

KANYE WEST

BY AUSTIN SCAGGS

When you were growing up, how did you imagine the future?

I wanted flying cars – I designed many a flying car as a little kid. I wanted hover boards. I wanted Nikes with a bunch of air bubbles on them. u It sounds like your vision was shaped by “Back to the Future II.” u Yeah. Oh, man, I love that movie so much. You can see so many influences from my new album cover [Graduation, featuring Marty McFly’s futuristic Nikes]. It’s crazy how movies can connect with pop culture. I also wanted one of those machines from Star Trek. Where’s my “Beam me up, Scotty” machine?

How do you assess the current state of America?

I don’t know what’s going on. I don’t even watch much TV. The only news I read is what pops up on Yahoo! when I’m checking my e-mail. Right now that news on Yahoo! is about an underwater pumpkincarving contest. I’m fine with people just being good at what they do. I wouldn’t expect a politician to be able to recite the third verse on my album.

What excites you most about the future?

Technology. What will be possible ten years from now? Will cars be solar-powered, and if they’re solarpowered, then would we need to have a war?

What’s exciting for me personally is music and fashion, and becoming a real designer. It’s time to present the world with a lot of great product, whether it’s visual or sonic.

You seem able to predict trends, to stay one step ahead of pop culture. How do you do that?

You have to think like a designer. You have to establish the trend four seasons before it becomes popular. As a musician, there's only a few people I could compare that to – Bob Dylan has the same thing – but there are a bunch of designers that do that: Murakami and Marc Jacobs. And Yves Behar, who designs watches and computers.

You like to call yourself a designer.

I wanted to be a designer before I wanted to be a rapper. I want to establish myself as somebody with creative ideas. Once you get that respect, you can just keep going and going.

What performers do you see having a major impact on the future of music?

It's so hard to tell. There will be so few, if any. Chromeo has a futuristic sound, but what artists matter now who mattered twenty years ago? The Rolling Stones still sell a lot of concert tickets, but they don't matter in an "Oh, my God, did you hear that new song?" type of way. I think designers will lead us into the future. Obviously, people who design technology, all the people who work for Steve Jobs – those are the guys who will paint the world.

So what artist can stay relevant over the years?

Jay-Z, the greatest hip-hop artist of all time. Tupac was great, but I never wanted to dress like Tupac.

How is technology changing music?

Who knew that downloading would take record sales down so much? With Graduation, I became part of the culture. When I dropped this album, I wanted to be a part of that technology. As a result, I had the most downloaded album in history.

The flip side is that people can rip off your music.

I like to sell as many albums as possible, but more than that, I like as many people to hear the songs as possible. All those people that bootlegged the album, there's a chance they'll come to the concert, or play the music for their kids, that these songs will connect in different ways. That's more important than sales. My goal is playing stadiums, and I don't think having millions of illegal downloads hurts that.

Selling out stadiums – you sound quite optimistic about the future.

I'm optimistic about everything. I go anywhere from optimistic to borderline delusional.