control communities, and stop people from questioning the capitalist mindset or from questioning war.

One of your interview subjects, Marjorie Heins, reflected that members of the UPS really could have created a revolution, but everybody was too wasted. Do you think that the whole weed thing ended up getting in the way?

There was this kind of fundamental schism between the Politicos vs. the Freaks, the two groups who really created a lot of the material for the UPS. The Politicos wore button-down shirts and sweaters, and they were erudite in Marxist theory and saw themselves as socialists fighting for worker's rights. Then, the Freaks were into psychedelics and rock 'n' roll. Initially, these Underground Press papers worked really well because the psychedelia made the dry political issues more sexy and accessible. And the substantial political theory gave credibility to this wild psychedelic imagery and sensibilities. But then, as the Vietnam War intensified, and students were getting shot by the army in Ohio and in Berkeley, the Politicos started saying the Freaks were threatening the struggle by claiming that revolution would come through weed. And then the Freaks would answer by saying, like, "No, we need to be even more radical; we need to drop acid from helicopters." So, this schism just got more and more pronounced.

Both sides were so passionate.

What appeals to me is the earnestness. And the willingness to live it, to put your life on the line for your ideas. This was beyond rhetoric. These people were trying to live their ideals. They really thought weed was going to help people become antiracist, that it would help achieve gender equality, and save the planet. And even though they may have been somewhat delusional or wacky, I think their heart was in the right place.

What did you learn from doing this work?

What inspires me the most is that these were all amateur artists, amateur journalists, amateur photographers, amateur designers—sometimes, an individual was all of those things at once. But because they believed in the value of what they were doing, that's what inspired them. It was not a commercial endeavor. And I'm inspired by the kind of conviction, the wildness in that conviction, to make something new and extremely energized and not cynical. Nowadays, things are so scrutinized that it can subdue certain creative energies. But they were really just going for it. And sometimes, the results were embarrassing.

There's a lot about the Underground Press Syndicate that was bad—for one, there was lots of sexism. But it did empower people in small towns in the middle of nowhere to create their own newspaper and print it, and join this global collective where they could tell stories of whatever was happening in their world and maybe see it picked up by another UPS publication in, I don't know, Sweden. It made people feel like they could contribute to culture and that their ideas had value. ✨