IN OLIVER MUNDAY’S designs and illustrations, things often morph into other things. As a student at the Maryland Institute College of Art, Munday created a typeface out of plastic soldiers that he strategically set on fire and melted, producing an alphabetical army of the wounded and maligned. An illustration on the cover of a poetry book by the young inmates of a prison in Washington, D.C.—Munday’s hometown—shows the ridges of a pencil turning into the iron bars of a jail cell. And in a recent poster for PieLab, an Alabama dessert shop and community space created by the design collaborative Project M, a slice of pie inverts to form a beaker.

Munday is particularly attuned to his sense of social consciousness—he has also produced infographics for Good, a promotional booklet for a women’s rehab center in Baltimore, and a poster for an Angela Davis lecture at MICA.

Soon after graduating in 2007, Munday sent his portfolio to Nicholas Blechman, art director of The New York Times Book Review. Blechman called Munday that night with an assignment. “That changed everything for me,” Munday says. Since then, he’s completed more than 50 illustrations for the Times, extending his work to the Op-Ed page. He likes these “projects that make you think hard but don’t take forever.” His first book-jacket designs, for such projects as a poetry book and an alternative history of the United States, will appear later this year.

Munday’s work to date is elemental and immediately arresting, an approach that might have been inspired by his early life as a sports fan. “In football,” he says, “the helmets were what drew me to a team. I liked really graphic helmets, like the Cincinnati Bengals with their black stripes on orange.”

PETER TERZIAN

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