Portikus



Project Merch

Please find enclosed a selection of initial sketches and rough drafts – just a way for us to see which ideas are greeted with enthusiasm – and which ideas might need some further work. We're only 'testing the water' here (so to speak) – just putting it out there, to see what happens!

A few things to keep in mind though. First of all, in these sketches, we used only very archetypical forms of shirts and tote-bags (and baseball hats) – while we actually would love to find more specific shirts and bags and hats (in fact, we would love to search for other objects).
However, before we look into this, we would first like to know which direction we should be heading for – which is the reason why we decided to send you these rough, half-baked sketches. We would love to hear your feedback – so that we can continue sketching.

Also – while going through the sketches enclosed in this PDF, we noticed that a lot of these pieces were referring to the notion of 'merchandise' more than to the notion of 'Portikus'. If this is indeed a problem, do let us know. We have more ideas – we can always rip up our previous sketches, and start again!

In the meantime – please find below a general introduction, followed by short texts about each chapter.

Merchandise, multiples, memorabilia

There are actually three ways to describe the items we show in this PDF – merchandise, multiples, and memorabilia.

As for the word **merchandise** – at first sight, it's a bit of an ugly word, referring to commodification, commercialisation, reification. However, we have to admit that we have a soft spot for the word, based solely on the fact that we associate it mainly with 'band merchandise' – the t-shirts, badges and buttons that have been such a large part of our subcultural upbringing. As teenagers growing up in the 1980s, we were completely fascinated by that era's many post-punk subcultures (Two-Tone, Psychobilly, New Wave, Mod, etc.), and all these movements really shaped us. And it were post-punk artefacts (such as record sleeves, badges, buttons, patches, xeroxed fanzines, mix tapes, and t-shirts) that made us aware of graphic design in the first place. In other words – we do have a fascination for certain kinds of subcultural merchandise.

Added to that, we also feel that this word, 'commodification', is often used to dismiss all forms of cultural production happening outside of the narrow, 'official' confines of art and academia.

Which means that, for example, an academic book is seen as a valid and respectable object, while a t-shirt is not. However, we do feel that a t-shirt is a tool to distribute knowledge (and aesthetics) in its own right – and often in cheaper, more approachable, and more accessible ways as well.

So we should not be snobbish about 'merch' – it's an information network, a platform to distribute language. Sure, 'merch' exists within a capitalist infrastructure – but the same can of course be said about all forms of (cultural) production. The whole point is to somehow repurpose this infrastructure, to reimagine it – without being dismissive of the desires and impulses that live inside of all of us. We're thinking here specifically of Mark Fisher, who (in 'Post-Capitalist Desire') asked himself:

> *Instead of the 'no logo' call for a retreat from semiotic productivity, why not an embrace of all the mechanisms of semiotic-libidinal production in the name of a post-capitalist counter-language?*

Which brings us to the word **multiple** – the term 'multiple' referring to an artwork specifically created to be multiplied and distributed.

What we like about the notion of the multiple is the fact that it really breaks down the borders between disciplines. As graphic designers, we have always been interested in movements that tried to achieve the synthesis of art and the everyday – from Dada to Bauhaus, from Constructivism to De Stijl. Within these movements, everyday objects were seen as potential platforms – platforms for aesthetic energy, for conceptual subversion, and for graphic expression.

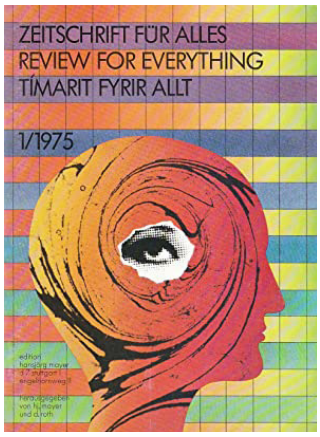
Another way to described the items in this PDF is the word **memorabilia**. What we like about this word is that it describes one of the main functions of items sold in museum stores – their purpose as a souvenir, as a material manifestation of memory.

So that is exactly the way in which we regard the items we're currently working on for Portikus:
As **merchandise** (in the sense that we see these items as an accessible platform for ideas, aesthetics, language).
As **multiples** (in the sense that we view these items as existing in that shadowy overlap between art and the everyday). And lastly, as **memorabilia** (in the sense that these items are rooted in a specific location, and in a specific time).

Section 01.
Merch/Merz/Mersh für Alles
(pages 07–20)

In the first chapter (pages 07–20), we show a set of sketches that refer to two different starting points:

On the one hand, we were looking into the first-ever exhibition at Portikus (the Dieter Roth show, opening on October 1987) – and we were struck by the title of his magazine, 'Zeitschrift für Alles' (ZFA). So we thought it would be interesting to envision a 'Merch für Alles'.



On the other hand, we were thinking about three terms ('Merch', 'Merz', and 'Merch') that share a similar etymology. As we already explained to you all in an earlier e-mail (see February 18, 2022):

Merch obviously comes from 'Merchandise' – and as an abbreviation, is often used for band shirts, tour shirts, etc. At concerts you often find these 'Merch tables' – it's part of the graphic landscape of festivals and rock concerts.

The punk band Fugazi famously had an 'anti-merch' attitude, and refused to make shirts. (They also had a very good song named 'Merchandise', containing the immortal lines "Merchandise, it keeps us in line / common sense says it's by design").

Because the band was so opposed to merchandise, fans (and t-shirt labels) started to create Fugazi bootleg shirts – the most famous one being the "This is not a Fugazi T-shirt" one (which indeed does have a nice René Magritte-like ring). If everything else fails, we can always make a "This is not a Portikus T-shirt" shirt...

Merz is the word that was used by Kurt Schwitters for a lot of his projects ('Merzbau', etc.) – for Schwitters, it was almost a synonym for the word 'Dada'.

The word 'Merz' actually comes from the word 'Kommerz-bank' – it was a snippet of an advertisement that Schwitters once used in a collage.

As it happens, 'Merch' and 'Merz' share etymological roots – both words are related to the Latin '(com-)mercium'...

Mersh is a more obscure word – it was used by the punk band Minutemen. In the band's Marxist/ish jargon, 'Mersh' meant commercial, and 'Econo' meant non-commercial.

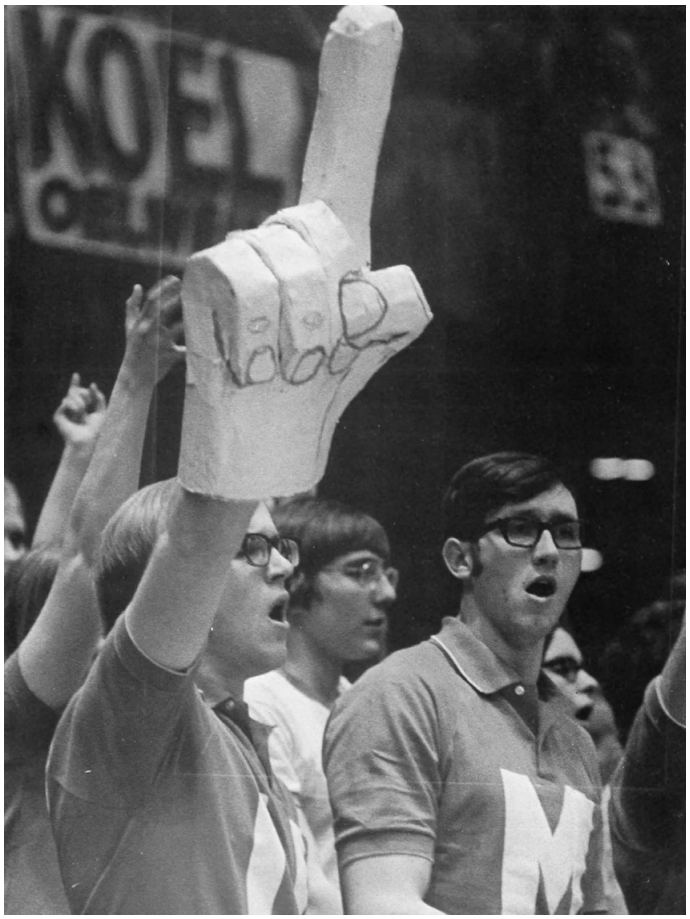


That's why their last album (the self-proclaimed 'sell-out album') was titled 'Project: Mersh'.

For some reason we always thought it would be interesting to develop some objects that would reflect on those very three words: **Merch/Merz/Mersh**

Section 02
Sportikus (or: Pointikus)
(pages 21–40)

While working on the sketches, we became somewhat obsessed with the phenomenon of the 'Foam Finger'. According to Wikipedia, it's a "sports paraphernalia item worn on the hand to show support for a particular team.
[...]
The most common version resembles an oversized hand with an extended index finger. Usually the surface displays a silk-screened team name, logo, or other graphic or slogan, such as 'We Are #1'.
[...]
The first prototype foam finger was created in 1971 by Ottumwa High School student Steve Chmelar, who constructed a giant hand out of hardware cloth and papier-mâché".





Because the ‘foam finger’ is such an iconic piece of fan merchandise, we thought it would be interesting to see how it would fit within the context of Portikus – just for the sake of absurdity.

The way we envision it, images of existing ‘foam fingers’ will be screenprinted on shirts, in a black-and-white, almost photocopied way (a reproduction method referring to that other icon of fandom – the D-I-Y fanzine).

We can then either look into the possibility of a series of shirts displaying hands counting to three (see pages 21–29), referring to the three years that the shirts will be in use. Or we can come up with a series displaying all different kinds of hand signs (pages 30–40).

It’s too bad that foam is so bad for the environment – otherwise we could have made an actual ‘Foam Finger’ (as a 3-D object), shaped like the architecture of Portikus – a red, pointy rooftop/finger.

Either way – we have to say that this idea (the ‘Foam Finger’ concept) is actually our favourite. It’s bold, a bit absurdist, and not too overthought – it’s the kind of shirts that we would love to wear ourselves.

Section 03.
Portikisses
(pages 41–52)

We were thinking about the iconic “I Love NY” shirt (Milton Glaser, 1976) – which functions as a sort of ‘rebus’, the word ‘Love’ being replaced by the symbol of a heart.

Our idea was to come up with something similar for Portikus – so we replaced the letters ‘kus’ (which indeed sounds a bit like the German ‘Kuss’) with a kiss, or a series of kisses.

It’s a bit of a silly idea – then again, one could argue there are ways to link the notion of lipstick to the idea of art.

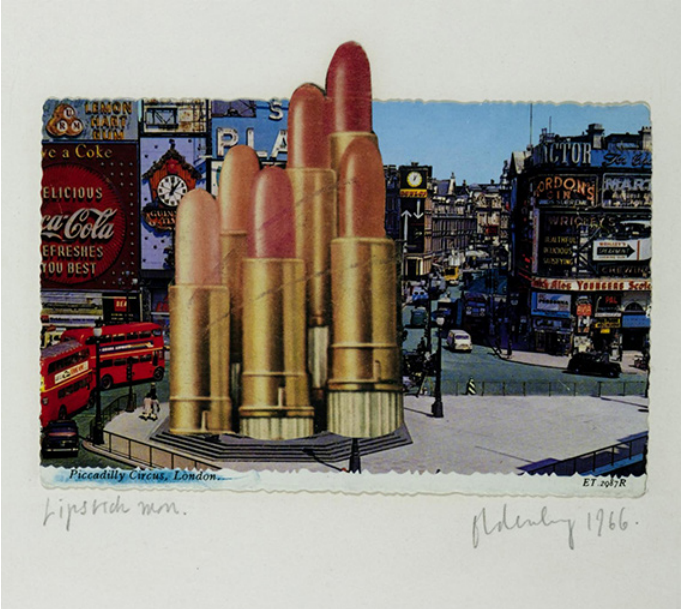
After all, you could say that making these kind of marks is indeed a form of printing, of painting.

Then there’s the Greil Marcus book (‘Lipstick Traces’), and the fact that some artists did indeed work with the shape of lips, lipstick, etc. (for example, Claes Oldenburg’s ‘Lipstick’ collages and sculptures, Marial Raysse’s ‘High Voltage Painting’, etc.).

Not to mention the fact that the Portikus building itself can be seen as a large, pointy lipstick.

We also realised that the remaining letters ‘Porti’ could be read as ‘Por ti’, meaning ‘For you’ in several languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Esperanto, etc.).

So the overall message would be “kisses for you” – in itself quite a sympathetic message.



Still, perhaps it’s all a bit too sweet, too twee.
Or at least, it can be perceived as such.
So perhaps this is not the way to go.
Or perhaps it is.

Curious to hear your thoughts about it.

Section 04.
Merch on Merch
(pages 53–64)

We do like this idea – but we can only show it to you as a series of rough sketches.These sketches only serve to illustrate the general concept – they aren’t meant as the actual designs yet.

In short, the idea that we had was as follows:

Photos of merchandise, printed on merchandise.

In other words, a photographic image of a tote-bag, printed on a t-shirt. And a photographic image of a t-shirt, printed on a tote-bag. Or a photographic image of a mug, printed on a baseball hat. And a photographic image of a baseball hat, printed on a mug.

So it becomes merch about merch – ‘meta-merch’, so to speak.

In this chapter, we tried to demonstrate this idea – by way of some quick collages, and some even quicker graphic sketches. But if this is indeed a direction we would like to explore further, we can make more refined (and more photographic) sketches.

Conclusion

Obviously, we are not there yet – and there are still some matters that we have to explore further. But we do hope this set of sketches will clarify some of our ideas, and point to some exciting possible directions.

We are curious to hear your thoughts about these sketches – and we’ll continue working on them soon!

Experimental Jetset
Amsterdam
June 12, 2022

Portikus MERCH FÜR ALLES

After Dieter Roth, Zeitschrift für Alles – 1975

Portikus MERCH FÜR ALLES

After Dieter Roth, Zeitschrift für Alles – 1975

Portikus

MERCH
MERZ
MERSH

After Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau – 1920
After Minutemen, Project Mersh – 1985
After Fugazi, Merchandise – 1990


Portikus
MERSH
MERZ
MERCH
After Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau – 1920
After Minutemen, Project Mersh – 1985
After Fugazi, Merchandise – 1990

Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Portikus

Multiples / Merchandise
Page 11



Portikus

MERCH FÜR ALLES

After Dieter Roth, Zeitschrift für Alles – 1975

Portikus

MERCH
MERZ
MERSH

After Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau – 1920
After Minutemen, Project Mersh – 1985
After Fugazi, Merchandise – 1990

MERSH
MERZ
MERCH

Portikus

After Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau – 1920
After Minutemen, Project Mersh – 1985
After Fugazi, Merchandise – 1990

After Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau – 1920
After Minutemen, Project Mersh – 1985
After Fugazi, Merchandise – 1990

MERCH
MERZ
MERSH

Portikus


Portikus
MERSH
MERZ
MERCH
After Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau – 1920
After Minutemen, Project Mersh – 1985
After Fugazi, Merchandise – 1990


Portikus
MERCH
MERZ
MERSH
After Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau – 1920
After Minutemen, Project Mersh – 1985
After Fugazi, Merchandise – 1990

Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches





Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Sportikus

Multiples / Merchandise
Page 22




PORTIKUS
#1
FRANKFURT


PORTIKUS
#2
FRANKFURT


G
GAZYVA®
obinutuzumab
Developed by Powerhouse Penzberg


GO
FOR
IT
3RD
TIME'S
A CHARM!


PORTIKUS
#3
FRANKFURT


4
TIME
CHAMPS
BULLDOGS


TAKE IT
TO THE
NET

Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Front

Sportikus

Multiples / Merchandise
Page 30




MAININSEL
ALTE BRÜCKE 2,
FRANKFURT AM
MAIN, DE–60594
+49 69 96244540

Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Sportikus

Multiples / Merchandise
Page 32




PORTIKUS
1


PORTIKUS
1
FRANKFURT


#1
LOVE
THOSE
FALCONS!


GO
FROGS!


PORTIKUS
2
FRANKFURT


PORTIKUS
3
FRANKFURT


'BIGLOVE'
UB40


Porti


Porti


Porti


Porti
For
You


Porti

Porti

Kelly

Paik



Roth


Porti
Oldenburg
Ono
LeWitt


Porti
X


Porti
2022
2023
2024

Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Portikus

Multiples / Merchandise
Page 50



Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Portikus

Multiples / Merchandise



Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Portikus

Multiples / Merchandise





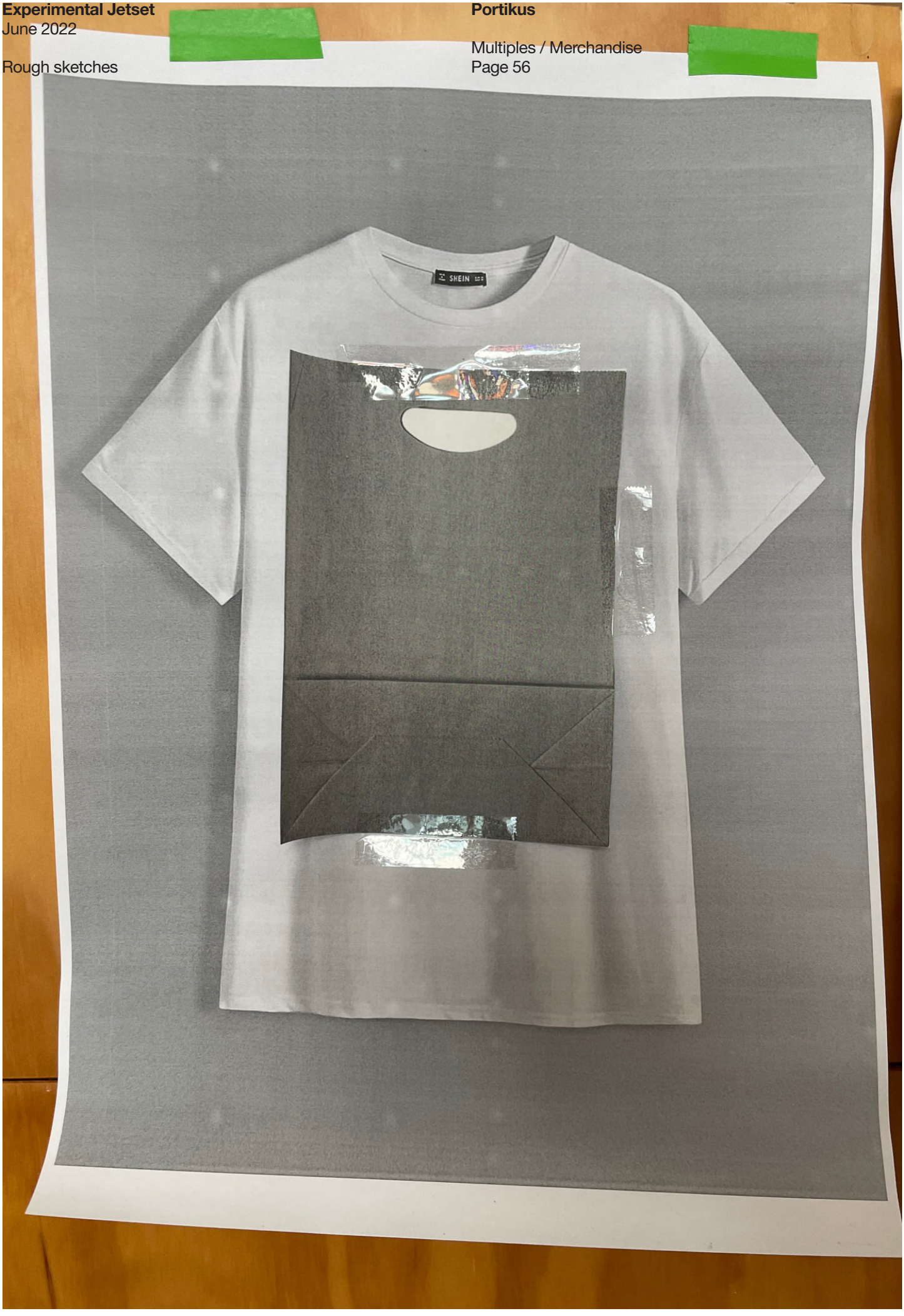


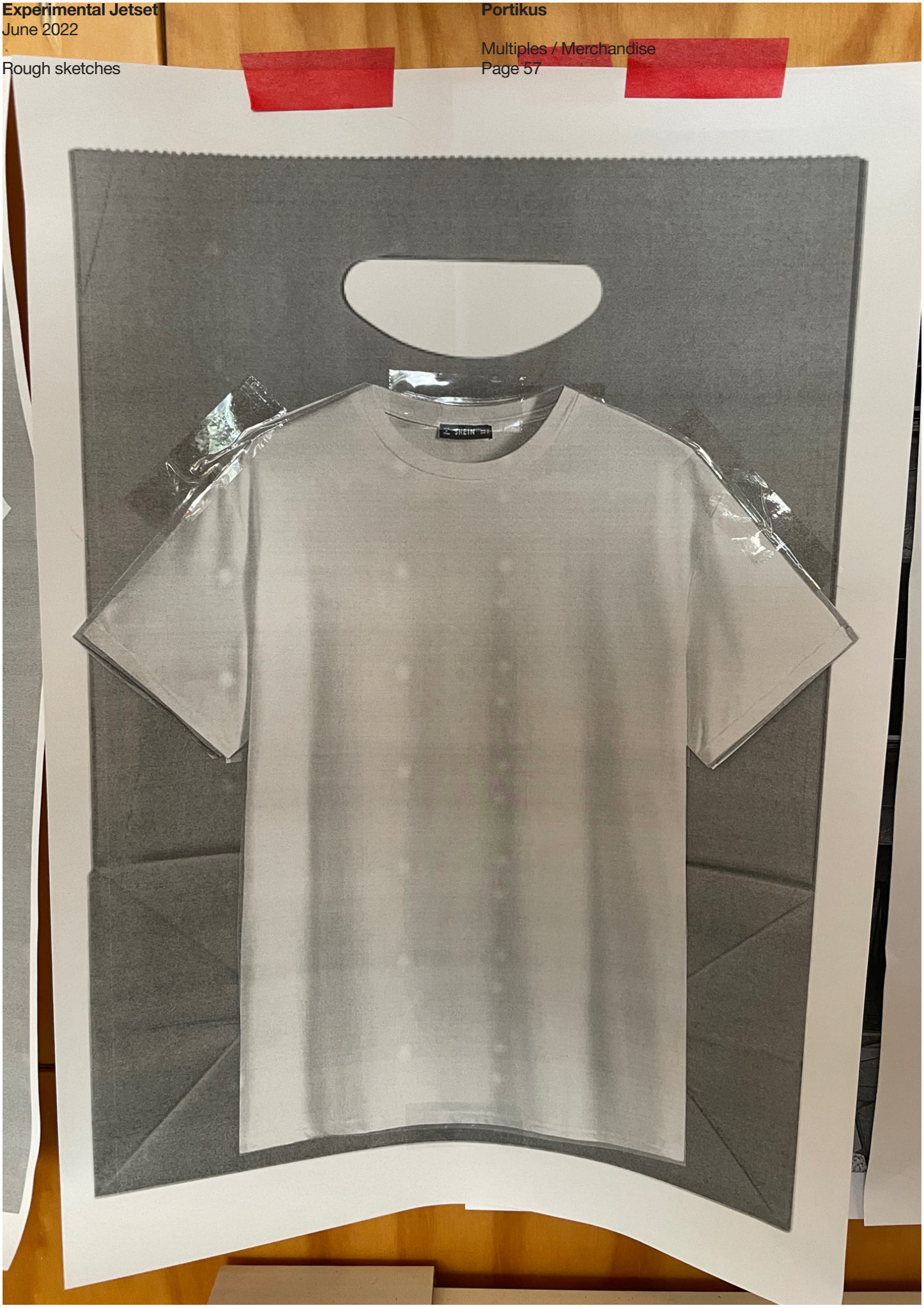
Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Portikus

Multiples / Merchandise
Page 56

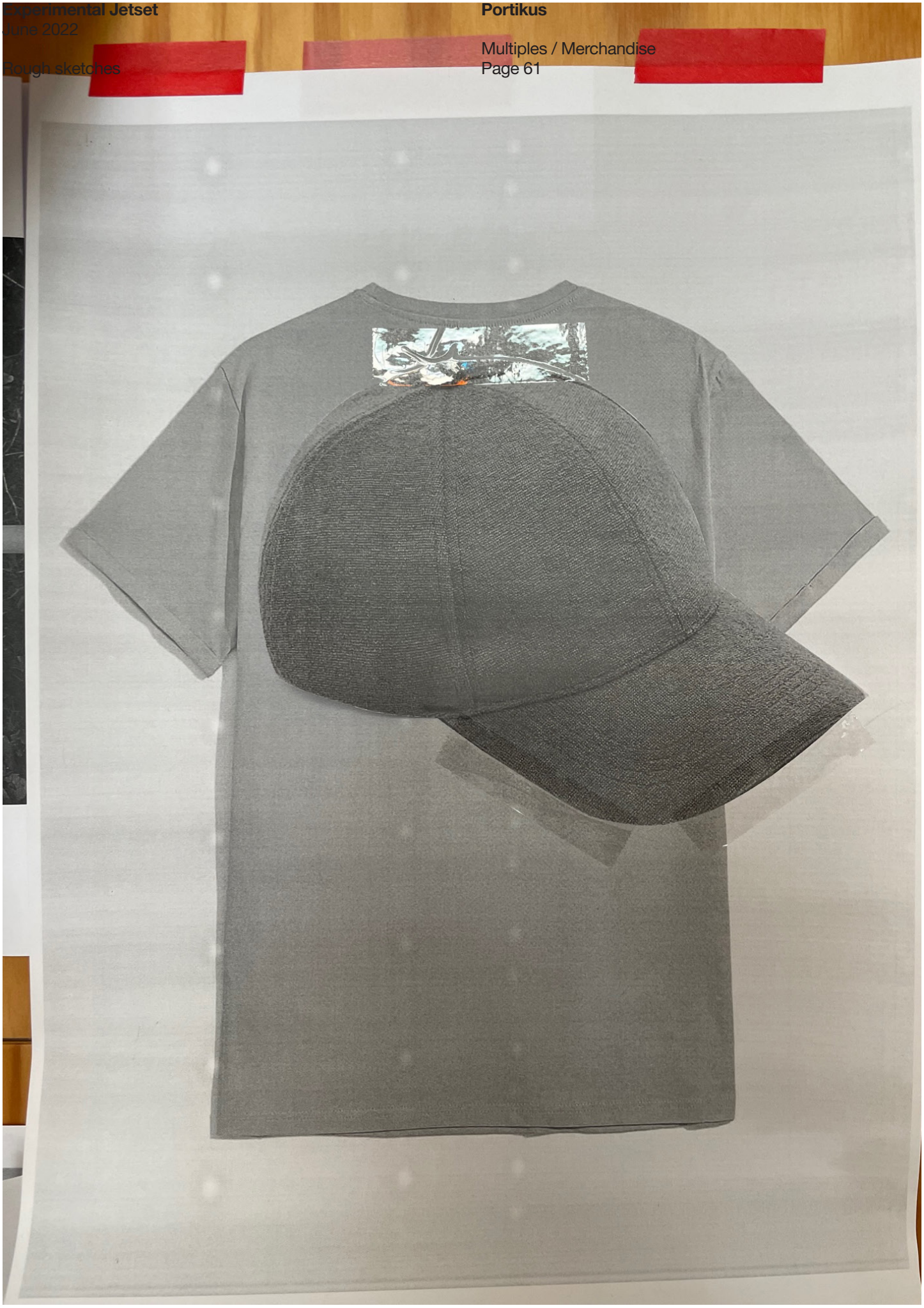





PORTIKUS


PORTIKUS






PORTIKUS

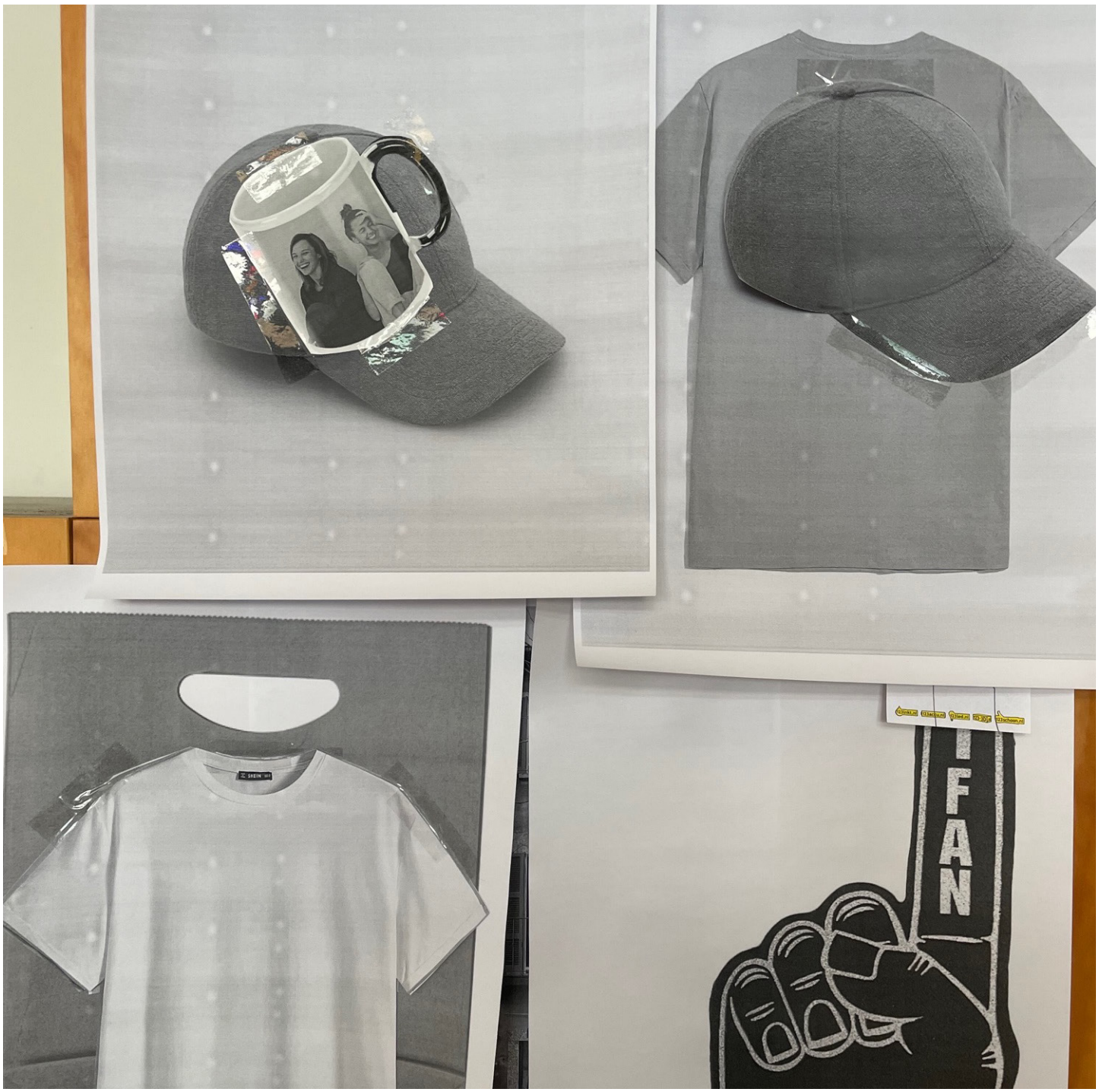

PORTIKUS

Experimental Jetset
June 2022

Rough sketches

Portikus

Multiples / Merchandise





Portikus ALLES MERCH