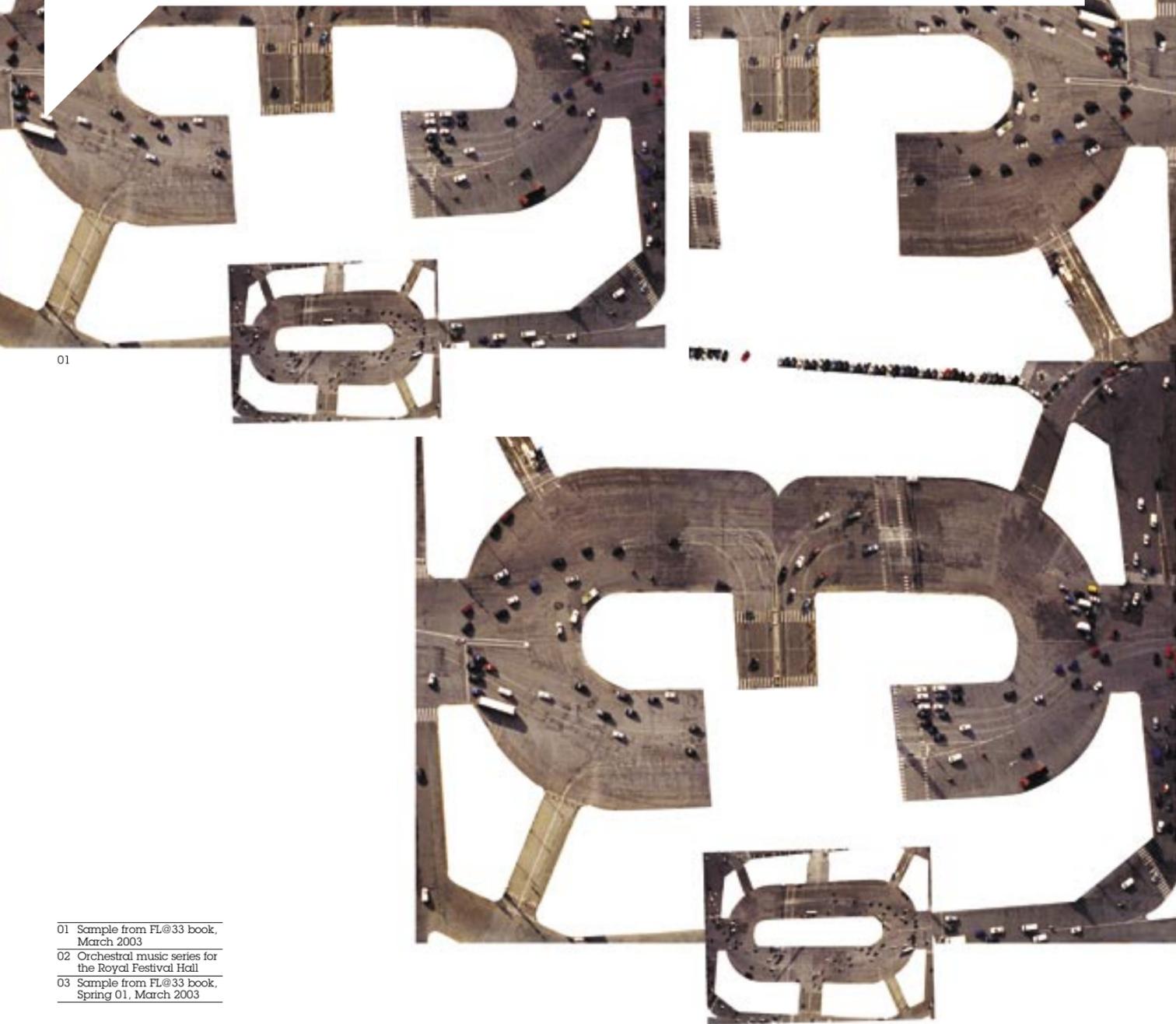


Consultancy Profile

FL@33

Text by Liz Brown



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01 Sample from FL@33 book, March 2003
 02 Orchestral music series for the Royal Festival Hall
 03 Sample from FL@33 book, Spring 01, March 2003

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From classical musicians to cranes, mattress manufacturers to the Paris Métro, the visual world of London design studio FL@33 is as eclectic as their multimedia skills. Liz Brown went to meet them.

If Agathe Jacquillat, one half of FL@33, had grown up in Britain she might have allowed her fate to be decided by a careers advisor. Luckily she grew up in France, and went to see a handwriting expert. "I was eighteen years old," Jacquillat remembers, "it was after my baccalauréat and I didn't know what I wanted to do. So I saw a graphologist. After the end of the first interview she said, 'You like art, don't you?' and apparently I had this big smile on my face and she told me I should study graphic design in Paris. And so I did." Jacquillat, now twenty-eight, graduated from the Académie Julian in Paris, and then went onto the RCA (via a summer session at the Rhode Island School of Design, and internships at Young & Rubicam in Paris, and Dazed & Confused and Pentagram in London).

By way of contrast, her thirty-year-old partner at FL@33, Tomi Vollauschek, was taking drawing classes at the age of nine. "I went into the equivalent of A levels in Germany with a graphic design degree," he laughs. He had a design degree from FH Darmstadt and spent a semester at Camberwell College before going to the RCA, where he met Jacquillat in 1999. They graduated in 2001 and launched FL@33 during their final-year show.

Aside from wanting to learn more about graphic design, both went to the RCA with the intention of using the experience to help them launch their own company. "I realised that the RCA was useful to propel yourself

into the design world," Jacquillat says, demonstrating a sense of purpose that more than compensates for her earlier lack of direction. "I wanted to set up my business and I wanted to find somebody to set it up with me." Vollauschek agrees: "We both wanted to meet somebody as focused as we each were."

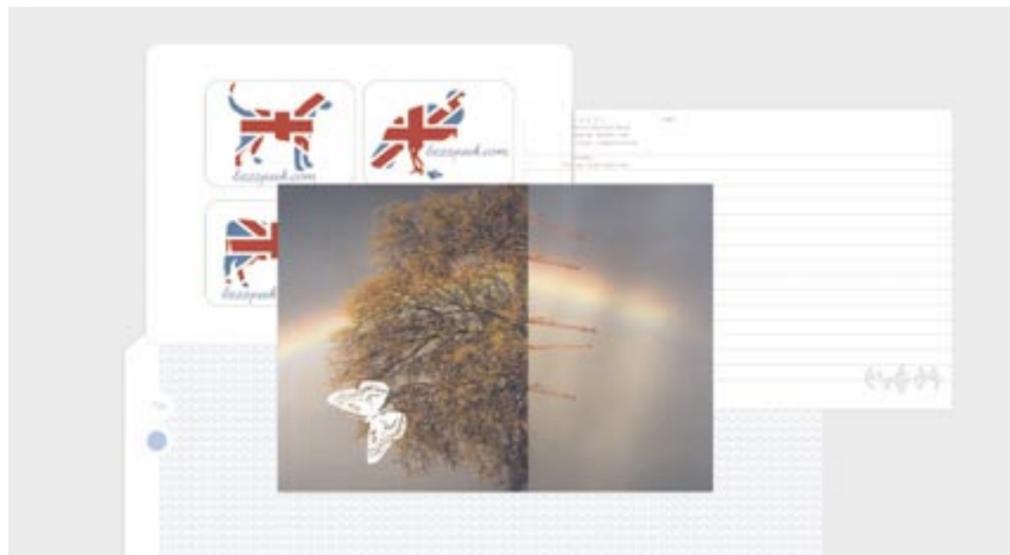
Their determination paid off. By the time they graduated, they had already completed two projects that would win them prizes, clients and admirers all over the world, creating what Vollauschek calls the FL@33 "chain reaction" effect.

The project for which they are best known was inspired by the view from the window of their Notting Hill studio. "We wanted to do something that didn't involve moving too much," Vollauschek explains. TRANS-FORM is a multimedia celebration of the tower cranes that dominated the Paddington skyline until earlier this year—only one now remains and the view looks empty.

"The main challenge was to bring together three different kinds of media," Vollauschek says. "Normally we come up with an idea rather than a presentation environment, but in this case that's how it started." The finished project included a magazine, TRANS-FORM, a website, www.trans-port.org, and a CD-ROM, TRANS-IT, and it laid down the blueprint for the way that FL@33 has come to think, work and develop since.

Given that it has only been running for just over two years, the company has produced an impressive body of work. All aspects of their multimedia projects are carried out personally by the pair. TRANS-FORM includes Armin Linke-style window — reflection photographs, line drawings, photo-montages, typography and graphics; Monty Pythonesque crane insects scuttle around in the CD-ROM animations; and the website offers the opportunity to climb into a tower crane cab, facilitated by a thirty-

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metre vertical trip Vollauschek took with his camera: "We have a couple of friends who are architects, and they allowed us access to construction sites. I ended up on a crane in Frankfurt. It was quite scary—I don't like heights," he recalls.

The second RCA project that helped create a reputation for the pair was their animation film *Singing Pasta*, or *Eat and Be Eaten*. As you might imagine from its alternative titles, this features two pieces of pasta that 'sing' before one eats the other. It's a gem and, along with their *Animated Acoustic Typefaces*, it won them a multimedia competition organised by Noos Interactive Television in France.

The chain reactions duly began: the head of design at the Royal Festival Hall sees *TRANS-FORM*, convinces his marketing department that FL@33 can do for classical music what they did for tower cranes, and commissions a series of artworks for the RFH's Classical Music Campaign. *TRANS-FORM* is featured in Laurence King's book *GB: Graphic Britain* and FL@33's posters *Pencil Eye* and *Butterfly Sculpture* (designed for the occasion) are shown at the launch exhibition at Magma. *Creative Review* includes the posters in a feature on *GB: Graphic Britain* and asks FL@33 to design the cover to celebrate D&AD's fortieth birthday. *Magma* sees the posters and invites FL@33 to participate in the first issue of their magazine, *Graphic*. And MTV sees the *Creative Review* cover and calls FL@33 to ask the pair to do some moving-image work (the resulting VH1 animations, some of which are shown here prior to launch, are due to air in the autumn).

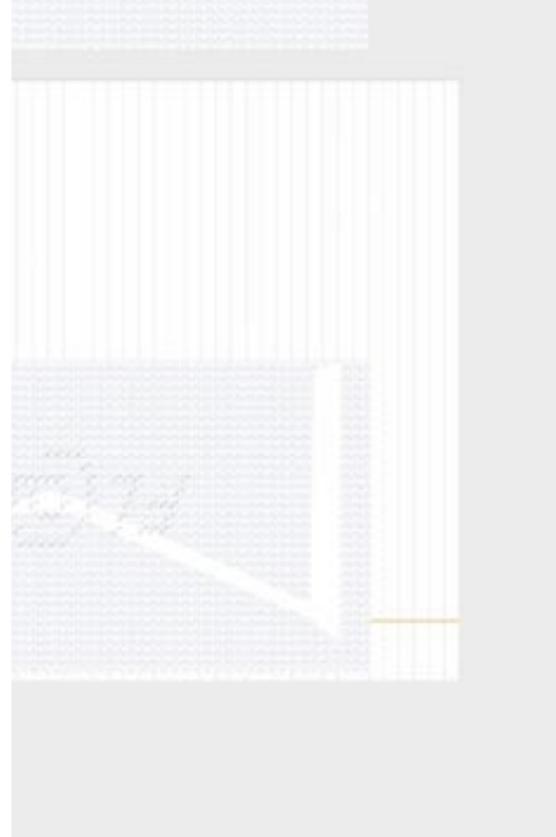
Projects often develop as relationships with clients develop. FL@33 has been working with French mattress company *Matelsom* since 2001. "At the beginning we were just asked to make one poster," Vollauschek says. "We said, 'Why don't you make two? Then it would be a campaign,' but there wasn't the budget. So we developed a

concept that worked with one but that would have been better with two—and in the end they made two. And the next year they said, 'Now we are going to make four.'" The posters will be on every Paris Métro train for the next year.

As well as going on to design *Matelsom's* website, logo and typeface, FL@33 also created a series of business cards for the company's employees. These include a picture of each person's favourite sleeping position, an idea that resulted in another little chain reaction: a survey on the *Matelsom* website to find the favourite sleeping position in France. "We'll find out the result in a couple of months," Vollauschek says.

Even though the pair work in a large array of different formats—everything from Director and Flash animations to photography, typography, drawings, graphics, and good old-fashioned scissors and paper—their ideas are never constrained by technical considerations. FL@33 are the masters, not the servants, of their machinery; as Vollauschek says, the medium is usually chosen last. They develop all concepts together, then divide up the 'formatting' tasks: "At some point we had to decide who's doing all the html stuff," Vollauschek begins. "And as I'd come to the RCA to learn how to make websites, that was me," Jacquillat interjects. Vollauschek returns: "And if it's more illustrative, in terms of hand-made, it's Agathe's work, and if it's slightly more techy in terms of animation, then it's mine. So I do all the timelines," he smiles. "Sometimes we have to really specialise within the team but other times we do similar work and have similar strengths." "And then it depends how much time we have," Jacquillat continues.

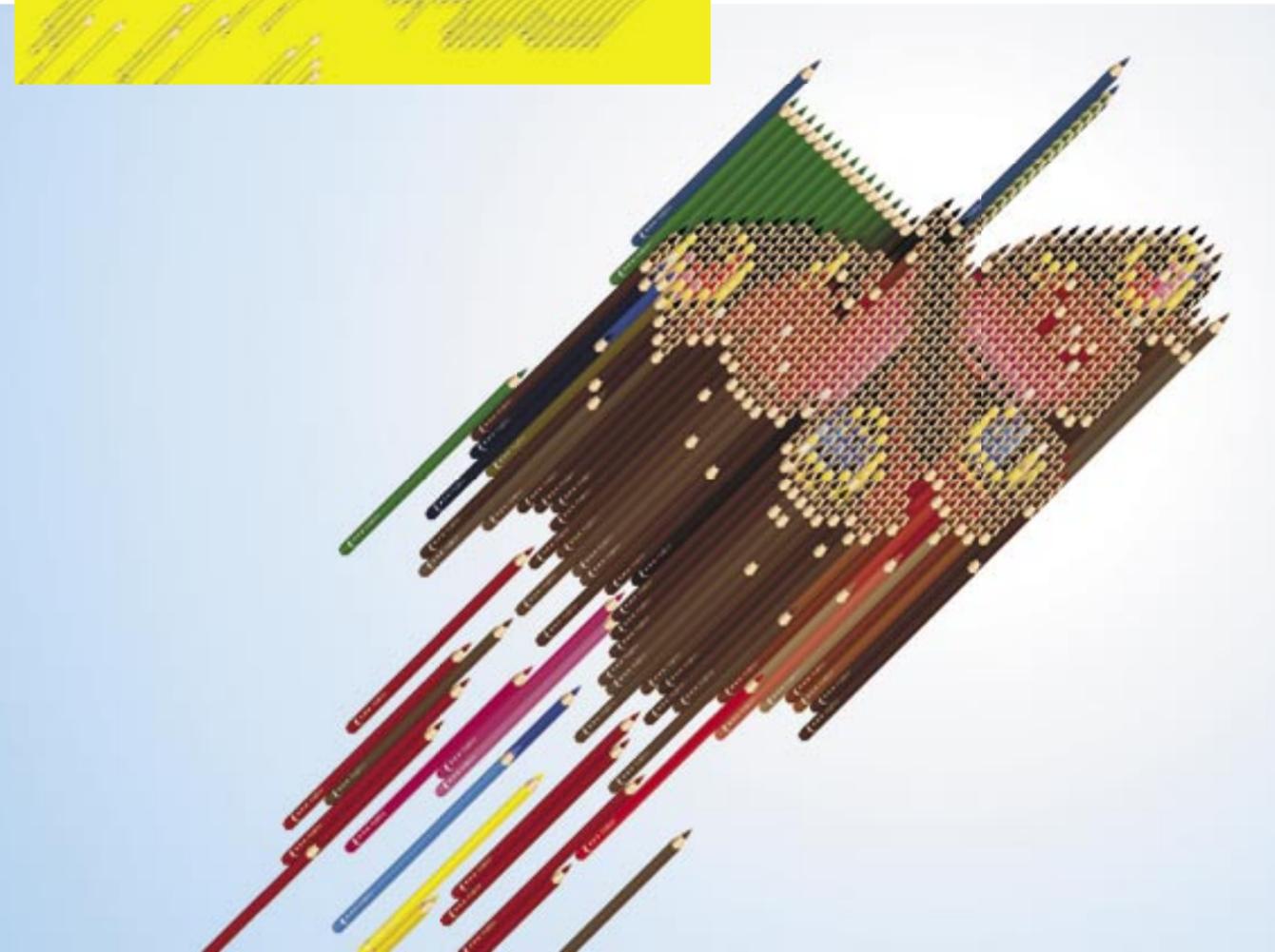
Last year they found time to launch *bzzzpeek.com*, their onomatopoeic online experiment. "It started about two years ago when we began to write down sounds that we remembered from our childhood,"



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- 04 FL@33 stationery with postcard cityscape, *Metamorphosis*, June 2001
- 05 Artwork for *Creative Review* cover, 40 Years of D&AD, November 2002. Art direction Nathan Gale.
- 06 Pencil sculpture illustration series, *Butterfly Sculpture*, contains 818 pencils, September 2002

Vollauschek explains. Jacquillat adds: "Tomi's Austrian and I'm French and we'd see a rooster: in French the rooster goes 'cocorico', and in German 'kickeriki'."

The website is made up of line-drawn animals. You click on one, and then click on a national flag to hear the onomatopoeic sound representing that animal in a particular language (thirteen so far). "The snake's sound is quite amusing," Vollauschek comments. "In Japanese it's something really weird."

"It was friends of family first, then their friends who contributed sounds," Jacquillat explains. "Then I started asking local people if they knew any children," she laughs. "We ended up in a hotel in Victoria and the Indian woman at reception called some friends in Pakistan and this little boy did a recording for us."

With no spare time to promote the site, they entered it for a couple of competitions (including Ars Electronica in Austria, which awarded it an Honorary Mention, and the ADCNY, which gave it a Distinctive Merit Award) and had it linked from portals like Design Is Kinky. The site peaked at 10,000 and now averages roughly 2,000 visitors a day.

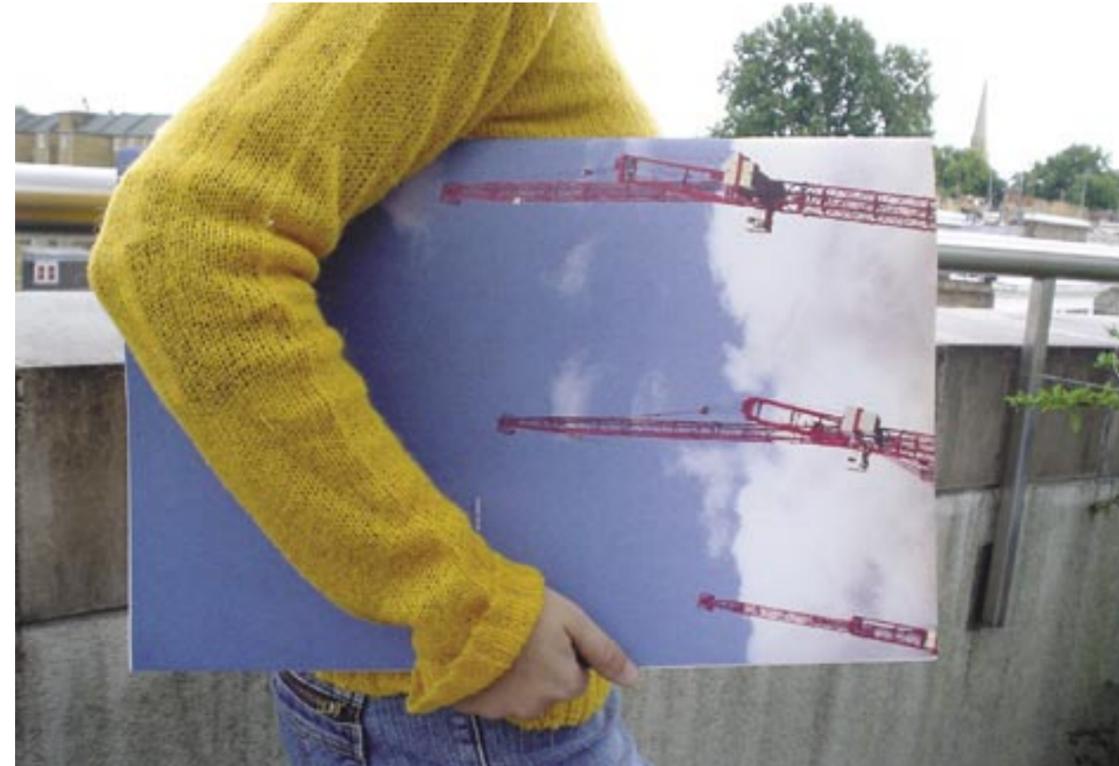
"We've had a good response from educational establishments asking if they can use the application, because the website is designed to be used by everybody—it's for kids as well. So once they are in the application, they should be able to use the menu icons to help them find the sounds. And we've seen kids of two and three using it," Vollauschek says.

October looks like being another busy month for the pair. Their own website, which they have not had time to update since the company's early days, is due to relaunch and will feature a comprehensive archive of their work. They have also contributed to a book, *Romantik*, which is due to be published this month by Die Gestalten Verlag, and which has meant another short break from the computer and more illustrative work for Jacquillat and filmed work for Vollauschek.

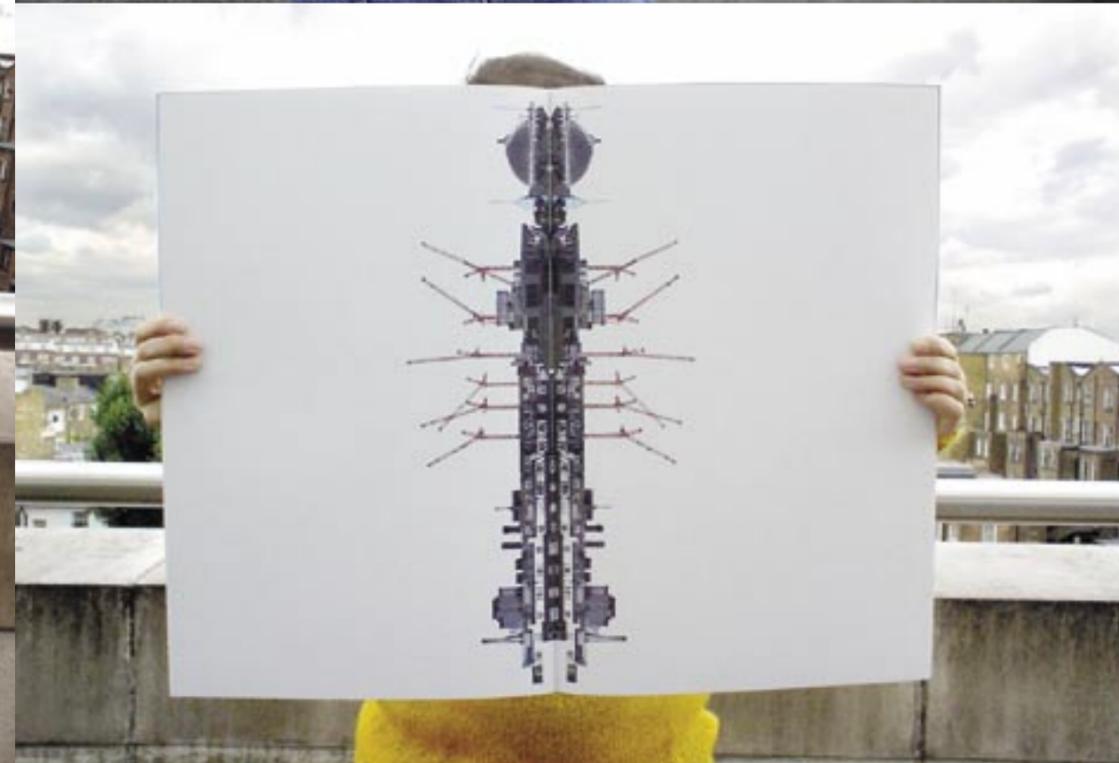
As well as working on their latest self-initiated project, a book of their own work (for which they are currently seeking a publisher), there are deadlines to be met for clients, including a website for French furniture company *meubles.com*. I wondered which international clients were strictest about deadlines. "I'd say it was between Germany and France," Jacquillat vacillates. "It's a cliché, but I'd say that the Germans are the strictest," Vollauschek decides. "I'm not sure about the towel story but the deadline thing's right."



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- 07 TRANS-FORM, *Trans-it*, www.trans-port.org magazine cover, July 2001
 - 08 *Creative Review* editorial design, Miami Ad School, May 2003
 - 09 *Cityscape Insect*, spread from TRANS-FORM magazine, July 2001
- FL@33
27 Hereford Road
London W2 4TQ
+44 (0)20 7313 9783
contact@flat33.com
www.flat33.com
www.bzzzpeek.com
www.trans-port.org
www.cgatheHD.com
TRANS-FORM has sold out from half of its UK stockists, but it can still be purchased at Tate Modern and Zwemmer and is available online from www.flat33.com.