

# AT

"Buy the ticket, take the ride."



2014

# LARGE

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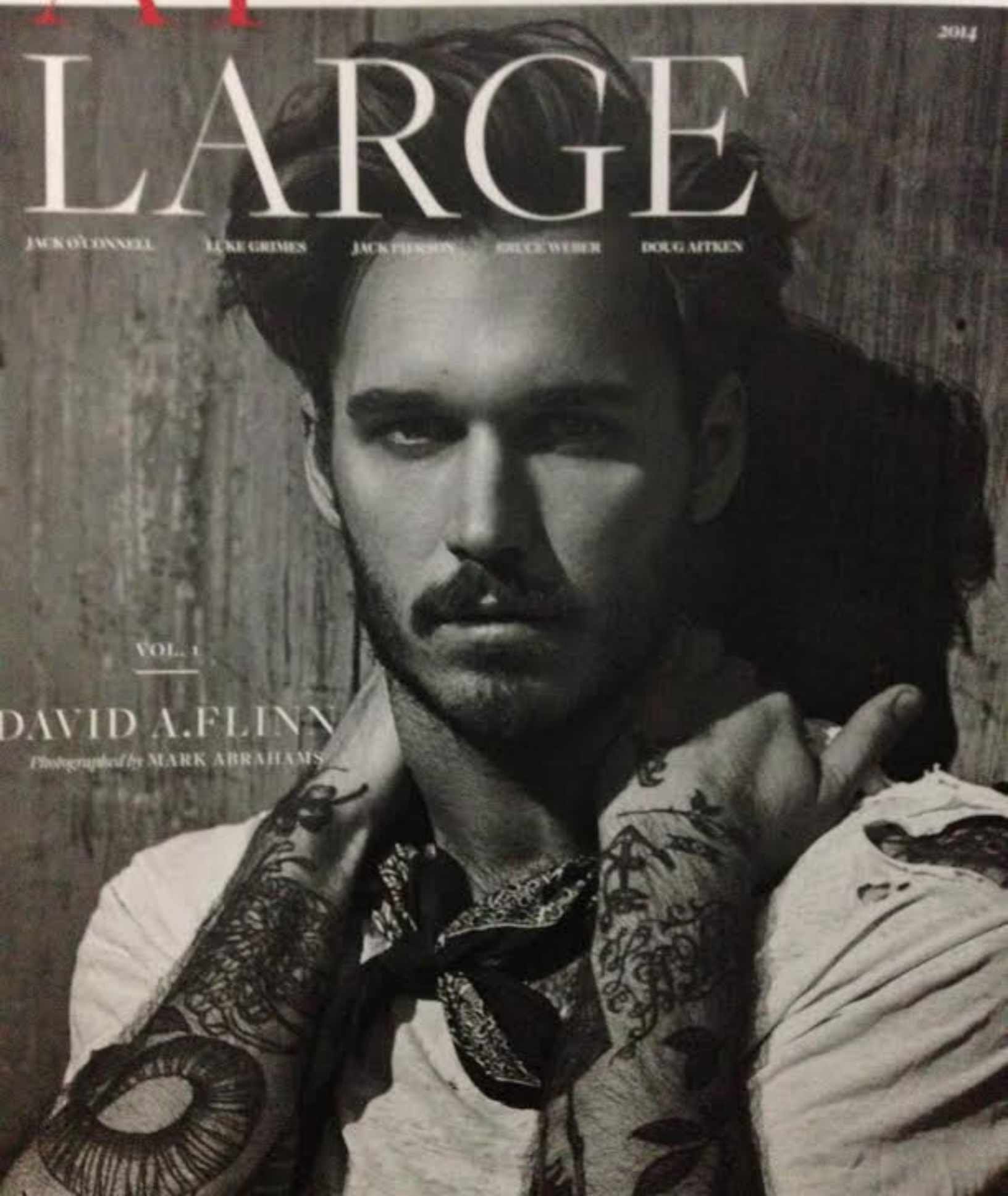
BRUCE WEBER

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VOL. 1

DAVID A. FLINN

Photographed by MARK ABRAHAMS





# FLAGS *of* NOTHING

*Photography by* Mark Abrahams

*Interview by* Joseph Akel

*Styled by* Deborah Watson

*Still life by* Rob Kulisek

**D**avid Alexander Flinn is not your average twenty-seven-year-old. With several solo shows at New York's LES gallery Envoy Enterprises under his belt, in addition to numerous international exhibitions, Flinn has made a name for himself as an artist whose multimedia installations, sculptures, and tinted photographs evince an uncanny sense of menace. For his show "Funerals," Flinn attached metal chains, shards of glass, and sharp knives to tree trunks, while among the works included in his exhibition "Nor Here Nor There" were monochromatic watercolor portraits of balaclava-clad subjects and grainy black-and-white photographs of spiders. Heavily tattooed and strikingly handsome, Flinn, as it happens, has modeled in campaigns for the likes of Prada, Louis Vuitton, and J.Crew. *At Large* sat down with the New York native to discuss his newest project, "Flags of Nothing," his personal take on style, and a run-in with the NYPD that changed his life.

**Joseph Akel:** When I first heard that your latest body of work, "Flags of Nothing," incorporates "flags" stripped of graphic imagery, I immediately thought of the two German artists who earlier this year replaced the American flags over the Brooklyn Bridge with their own handsewn white ones.

**David Alexander Flinn:** What's ironic is that I've been telling my friends for four years that I want to put two silver flags

up there. They kind of beat me to the punch. Plus, I already have priors on my record and it would not have been a good idea.

**Right, so let's talk about that. How in the world did you come to have the NYPD tapping your phones? You—the kid with two economics professors as parents!**

It was honestly a stupid situation. I'd been selling massive quantities of weed in three different states. I had a federal wiretap investigation and was looking at pretty serious charges. I got arrested and was facing a year-and-a-half jail sentence. Fortunately, given the circumstances of the case, I ended up getting off with three years of probation and hundreds of hours community service.

**You identify that moment in your life as a turning point.**

Yeah, it was a wake-up call. I had this moment of clarity where I said to myself, "This is my everything. This is why I wake up every morning. This is the thing I love doing, and I don't want to jeopardize that ever again." I think often in New York you can get horribly sidetracked, and that episode in my life really kind of kicked me back on track. Making art and wanting to be an artist has always been there deep down inside me. It's funny, I recently visited my parents' home and found these drawings I had made as a kid. There's a certain aesthetic and symmetry to the works I was doing then, which are so resilient and referential to what I am doing now.









I FORGOT TO SAY I LOVE YOU  
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*“At the end of the day, I just want to feel, live, and experience things that can’t be given or provided to me in a package.”*

**Graffiti plays an important role in the development of your art, although it’s not obvious in your work today.**

In high school, I was doing a lot of graffiti—and getting into trouble for it. My high school art teacher saw me carrying a black book of sketches and asked to look at it. Her subsequent encouragement was the catalyst for my realizing that graffiti was a viable thing I could do, and not just a manifestation of rebellion. Fast-forward a few years and another influential figure to me was Dash Snow. I only met him on a handful of occasions, the first time at an exhibition of his in the Bowery. During that period he was tagging under the name Sacc and I saw in him someone who was doing exactly what they wanted to do, and how they wanted to do it. That was really inspiring. It bridged a lot of insecurities for me. Of course, I was different from him; I came from a different background. But, in the end, I think he opened a lot of doors.

**With your current project, “Flags of Nothing,” you reference this idea of independence from social structures and how, on some level, the works you are creating are flags that represent you in some way.**

Absolutely. With the expected degree of mediated connectivity that we have today—Facebook, Instagram—I felt any attempts at disengaging from them somehow predicated a loss of place or identity. In response, I see “Flags of Nothing” as an attempt to stake out my own space, my identity—to plant my flag, so to speak.

**Isn’t it paradoxical that questions surrounding the status of the individual in society today—and particularly your interest in subverting norms that define them—underline much of your art, while simultaneously you are engaged as a model with the very systems that you often criticize?**

Honestly, I don’t see it that way. I was recently talking to my agent and he said, “You did everything you could to not fit into any of the standard ‘model’ expectations.” And let’s face it, I don’t have a six-pack. I’m covered in tats, and so on. But I saw in the world of fashion artists and innovators who were searching for something more.

**That said, you were hesitant to get into the industry for some time.**

Modeling wasn’t really a thing for me until I was twenty-five, although people had been approaching me to model since I was sixteen. I honestly had no interest in it. I’d done one or two jobs here and there, like every New Yorker does.

**David, not every New Yorker goes out and randomly models.**

Yeah, yeah. Anyway, while I was working as a carpenter—

**Wait, you were a carpenter, too? A model and carpenter; that’s every romance-novel genre in one fell swoop.**

As I was saying, while working as a carpenter, I was profiled along with several others for a magazine, I think it was *T*. Three weeks later, the casting director from J.Crew e-mails me and says, “Hey, we’d really love to have you in our ad campaign. Would you be interested?” I was like, “Sure, this is money.” I had initial reservations about how this would effect my art career, but then I remembered Matthew Barney doing all those Ralph Lauren catalogues, or whatever it was, and I said to myself, “All right, Matthew did it. It worked out for him.”

**Style also plays an important part in your life, which again seems to adhere to this idea you talk about of “staking your own claim.” What inspires you currently?**

Honestly, my favorite thing is to dress like a cowboy all the time. I like cowboy boots. I like cowboy hats. It’s funny, and forgive the analogy, but in many ways I felt like my childhood embraced the concept of the cowboy. Even though my friends and I had skateboards and bikes instead of horses, we loved the idea of wandering uncharted territory, which for us, as teens, was New York City. We were just little dirty cowboys running around town in our Air Force 1s. And it is that sense of exploring the uncharted that underlines the work I make today. At the end of the day, I just want to feel, live, and experience things that can’t be given or provided to me in a package. My latest adventure has been to remove myself completely from almost all social media and connectivity. I don’t have Instagram anymore. I don’t have a phone anymore. I’m come and go, a little AWOL.

**Going cowboy, in a sense.**

There you go. Cowboy Dave.





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1902  
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1871-1872





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