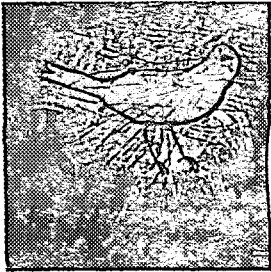
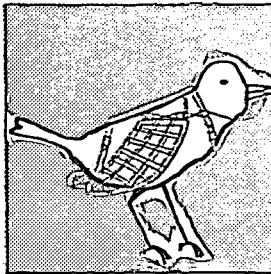


Martina Witte, Brooklyn, NY
TOSSED AND FOUND

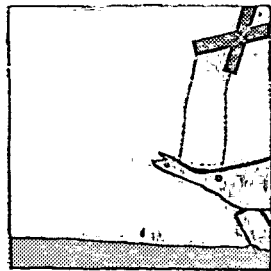
“I”**m** crazy for office supplies—labels, ledger paper,” says Martina Witte. These materials, along with wood samples, envelope liners, fabric, and coffee filters are all likely to find their way into her illustrations. Witte, who is slim, pale, tall—and very thrift-store chic—greeted me in sneakers, textured tights, a fitted tweed skirt, and a hoodie when I visited her at her studio. Her sartorial medley was one that shouldn’t fit together, but did, and I immediately sensed a pattern. “I’m an obsessive doodler, too,” she says. “I keep many Post-its that have doodles on them to work into illustrations.” She’s a confessed pack rat, but a very organized one; a glance around her work area reveals multiple folders of inspirational scraps and separate drawers for labels, Post-its, and other quotidian gems. She may incorporate random ephemera into her art, but the overall effect is quite personal.



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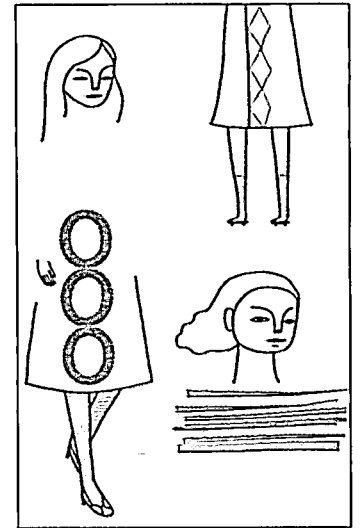
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While growing up in Celle, Germany, Witte, now 29, would sketch compulsively, but she never thought illustration would be her calling. “I drew all the time. I always liked having fresh pens and complete sets of pencils, but that was that,” she recalls. When she was 17, she found herself in Wellsville, Kansas, as part of a student exchange program; using her time wisely, she researched the arts degree offered at the University of Kansas at Lawrence. Once enrolled, she studied graphic design, but—to her frustration—she found that work she produced on the computer was “too static and too clean.” To provide balance, she took to drawing and painting with renewed vigor. Since she suffered from bouts of homesickness, work on her thoughtful and resonant pieces became a kind of creative therapy. It was in this process that she started developing a personal iconography. Birds that showed up in her work came to stand for home and family—a visual link to the childhood pet she had for nine years.

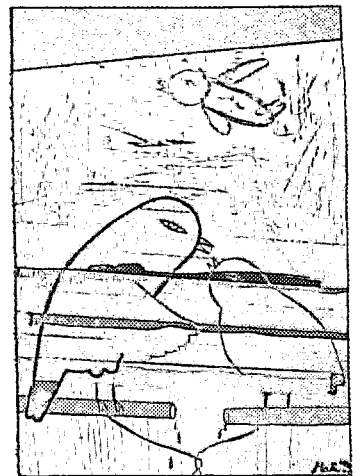
After graduating in 1997, Witte moved to Seattle, where she was hired as a designer for Starbucks Coffee. During her productive three-and-a-half years at the company, she devoted increasing amounts of time to illustration. As a result, her work encompassed everything from murals to mugs, from annual reports to coffee packaging. Human figures were kept to a minimum and her color palette was largely defined by muted, “food-based” colors. “Pink,” she notes ruefully, “was not a Starbucks color.”

Witte’s first freelance commission was for *The Utne Reader*. The assignment showed how people mentally and physically map their lives to keep organized, to remember landmarks, or to process feelings. It is this kind of intimate and introspective complexity that appeals to her.

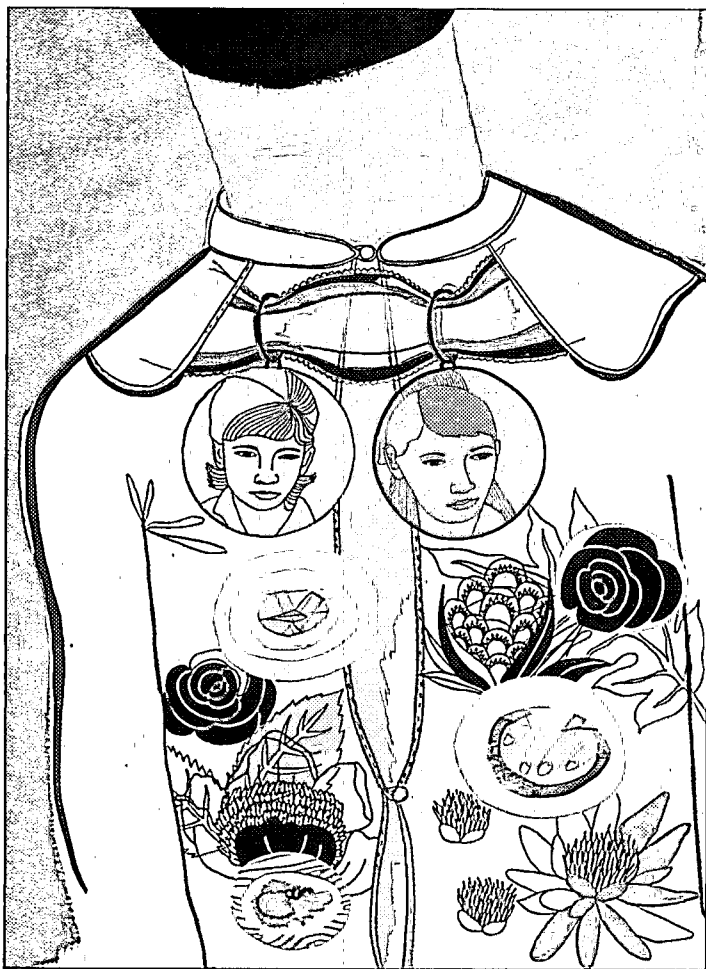
When asked about her influences, Witte, who now lives in Brooklyn, hesitates. “I try not to look too much at other people’s work,” she reflects. “I don’t want to be influenced.” But she admits to “copying” in one area: “My color palettes! When I go to the supermarket, I like the way the limes sit next to the apples—or I look at my sink full of Tupperware lids.” She admires the symbolic language of Frida Kahlo, “anything by Maira Kalman,” the work of West Coast illustrator Fay Jones, and the sensibility of children’s books. “In the future,” she says, “I’d love to illustrate my own books.”—Angela Voulangas



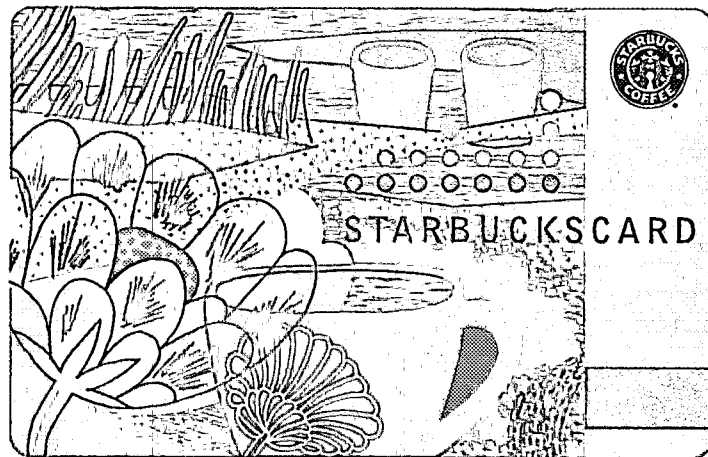
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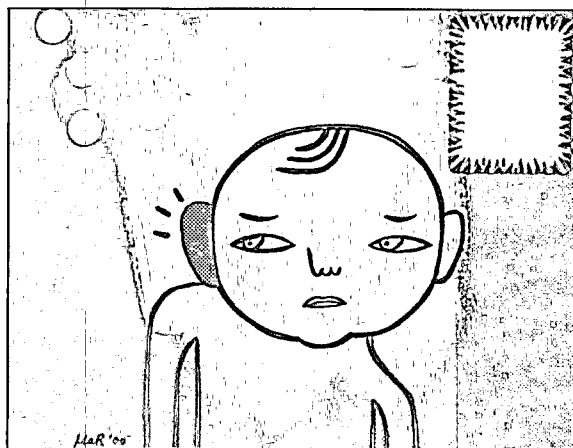
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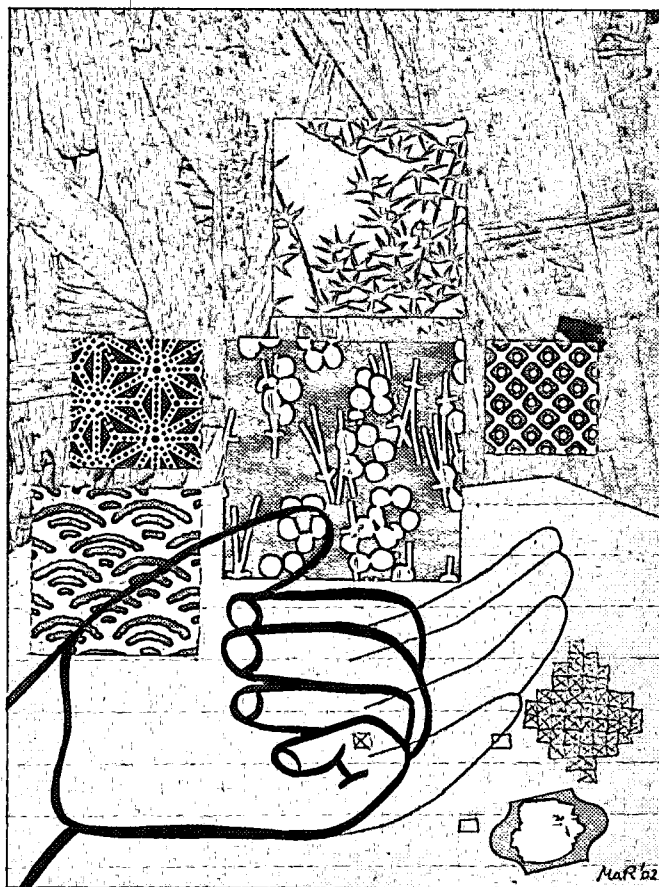
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1. Personal piece titled "Mama," created for a West Coast Art Directors Club auction.
- 2-4. Personal pieces from a series titled "Nine Birds."
5. A collage of illustrations shown in the book *Radiant Beauty*, published by Rodale, 2000.
6. Personal piece.
7. Personal piece titled "zwei Vogel—ein Leben" (Two birds—one life).
8. Personal piece titled "Of Mothers and Flowers."
9. Starbucks debit card. Art directors: Robert Mercer, Carol Baker.
10. Illustration for *Fit Pregnancy* magazine. Art director: Stephanie Birdsong.
11. Illustration for *Personal Wealth* magazine. Art director: John Ganza.

A vertical bar on the left side of the page, consisting of a series of yellow and orange rectangular segments. A small red diamond is located at the top of this bar.

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