

All American

BY
Ganzeer



curated by
Shiva Balaghi

Cultural historian of the Middle East,
curator & art lover

showing at
**Leila Heller
Gallery**

568 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001

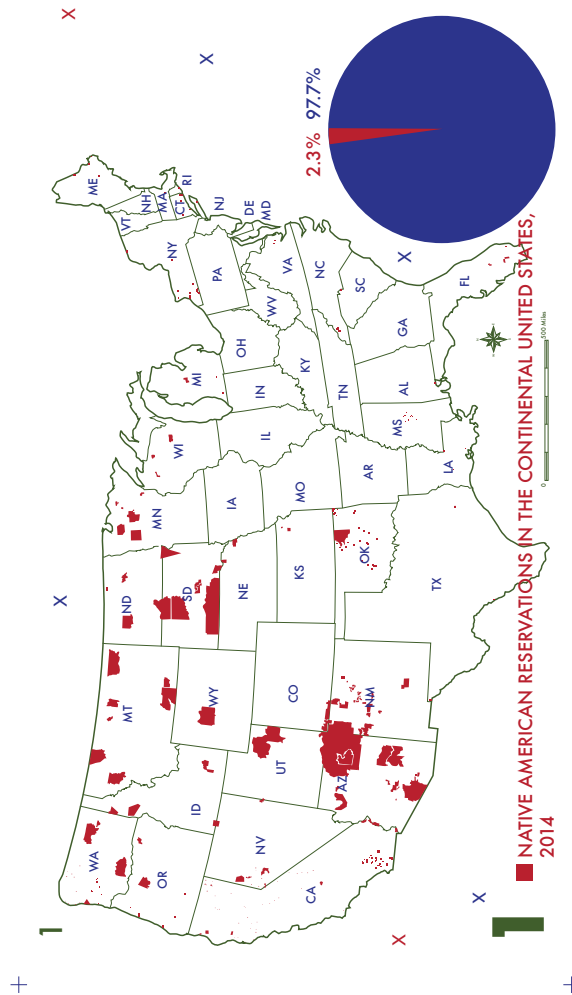
Opening
**January 16, 2015
from 6-8pm**

Through February 21st, 2015



LISTEN, FELLAS.

WHEN THE
PRESIDENT
DOES IT, IT IS
NOT
ILLEGAL.



CURATING GANZEER'S ALL AMERICAN EXHIBITION

BY SHIVA BALAGHI, PH.D.

Ganzeer will tell you he's not a street artist, though he created some of the most iconic street art of Egypt's recent revolution. He'll tell you he's not an author, though he writes prolifically about art and politics. He'll tell you he's not a comicbook artist, though he's famously rendered ordinary Egyptians into superheroes. He'll tell you he's not a speaker, though he regularly speaks to packed rooms in Bahrain, Berlin, and Brooklyn. He'll tell you he's not a videographer, though his recent video "Volcano" inspired by a U2 song has received rave reviews. It seems to me that Ganzeer is most comfortable being defined by what he's been for the past decade—an artist.

And though he's been written about as one of Egypt's leading artist, Ganzeer's art crosses borders. For Theatrefestival Basel 2012, he focused on the politics of Swiss arms exports, creating a street mural with "infographics" detailing Swiss arms sales to the US alongside the rate of US deaths by gunshot violence. When he was commissioned to paint a mural in Adilya, Bahrain in February 2014, he made a monumental work that shed light on the country's minority cultures and the ways they build the country and help shape its identity. And so it's natural that for his first US solo exhibition, Ganzeer has focused his keen eye on life in America.

For some years, I'd been teaching about Ganzeer's art in my art history seminar "War, Revolution, and Art," at Brown University. Students drew on his work in our debates on the role of art during revolutionary times. Some of Egypt's leading artists and writers were part of the protests in Tahrir Square. Some, like Huda Lutfi, moved between the square and the studio, making critically important art that documented and archived the revolutionary moment. Ganzeer stayed in the street—making wall murals and distributing posters. He absorbed it all—the slogans that reflected longstanding grievances and the pushback against the revolution from various groups.

Unit

Code Section 32-6-51;

(2) On any private property unless the owner thereof or the occupier as authorized by such owner has given permission to place such posters, signs, or advertisements on such property; and, provided, further that no municipal, county, or consolidated government may restrict by regulation or other means the length of time a political campaign sign may be displayed or the number of signs which may be displayed on private property for which permission has been granted; or

(3) On any property zoned for commercial or industrial uses if the placement of such posters, signs, or advertisements conflicts with any zoning ordinances.

It all fed into Ganzeer's art and his ideas about the relationship between art and politics in important ways. In an essay published in the summer of 2014, Ganzeer articulated his idea of Concept Pop. The strength of revolutionary street art, he argued, was that it was "void of the artist's ego" and that it tackled "concerns of your average Egyptian. It is these qualities that are finding their way into the works of conceptual artists and resulting in this new thing called Concept Pop." Ganzeer's pseudonym means a bicycle chain; art can become a link in society, a circular chain that both reflects and propels ideas.

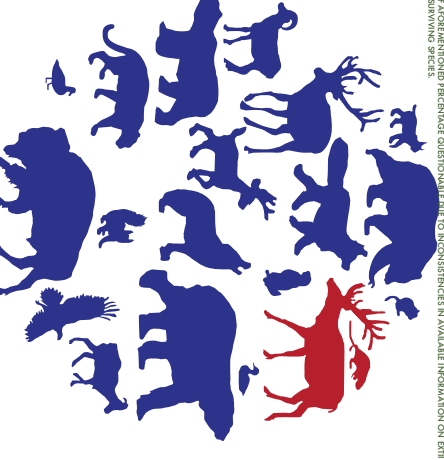
As Ganzeer and I began talking about working together on a show of his art at Leila Heller Gallery this past June, these ideas played a central in shaping the concept of the exhibition. The process has given me a fascinating perspective on Ganzeer's art practice. Ganzeer's approach is deeply immersive, and making art is central to the way he understands and explains the places he inhabits. From the very start of his time in the US, he framed his point of view with regular Instagram photos. Before he'd even found an apartment or a studio he could call his own, he'd found a printmaker in Brooklyn to work with. And he reads, deeply. Recently, he posted a picture of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* on his tumblr and commented, "There's at least one thing that blows my mind on each page of this 700+ page book."

"All American by Ganzeer" is a playful and sometimes disturbing look at the quotidian and the political. Ganzeer has been exploring American iconography, decentering it, and drawing visual and political connections across time and space. The exhibit also reflects his perpetual experimentation with new artistic forms. His prints are deliberate and extemporaneous, layering ideas and mixing references—deconstructing and destabilizing images and then reframing them it into something altogether different.

Early in our process, Ganzeer conceived the idea for the installation of this exhibition. He has not just made the art but shaped the way the viewer will experience his art within the gallery walls. As you walk through the maze created by walls of his prints, you will see images cast and recast, references from other political movements weaving their way throughout his work, accentuated by particular moments manifested in larger mixed media works. And in the 11th Avenue windows of the gallery, you will see Ganzeer extending his artistic intervention into the streets that have helped shape his work. In a way, **this exhibition is a visual diary of Ganzeer's first experience of living in the US.**







A VERY LONG TIME AGO, WHEN SCRIBES WERE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN, THEIR ABILITY TO SPELL WAS CONSIDERED NO LESS THAN A MAGICIAN'S ABILITY TO CAST SPELLS. THE ABUNDANCE OF READERS AND WRITERS TODAY, HOWEVER, DOES NOT MAKE THE POWER OF THE WORD ANY LESS POWERFUL. SO WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THE NATIVE AMERICAN MAN WHEN A) THE LAND STOLEN FROM HIS ANCESTORS IS REFEREED TO AS AMERICA. AND 3) HE IS REFERRED TO AS AN INDIAN. THUS IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT SOME NATIVE AMERICANS STILL REFER TO THIS GREAT CONTINENT AS "ANOWARKOWA," OR "TURTLE ISLAND" (IN REFERENCE TO ITS SHAPE), WHILE OTHERS CALL IT "INA MAKA" WHICH TRANSLATES TO MOTHER EARTH.



United States,

"There will probably be no change in America until the country's underprivileged do what English colonialists feared in the 1700's: create a union between the Indians, the negroes, and persons of mean and vile condition."

...ing at the time of their adopting the Constitution expressed a desire is
... the ground of public confidence in the Government, will best ensure the
... of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assem
... to the Constitution of the United States, all, or any of which Articles, wher

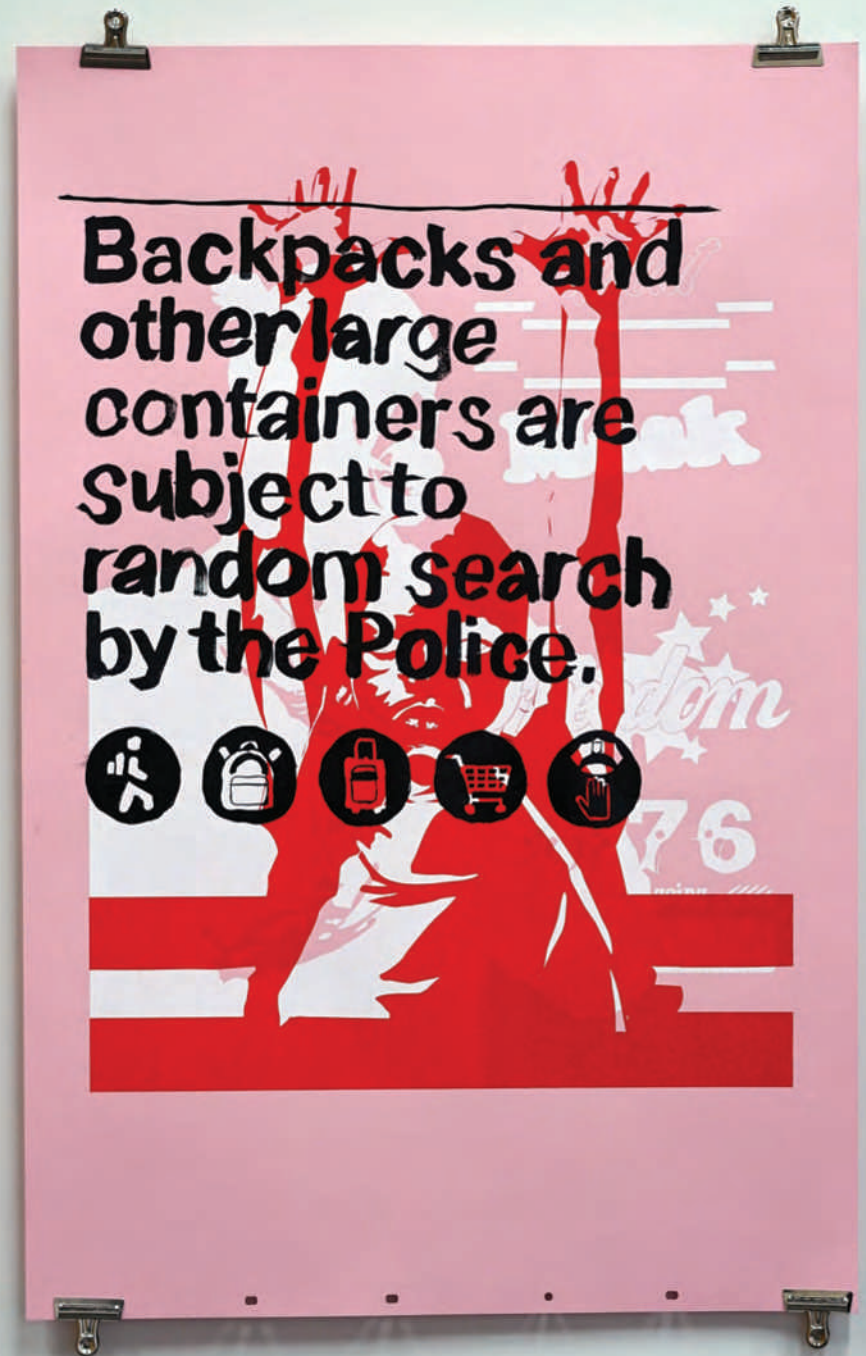
...t of the Constitution of the United States of America, proposed by Congr

...e one Representative for every thirty thousand, until the number shall
... than hundred Representatives, nor less than one Representa



**“Yo she be the type of bitch you’d see
on Instagram and be like hot damn, but
then you meet up with her and meh.”**

- Overheard on the L train

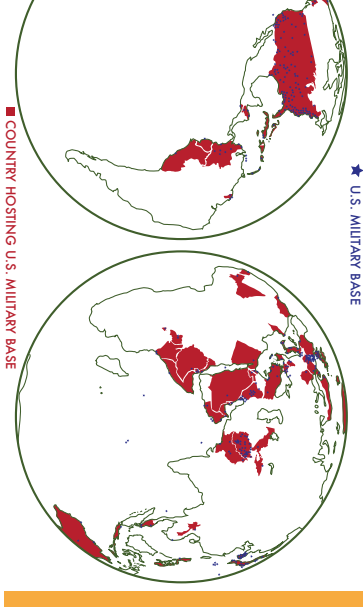


by the Police.



WHAT IS THE PENALTY FOR ANYONE WHO
PUTS HIS FEET ON THE GROUND?





In Egypt, the question is always
"What is your religion?"

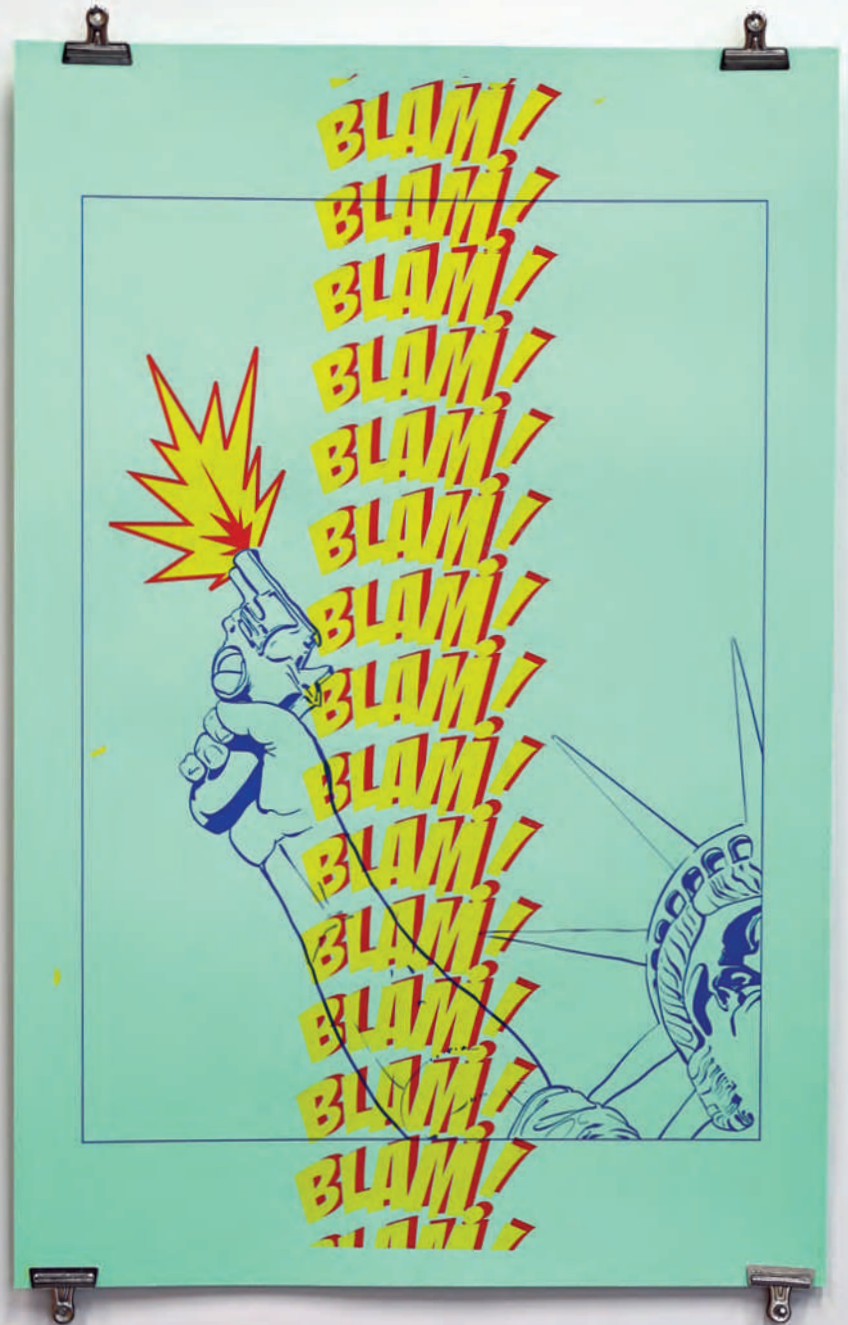
In America, it is always
"What's your religion?" and
"What's your race?"

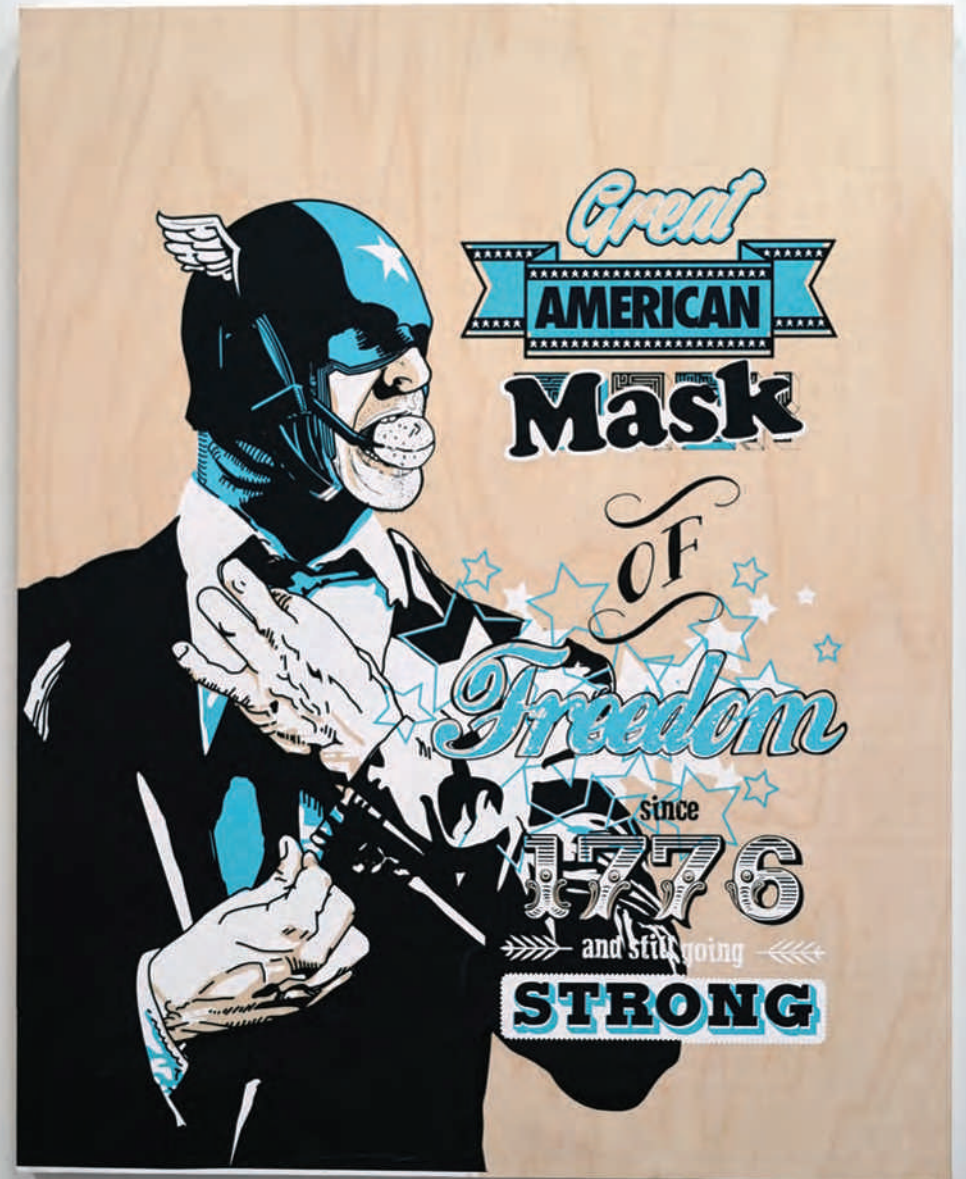
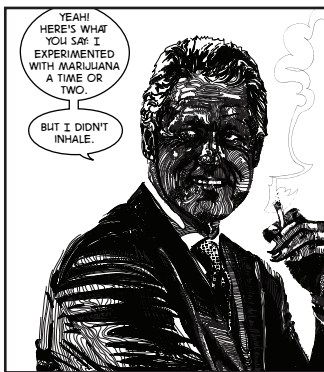
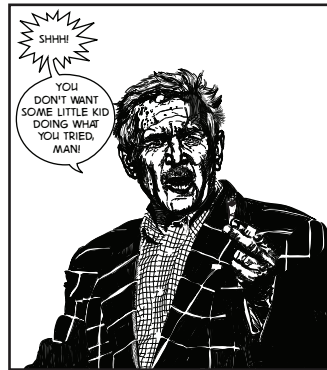


**Sometimes it seems
like what we're longing
to achieve are qualities
associated with cultures
we've long wiped out.**



Slavery has been proclaimed dead for a very long time now, but how many of us are working jobs we do not want or care for? And what is the essence of slavery if not being forced to perform a job you do not want which entails working hours you do not decide? It would seem to me that this proclamation that slavery is dead is as real as the proclamation that "the Egyptian Revolution has succeeded."





“THE
PRIMITIVE
ACCUMULATION
OF CAPITAL.”

— KARL MARX



NOT EVERY
REVOLUTIONARY
PERSON IS
NECESSARILY A
GOOD PERSON. TAKE
NATHANIEL BACON
FOR EXAMPLE, WHO IN
1676 LEAD A REBELLION
COMPRISED OF BLACK
SLAVES AND WHITE
SERVANTS AGAINST
THE COLONIALISTS.
HE WAS PRACTICALLY
AMERICA'S ROBIN
HOOD, EXCEPT HE WAS
A ROBIN HOOD WHO,
WHILE FIGHTING FOR
THE POOR, WAS ALSO
KEEN ON WIPING OUT
THE NATIVES OF THE
CONTINENT.

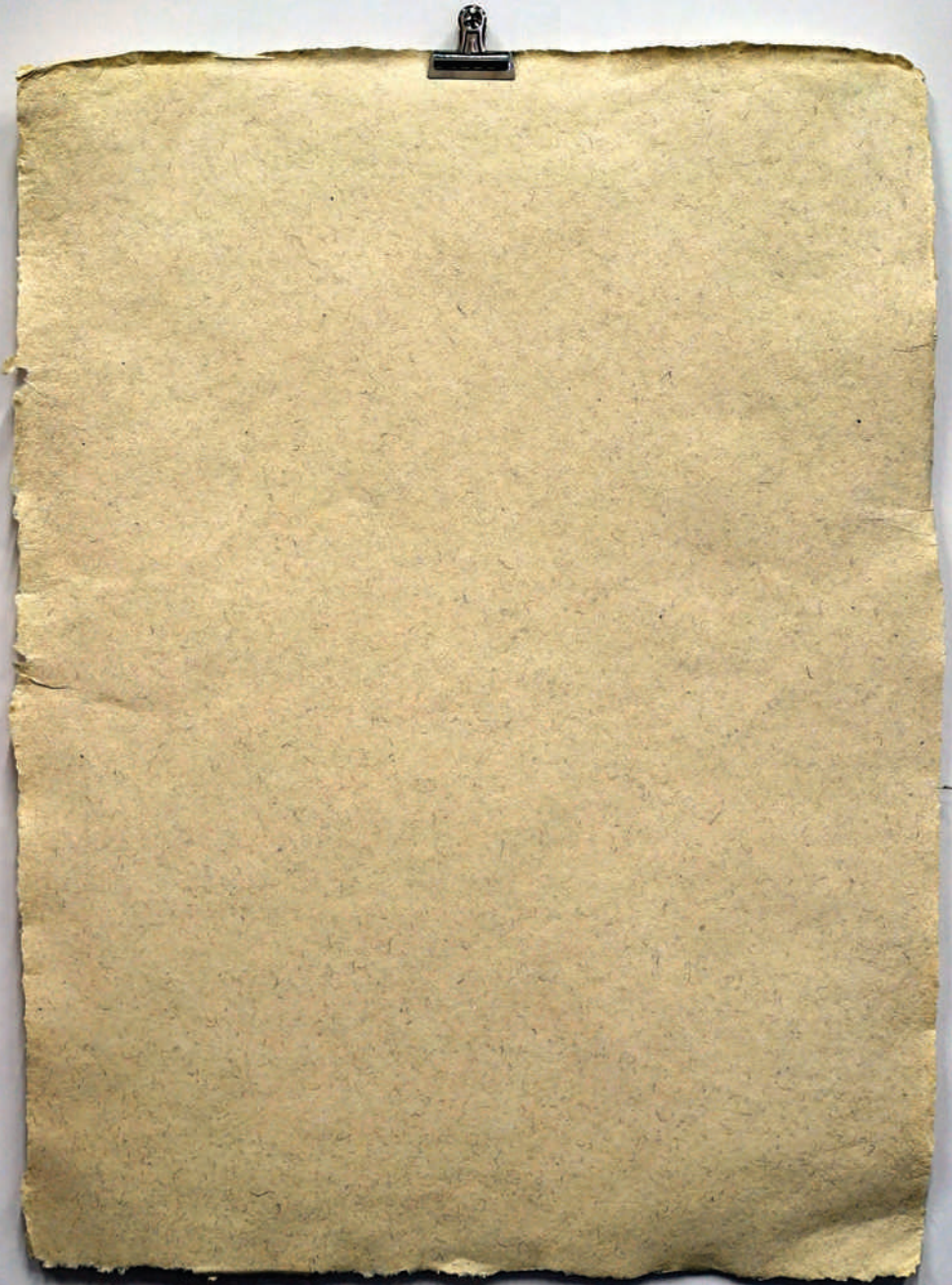




"THERE'S LITTLE MORE DIVISIVE THAN MODERN ART-MOST TAKE A STAUNCH 'BRILLIANCE' OR 'BULLSHIT' STANCE. SO IT SHOULD COME AS A SURPRISE THAT THE STRAIGHT-LACED FEDS AT THE CIA LEANED TOWARD THE FORMER CAMP-OR AT LEAST SAW IT AS BRILLIANTLY EXPLOITABLE IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR AGAINST THE SOVIETS. REPORTS FROM FORMER AGENTS ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT WAS ALWAYS A TALL TALE IN THE ART WORLD-THAT CIA SPOOKS FLOATED PIONEERING ARTISTS LIKE JACKSON POLLOCK, WILLEM DE KOONING, AND ROBERT MOTHERWELL, TO DROP AN AESTHETIC NUKE ON COMMUNISM. WHAT SEEMED LIKE NATURAL POPULARITY OF CERTAIN ARTISTS WAS, IN PART, ACTUALLY A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT AT PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE, BACKED BY THE US GOVERNMENT.

"BUT WHY MODERN ART? AT THE TIME PERIOD IN QUESTION- THE 1950S AND 60S-THE ARTISTIC STYLE OF THE MOMENT WAS ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM. ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM (OR ABEX, IF YOU WANT TO IMPRESS PEOPLE AT YOUR NEXT SNOOTY COCKTAIL PARTY) STOOD FOR, ABOVE ALL ELSE, SELF EXPRESSION."
- SAM BIDDLE, GIZMODO

SO WHEN IF YOU THOUGHT THERE WAS ANY KIND OF NEUTRALITY IN AVOIDING HAVING ANY KIND OF POLITICAL STANCE WITH YOUR ART, THINK AGAIN. IT WILL BE USED TO SERVE ONE STANCE OR ANOTHER WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT.





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Catalogue design by Demetra Georgiou
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BY 1770, THE TOP 1% OF PROPERTY OWNERS OWNED 44% OF WEALTH IN AMERICA. IN 2007, THE RICHEST 1% OF THE AMERICAN POPULATION OWNED 34.6% OF THE COUNTRY'S TOTAL WEALTH.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED IN AMERICA SINCE THE 1700'S.