

THOMAS NICHOLAS | THE NEW HEROES MAGAZINE

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“This is about creating new heroes, a new mythology that we can relate to now. This is essential.”

There’s a brightness in Thomas Nicholas’ eyes when he holds The New Heroes in his hands. As he flips through the thin newsprint pages of his magazine in the sunlit living room of his home in Boerum Hill, he excitedly points to the people he’s profiled, detailing their creative visions so thoroughly and vividly as though they’re his own. It’s a small glimpse into just how much The New Heroes is an extension of Thomas as a designer and a creative — it’s undoubtedly an integral part of his being. Beautifully

designed, curated, and written by Thomas himself, the magazine features original artwork and topical conversations with artists exploring thematic issues that Thomas deeply invests himself in, from mythology and culture (or, rather, the lack thereof in modern society) to the staggering human impact on the environment.

Thomas didn't start out as a designer. In fact, he followed a very different career path before he landed in design: he performed professionally for seven years as a lead dancer at the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago. After graduating from New School University in New York City at the age of 19 ("I couldn't be old," he says matter-of-factly. "I couldn't be 22 and starting a career in dance.") he landed a job at the prestigious dance company and moved to Chicago. "We did all the classics, we traveled all around the world. It was really a wonderful career for me," he says.

As he grew older as a dancer, however, he started feeling the weight of the finality of his career at hand. "After 25, I could start to feel things slowly slipping, and that's a hard thing to grasp once you've hit 30. I was seeing these people that I admired losing a little bit of their technical ability, and I didn't want that to happen." On top of this loss of technical ability that he saw awaiting him, Thomas also was grappling with the finite nature of his creative expression as a dancer. "There's only so much you can express in a role when you have gatekeepers in the form of artistic directors, choreographers telling you how to interpret something. It stunts your artistic growth."

"I saw a wall coming, and I didn't ever want to hit that."

There are people who settle for what's comfortable, and there are people who refuse to stop pushing themselves forward. Thomas is of the latter variety. In reaction to the finality he saw for himself in dance, he turned to another art form he loved with seemingly limitless potential: design.

"It's something that I'm going to do forever," he says. "There's really no ceiling to how far you can take it. It's tremendously exciting to know that I'm going to die and I will not have even exhausted a tiny bit of that potential."

With encouragement from his brother, filmmaker Ben Louis Nicholas, Thomas began working on what would become the inaugural issue of The New Heroes magazine. He called up ten of his favorite artists ("They all said yes!" he says in disbelief), interviewed them, and scraped together enough money to print a magazine — all while his dance career was still ongoing. "When I first held it in my hands, I was like — I want to crash

into a wall,” he says. “I don’t think I’ve felt this high before. It was amazing. Just holding something I’ve made is worth any struggle that goes into it.”

“One day, I went to work in the dance studio and the feeling that I should be there was gone. So I just walked out of the room and went to the director’s office that moment and said: ‘This is it. I’m done. I can’t do it anymore.’”

This was the rise of The New Heroes.

“This is about creating new heroes,” Thomas says about the magazine’s name. “A new mythology we can relate to now.” From Daniel Arsham and his Future Relic series, which casts slightly-outdated objects (i.e. film cameras) in volcanic ash and crystal, to Ivan Forde, a young up-and-coming photographer from Harlem whose work includes collage and surreal self-portraiture, Thomas introduces The New Heroes’ readers to a wide breadth of talented and thought-provoking artists, placing their words alongside large and vivid prints of their original work.

Having control over every element of the magazine — the curation, the writing, the design, and more — has its perks, at the forefront being the limitlessness in design that drew Thomas in this direction in the first place. But with this limitlessness also comes the overwhelming responsibility to render The New Heroes’ intent of invoking a “new mythology for our modern times,” as he puts it, all on the shoulders of a single person.

“The thing that I’ve learned is to be comfortable with the process. And I’ve learned that for me, this process is extremely painful.”

“I imagine it’s like labor,” Thomas says of creating and putting together The New Heroes. “It’s intense moments and prolonged periods of pain, followed by short glimpses of happiness and fulfillment. I think they all have to be painful in some sort of way; the process has to be painful. And I’m okay with that.”

“Over the course of the last four magazines I’ve really learned to embrace that struggle, and understand that nothing really good for me so far has come from an effortless process.”

“I think the challenge when you’re doing it yourself is that I want to see how far I can push myself. Because you can’t blame anybody if it doesn’t come out well, and I enjoy

the pressure of that. That's something that's sort of similar to dance: that kind of pressure. When you're out there by yourself — if you fall, no one caused that to happen. I miss that very much from dancing, and I think that I try to find a way to replicate that in my new career.”

A portrait of a dancer, toes pointed and limbs outstretched with unfathomable flexibility, leans against the corner of the wall in Thomas' living room, slightly hidden. “It's just kind of weird to hang a portrait of yourself, you know?” he laughs, shrugging his shoulders. The rest of his home — from its simple yet carefully-curated decor to his magazines, humbly but proudly stacked at the top of his bookshelf — is a testament to the creative path with infinite possibilities that he's forged for himself.

Thomas Nicholas is a designer, a dancer, a thinker, a creative director — and whatever else he creates for himself next.