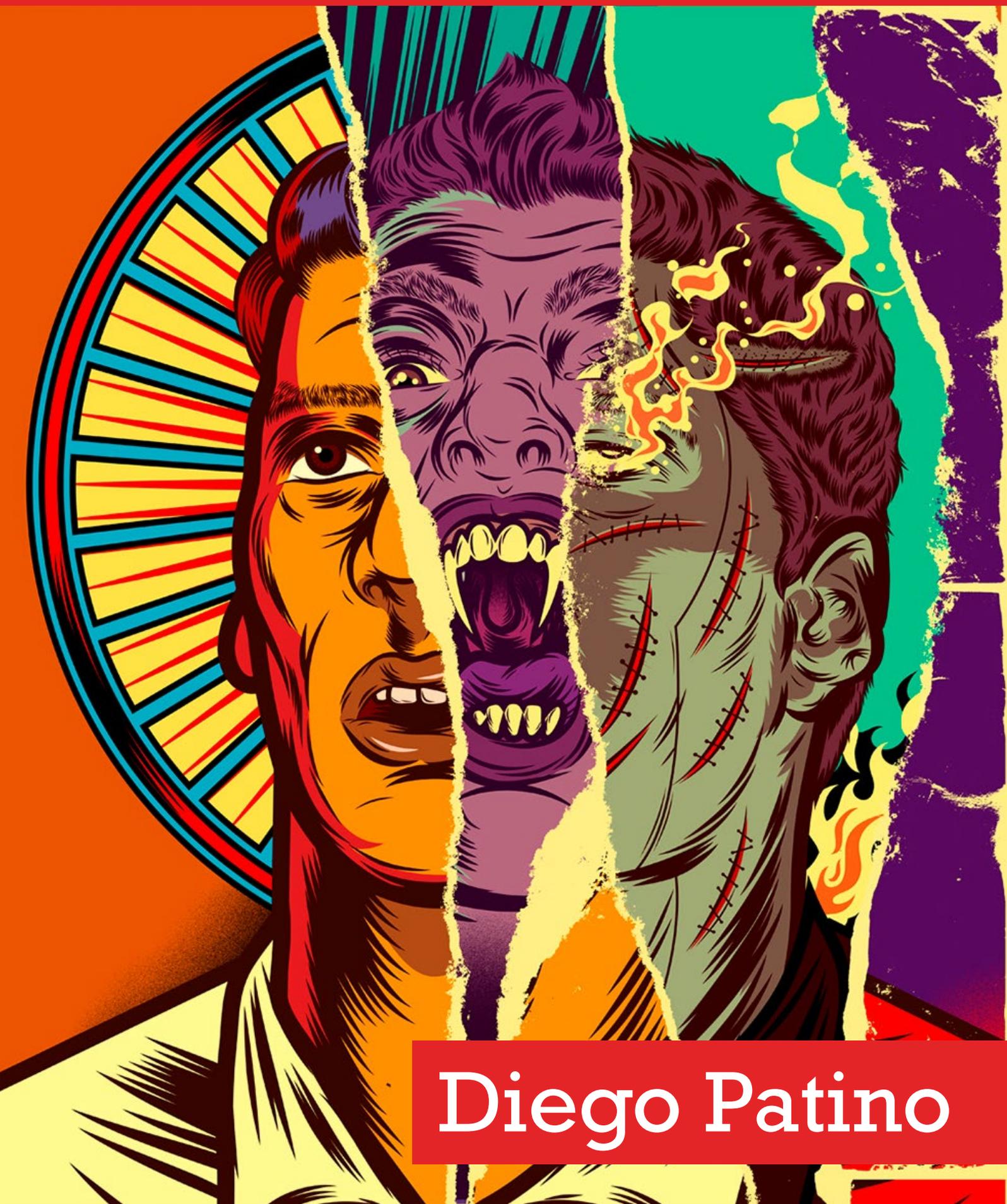


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Diego Patino

## {PROFILE}

# Diego Patino

This NYC based illustrator creates his work digitally, but manages to convey a variety of techniques, such a screen printing, through his creative, colourful work.

**Outline:** Could you tell us about your background (born in Colombia) - and the life/work path leading to your current world today?

**Diego:** It's kinda funny and a tad ludicrous when you look back and realize you've been doing the same since you were a kid.

It all started with my older brother, I guess, and how desperately I tried to emulate everything he was into. He seemed to have a superior understanding of what drawing and storytelling entailed and that was a powerful tool in the hands of a kid with a wide, untamed imagination and his fatter, younger sibling.

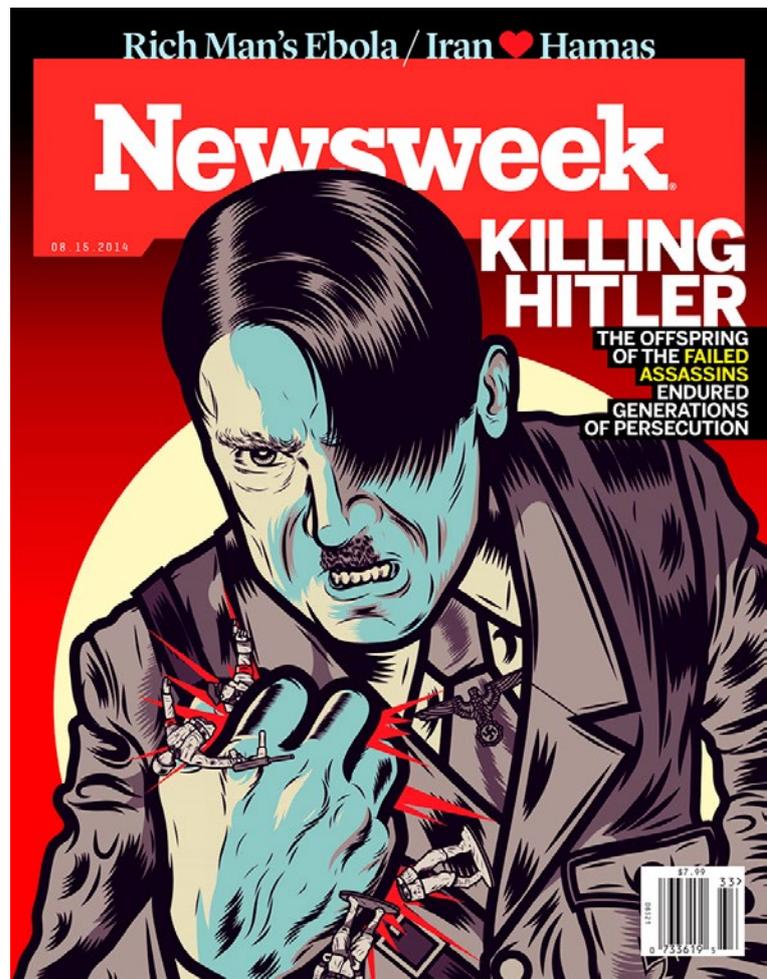
We also didn't have many restrictions at home and because both sides of the family had been raised loving books and stories we had access to all sorts of universes kids our age (specially in a place like Colombia) didn't have a window to. My childhood was a weird place where Hergé, Hieronymus Bosch and Paul Verhoeven converged—the weird and the new was just as welcomed as the classic and the divine and everything was susceptible of change and reinterpretation.

Circumstances forced me eventually to become an adult so I studied journalism and mass media, which explains why my work has orbited around magazines and press. At that point I thought I was going to be a writer but due to a series of unexpected events I ended up doodling for magazines instead.

After a series of failed attempts I finally left the country and moved to Australia, where I lived for a couple of years, and realised that devoting myself to a creative career in illustration wasn't that deranged after all. I've been travelling since and now I'm based in New York, which feels pretty much like home.

**Outline:** Looking back were there major breaks or projects that influenced your career in a big way? What have you considered your personal highlights?

**Diego:** I can think of three important milestones in my career. The first one was when I started working with El Malpensante, a Colombian magazine devoted to literature and culture. Guided by a wonderful editor called Mario Jursich I had the chance to really understand what illustrating for magazines meant. I think I did my best pieces to





date while working with them. The second one was meeting Jeremy Wortsman and becoming part of the Jacky Winter Group family in Australia. That boosted my career and put me in the right track when no one in the publishing field wanted to pay attention to what I had to offer. And the third one was having the chance to work with Robert Priest and Grace Lee (Priest + Grace) in New York. We have worked in several, remarkable projects like the covers for Eight by Eight magazine and the recently revamped Newsweek.

I still feel very insecure about many aspects of my work to fully believe I've achieved something meaningful (other than being able to pay my rent in time). Every day still feels like a struggle in the sense that I'm always asking myself how can I keep my creative efforts fresh, relevant and honest, and that's a bit of a torture. Recently I realized that learning new techniques and skills while keeping my brain oiled is the only possible way to embrace and deal with the uncertainty of the immediate future.

**Outline:** As a currently NY-based illustrator, what is life like in the Big Apple? How long have you been based there, and what drew you to make the move there?

**Diego:** Living in Gotham could be hectic and intense. I moved here because in a very strange way—like I said

before—it has always felt like home. There was a very delicate point when I had to choose what to do with my life and suddenly New York just shone like a beacon in a storm and that was it.

I feel incredibly comfortable here as the city never ceases to surprise me or show me new doors—NYC is essentially a playground for a certain type of personality. It also toughens you up in many ways so you have to learn to pick yourself from the ground every time something beats you down and spits on your half-dead carcass. The city is a beast that owes you nothing and will bite your fingers off given the chance, but once you're able to carve your way through it it's a very fulfilling and amazing experience every day. I particularly love it during winter.

**Outline:** Looking at your portfolio, editorial work features heavily (and some big ones - NY Book Review, ESPN Magazine, Newsweek, Variety etc - just in 2014 alone!). What makes a great editorial illustration? How did you get your first break in this competitive category?

**Diego:** I missed my mark with a lot of those pieces you mention. They've been great clients (although I hate that word, by the way) but I have the bittersweet feeling

that I could have done a more interesting job hadn't I been restrained to my usual aesthetics. Style is a trap and one of the dangers of any commercial creative field is being categorized and put in a box. Due to time restrictions mainly, art directors can't be as flexible or blindly trusting as you wish in spite of your firm, inner conviction that you can do other things just as good. I guess this is why it's so important to find an alternative space where you can keep on learning and experimenting aside from your job.

From a pragmatic and cynical point of view, a great editorial illustration is that that allows you to land your next gig in this uncertain business. You can talk all you want about shape and colour but at the end you're mainly selling an idea to an art director and an editor. And for that, just be as honest and clear as possible. The rest will follow.

As for having a big break, I don't think I've had one. It all started in a small scale in Colombia a decade ago and since then things have occurred very progressively and slowly and I'm ok with that.

**Outline:** Your work is incredible - much of it with layers of half tones reminiscent of a multi-layered screen print, but from my research it appears you work primarily digitally. Could you talk us through your process?

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**Diego:** Thanks for that. I'm slightly compulsive when it comes to details so I tend to separate everything by digital layers as much as possible. That way I have more control, even though to a certain extent I'm trying to achieve the feel of a screen-print illustration which is by nature slightly erratic. Since I don't have a formal training I've had to improvise and come up with techniques that allow me to combine analogue media with digital.

My process is simple and incredibly tedious: I receive a text. Take notes and do research. Draft a sketch and discuss the concept with the art director. And based on that, I determine what technical approach I should take. However, I'd like to emphasise that technique is secondary, almost an accessory. Storytelling comes first. The idea is what drives the picture and that's usually the hardest part to come up with. It of course varies from project to project but at the end you aspire for readers to stop for a little while and get something out of your work, anything but indifference.

**Outline:** Who are your art heroes?

**Diego:** I didn't know it then, but through the Garbage Pail Kids cards I've been collecting forever I got exposed to

Art Spiegelman's work—so count him as one of my first heroes. Other very important names in my life are Hergé, Chris Ware, Robert Crumb, Tim Lane and Charles Burns, who has impacted my work the most. As you can see, all of those guys are pretty much related to the comic book world, which underlines my fixation with storytelling. There are plenty of names from other disciplines (film specially) but my inner ambitious creator wishes to accomplish as much as those guys.

**Outline:** Are there any major upcoming projects that you can share with us?

**Diego:** All I'd dare to say for now is that I'm working on a couple of illustrated and written personal projects. Warming up is over and establishing myself as an author within the next ten years is what I'll be focused on. **o**

{ **CLICK!** } **Deigo Patino**

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