

MR. PRESIDENT

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Mr.
President

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Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 2007901204
ISBN: 9780910763349

Text was set in Adobe® Trade Gothic on Centura Matte 100 lb. text.
800 copies were printed on a Heidelberg Speedmaster offset press
by New York Press & Graphics, Albany, New York.

Designer: Zheng Hu
Editor: Jeanne Finley

This catalogue was supported by the Office of the President and the
Office of the Provost.

Cover: Lyn Foulkes
Washingtonland (detail), 2006
40 x 40 inches
Oil and acrylic on wood panel
Courtesy of Kent Gallery, New York

Mr. President

January 18 – April 1, 2007

Curators:

JoAnne Carson

Corinna Ripps Schaming

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM

University at Albany, State University of New York

INTRODUCTION

Mr. President brings together over fifty-eight portraits of United States presidents by thirty-two contemporary artists. The works range from sincere homage and playful caricature to irreverent commentary and biting satire. The artists represented look beyond stereotypes, myth, and iconic notions to provide an alternative view that reveals much about presidential power and personalities, but also a great deal about ourselves. Subverting the traditional portrait genre, they have taken the subject of presidents as a platform from which to launch their keen observations on American history, values, and aspirations. We are grateful to these artists for revealing so much to us with work that is beautiful, witty, and wise.

An exhibition of this scope comes together through the combined goodwill, enthusiasm, and plain hard work of many people. At times fun, frustrating, cause for celebration, and soul-searching, the process is the effort of many hands, and the product is always larger than the sum of its parts. We are sincerely grateful to the lending artists, galleries, and individual collectors who responded generously and eagerly to our requests for loans. Without their cooperation, the exhibition would not have been possible.

Co-curators JoAnne Carson, Professor of Studio Art and chair of the University at Albany Art Department, and Corinna Ripps Schaming, Associate Director and curator of the University Art Museum, approached the challenging theme with great joy and rigor. They honed an enormous body of work into a provocative exhibition filled with humor and insight that gives voice (in true democratic spirit) to multiple perspectives. Many thanks go to Lynne Tillman,

University at Albany professor and writer in residence, who has honored us with *Madame Realism's Conscience*, an original short story for this publication.

We are deeply grateful to Susan Herbst, Officer in Charge, Provost, and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, whose early enthusiasm for the project spurred us on; and to William Hedberg, Associate Vice President, and Melinda Spencer, Vice Provost for Administration and Planning, for their interest and support of the exhibition throughout its development. The ongoing support of the Office of the President and the Office of the Provost has been critical to the museum's success in this and all museum projects.

Giving substance to idea, the museum's exhibition team performed its tasks with diligence and inspired expertise: Naomi Lewis served as registrar for the project, and Jeffrey Wright-Sedam as preparator. Both were ably assisted by Darcie Abbatiello. Zheng Hu brought his talents to the design of the exhibition and this exhibition catalogue. Joanne Lue and Patricia VanAlstyne provided administrative oversight on a day-to-day basis throughout the project. Our esteemed colleagues in the collections area, Wren Panzella and Ryan Parr, were supportive and accommodating.

Special thanks go to those individuals, foundations, and corporations who have supported the University Art Museum over the past year. They have invested in our future through their contributions and graced our efforts with their encouragement. We are deeply grateful.

Janet Riker
Director

Madame Realism's Conscience

Lynne Tillman

"Whatever it is, I'm against it."

—Groucho Marx, *Horse Feathers*

Way past adolescence, Madame Realism's teenaged fantasies survived, thought-bubbles in which she talked with Hadrian about the construction of his miraculous wall or Mary Queen of Scots right before the Catholic queen was beheaded. Madame Realism occasionally fronted a band or conversed with a president, for instance, Bill Clinton, who appeared to deny no one an audience. Could she have influenced him to change his course of action or point of view? Even in fantasy, that rarely happened. She persevered, though. At a state dinner thought-bubble, Madame Realism whispered to Laura Bush, "Tell him not to be stubborn. Pride goeth before a fall." Laura looked into the distance and nodded absent-mindedly.

Over the years, Madame Realism had heard many presidential rumors, some of which were confirmed by historians: Eisenhower had a mistress; Mamie was a drunk; Lincoln suffered from melancholia; Mary Lincoln attended seances; Roosevelt's mistress, not Eleanor, was by his side when he died; Eleanor was a lesbian; Kennedy, a satyr; Jimmy Carter, arrogant; Nancy Reagan made sure that Ronnie, after being shot, took daily naps. When Betty Ford went public with her addictions and breast cancer, she became a hero, but Gerald Ford will be remembered primarily for what he didn't do or say. He didn't put Nixon on trial; and, he denied even a whiff of pressure on him to pardon the disgraced president. Ford's secrets have died with him, but maybe Betty knows.

The Pope, President Clinton, Henry Kissinger, and an Eagle Scout were on a plane, and it was losing altitude, about to crash. But there were only three parachutes. President Clinton said, "I'm the most powerful leader in the Free World. I have to live," and he took a parachute and jumped out. Henry Kissinger said, "I'm the smartest man in the world. I have to live," and he jumped out. The Pope said, "Dear boy, please take the last parachute, I'm an old man." The Eagle Scout said, "Don't worry, there are two left. The smartest man in the world jumped out with my backpack."



Rachel Mason
Kissing President Bush, 2004
Plaster
72 x 36 x 24 inches
Collection of Melva Bucksbaum and
Raymond Learsy

Whatever power was, it steamrolled behind the scenes and kept to its own rarefied company, since over-exposure vitiated its effects. So, when a president came to town, on a precious visit, people wanted to hear and see him, but they also wanted to be near him. They stretched out their arms and thrust their bodies forward, elbowing their way through the crush for a nod or smile; they waved books in front of him for his autograph, dangled their babies for a kiss, and longed for a pat on the back or a handshake. Madame Realism had listened to people say they'd remember this moment for the rest of their days, the commander in chief, so charismatic and handsome. And, as fast as he had arrived, the president vanished, whisked away by the Secret Service, who surrounded him, until at the door of Air Force One, he turned, smiled, and waved to them one last time.

Without access to power's hidden manifestations, visibility is tantamount to reality, a possible explanation for the authority of images. Everyone comprised a kind of display case or cabinet of curiosities and became an independent, unbidden picture. Madame Realism dreaded this particular involuntarism; but interiority and subjectivity were invisible, they were not statements. Your carriage, clothes, weight, height, hair style, and expression told their story, and what you appeared to be was as much someone else's creation as yours.

You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

If the President of the United States—POTUS, to any “West Wing” devotee—dropped his guard, power itself shed a layer of skin. Even cognizant of that, one of the great politicians of the 20th century, Lyndon Baines Johnson, called out to visitors while he was on the toilet. Suddenly, Madame Realism took shape nearby, and seeing a visitor's embarrassment, she shouted to the president, “Hey, what's up with that?” LBJ laughed mischievously.

It gave her an idea: maybe he had consciously made himself the butt of the joke, before others could. A Beltway jokewriter had once said that self-deprecating humor was essential for presidents, though Johnson's comic spin was extreme and made him into a bathroom joke. Presidential slips of the tongue, accidents and mishaps supposedly humanized the anointed, but the unwitting clowns still wielded power. Laughter was aimed at the mighty to level the playing field, but who chose the field? To her, the jokes also zeroed in on powerlessness; and, Madame Realism trusted in their uneven and topsy-turvy honesty. To defame, derogate, offend, satirize, parody, or exaggerate was not to lie, because in humor's province, other truths govern.

“Any American who is prepared to run for President should automatically, by definition, be disqualified from ever doing so.”

—Gore Vidal

She herself followed, whenever possible, G.K. Chesterton's adage: “For views I look out of the window, my opinions I keep to myself.” But presidents were nothing if not opinions, and, at any moment, they had to give one. Maybe since they were kids, they had wished and vied for importance, to pronounce and pontificate, and they had to be right or they'd die. The public hoped for a strong, honest leader, but more and more it grew skeptical of buzz and hype, of obfuscation passing as answer, of politicians' lies. Yet who one called a liar conformed to party of choice.

Some people are talking, and one of them says, “All Republicans are assholes.”

Another says, “Hey, I resent that!”

First person says, “Why, are you a Republican?”

Second person answers, “No, I'm an asshole!”

Some jokes were all-purpose, for any climate. Madame Realism first heard the asshole joke about lawyers, but most proper nouns would fit, from Democrats to plumbers, teachers to artists. Jokes could be indiscriminate about their subjects, since the only necessity was a good punchline that confronted expectation with surprise, puncturing belief, supposition, or image.

“Mr. Bush's popularity has taken some serious hits in recent months, but the new survey marks the first time that over fifty percent of respondents indicated that they wished the president was a figment of their imagination.”

—Andy Borowitz, *The Borowitz Report*

Her fantasies often skewered Madame Realism, threw her for a loop, but at times they fashioned her as the host of a late-night talk show, when, like Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, she held the best hand. Madame Realism imagined questioning presidential also-rans, who had sacrificed themselves on the altar of glory and ambition—Al Gore, John Kerry, the ghost of Adlai Stevenson. Suddenly Adlai stated, out of nowhere, “JFK never forgave me, you know, for not supporting him at the Democratic convention.” Then a familiar, haunted look darkened his brown eyes, and pathos quickly soured their banter. Pathos didn't fly on late-night TV.

Anyone but an action hero understood that even a rational decision or intelligent tactic might awaken unforeseen forces equipped with their own anarchic armies, and some presidents agonized under mighty power's heft. In portraits of him, Abraham Lincoln morphed from eager Young Abe, saucy, wry candidate for Congress from Illinois, to a father overwhelmed with sadness at his young son's death, to a gravely depressed man, the president who took the nation to its only civil war. Madame Realism treasured soulful Abraham Lincoln, because he appeared available to her contemporary comprehension, a candidate ripe for psychoanalysis. She pictured speaking kindly to him, late at night, after Mary had gone to sleep, the White House dead and dark, when words streamed from him, and, as he talked about his early days, his ravaged face lit up, remembering life's promise.

What do you call Ann Coulter and Jerry Falwell in the front seat of a car?
Two airbags.

In the 19th century, even Thomas Carlyle believed "all that a man does is physiognomical of him." A face revealed a person's character and disposition, and, if skilled in reading it, like physiognomists who were its natural science proponents, why human beings acted the way they did could be discerned. Also, their future behavior might be predicted. Criminals and the insane, especially, were analyzed, because the aberrant worried the normal, and, consequently, deranged minds had to be isolated from so-called sane ones. The sane felt crazy around the insane.

Though face-reading as a science had gone the way of believing the world was flat—poor Galileo!—facial expressions dominated human beings' reactions; each instinctively examined the other for evidence of treachery, doubt, love, fear, and anger. Defeat and success etched an ever-changing portrait of the aging face that, unlike Dorian Gray's, mutated in plain sight. Animals relied on their senses for survival, but beauty made all fools, democratically. And though it is constantly asserted that character is revealed by facial structure and skin, plastic surgery's triumphal march through society must designate new standards. For instance, Madame Realism asked herself, how do you immediately judge, on what basis, a person's character after five facelifts?

"Images are the brood of desire."

—George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Before appearing on TV, politicians were commanded: don't move around too much in your chair, don't be too animated, you'll look crazy, don't touch your face or hair, don't

flail your arms, don't point your finger. Their handlers advised them: keep to your agenda, make your point not theirs. The talking heads tried to maintain their pose and composure, but these anointed figures faltered in public, and, with the ubiquity of cameras, their every wink, smirk, awkwardness, or mistake was recorded and broadcast on the Internet, the worse the better.

At a political leadership forum led by his son, Jeb Bush, former President Bush wept when he spoke about Jeb's losing the 1994 governorship of Florida. Madame Realism took a seat next to him after he returned to the table, still choked up. "Did you cry," she asked, "because you wish Jeb were president, not your namesake?" President Bush ignored her for the rest of the evening.

Why are presidents so short?
So senators can remember them.

A happy few were born to be poker-faced. A rare minority suffered from a disease called prosopagnosia, or face blindness; the Greek *prosopon* means face, and agnosia is the medical term for recognition. An impairment destroys the brain's ability to recognize faces, which usually happens after a trauma to it; but if the disease is developmental or genetic, and occurs before a person's awareness that faces can be differentiated, sufferers never know that it is ordinary to distinguish them. They see no noses, eyes, lips, but a blur, a cloudy, murky space above the neck. What is their life like? Their world? How do they manage? But she couldn't embody their experience, not even in fantasy.

He wants power
He has power
He wants more
And his country will break in his hands,
Is breaking now.

—Alkaios, ca. 600 BC, from *Pure Pagan*, translated by Burton Raffel

Those who ran for president, presumably, hungered for power, to rule over others, like others might want sex, a Jaguar, or a baby. Winning drives winners, and maybe losers, too, Madame Realism considered. Power, that's what it's all about, everyone always remarked. But why did some want to lead armies and others want to lead a Girl Scout troop, or nothing much at all? With power, you get your way all the time.

She wanted her way, she knew she couldn't get it all the time, but how far would



Geoffrey Chadsey
Retreat, 2005
Watercolor pencil on Mylar
35 ½ x 47 inches
Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Madame Realism go to achieve her ends? She wasn't sure. And, why were her ends modest, compared, say, with Hadrian's? Like other children, she'd been trained not to be a sore loser, to share, not to hit, but probably Hadrian hadn't. And, what a joke, she laughed to herself, the power of toilet training.

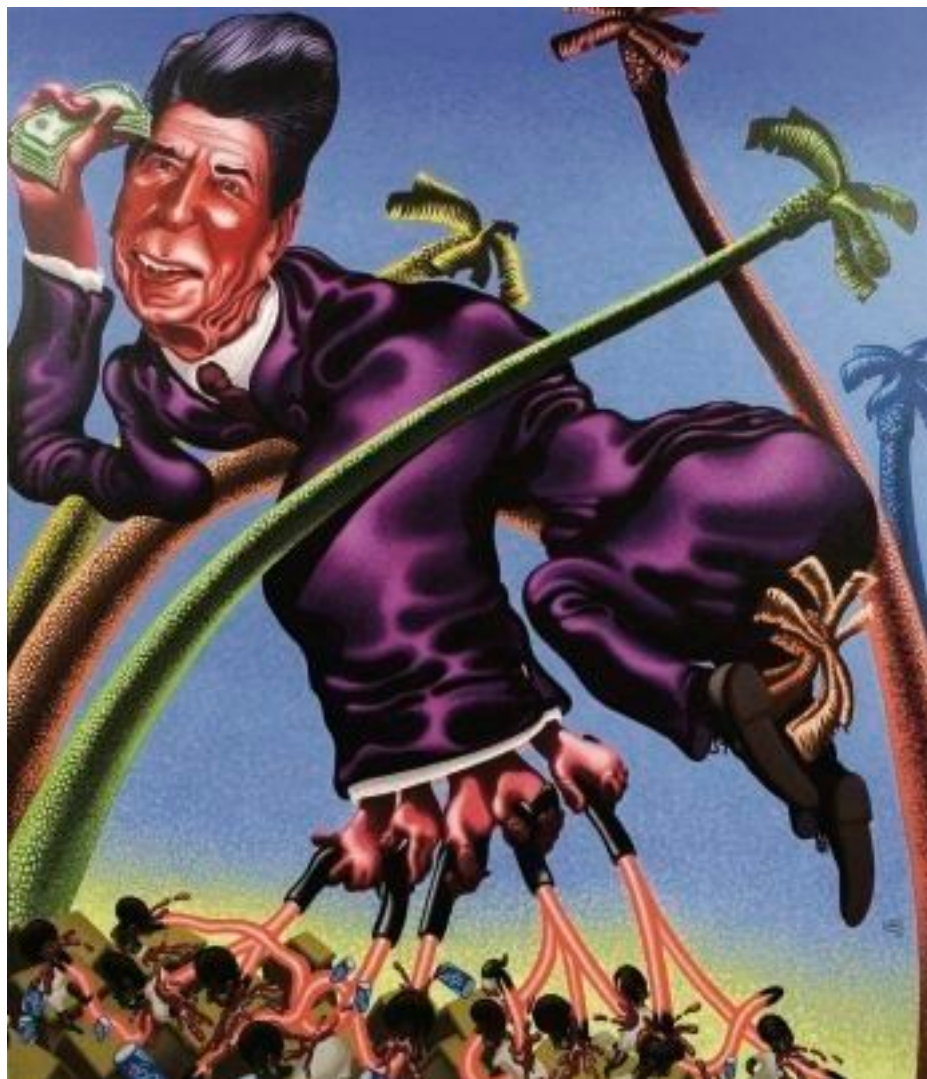
"Things are more like they are now than they ever were before."
—Dwight D. Eisenhower

Thought-bubbles gathered over her head, and she attempted, as if in a battle, to thrust into those airy-fairy daydreams fates that she didn't crave, like serving as a counselor in a drug clinic or checking microchips for flaws. In fantasy only, Madame Realism ruled her realm, and she could go anywhere, anytime. She would be lavished with awards for peace and physics and keep hundreds of thousands of stray animals on her vast properties. Fearlessly and boldly, she would poke holes in others' arguments, and sometimes she did influence a president. She did not imagine having coffee with the owner of the local laundromat, she didn't make beds or sweep floors. Though she believed she didn't care about having great power, her wishes, like jokes, claimed their own special truths.

The King of Kings is also the Chief of Thieves. To whom may I complain?
—The Bauls

There was a story standup comic Mort Sahl told about JFK and him. Mort Sahl was flying on Air Force One with Kennedy, when they hit a patch of rough turbulence. JFK said to Sahl, "If this plane crashed, we would probably all be killed, wouldn't we?" Sahl answered, "Yes, Mr. President." Then JFK said, "And it occurs to me that your name would be in very small print." The comic was put in his place, power did that. Madame Realism wondered how wanting power or wanting to be near it was different, if it was. Maybe, she told herself, she would give up some of her fantasies and replace them with others. But could she?

Lynne Tillman is a novelist, short story writer, and critic. Her most recent novel, *American Genius, A Comedy*, was published by Soft Skull Press.



Peter Saul
Ronald Reagan in Grenada, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
82 7/8 x 70 7/8 inches
Courtesy of Hall Collection

Presidential Powers

JoAnne Carson

As an idea, *Mr. President* was a late bloomer, springing forth full-blown from a long-planned portrait show. It was a rare “Aha!” moment, one that seemed to register on a Zeitgeist air-wave without initially yielding more than three artists for consideration. It didn’t take much investigation, however, to begin to see presidents everywhere. As the show grew to include over thirty artists, we began to marvel at our embarrassment of riches. Why, we wondered, does this subject seem to hold so much sway with contemporary artists?

The Oedipal relationship that artists have to the past—to learn the native tongue from one’s father, and then the need to kill him to make way for the new/(you)—certainly make them likely candidates for a romp with the leaders of the free world. American presidents—so patriarchal, patriotic, and powerful—are symbols on which to hang your hat. After all, anyone can grow up to be president, and by the same token anyone can monkey around with the presidential image.

Zelig-like, the artists in this show insert themselves into the historical record for a variety of purposes: to disrupt the well-manufactured image of the modern presidency; to blend the familiar and personal with the historical; to express the conflict that power engenders; to critique individual presidents and their administrative policies—in short, to wrangle with authority, or, as artist David Humphrey says, to “play fast and loose with the historical record.”

There seem to be two well-defined camps in the show in relation to this idea of power. There are those who express a profound skepticism toward authority and who engage directly in political satire. Lyn Foulkes’ *Washingtonland*, a portrait of George Washington tagged with a Mickey Mouse face; Peter Saul’s stinging indictment of Reagan’s foreign policy in *Ronald Reagan in Grenada*; and Komar and Melamid’s depiction of a bare-bottomed baby grafted onto our national symbol of the bald eagle, are squarely in this category. Robert Colescott is also in this faction with his *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware*, which envisions Carver as a president *manqué*—at once a lampoon and an homage.

In the other camp are the artists who reveal their conflicted and hidden desires to express rage at authority and to find authenticity in the narrative of power. This blatant insertion of personal wish-fulfillment into the public register may be a variety of postmodernism.

If so, it is a latter-day postmodernism, in which the embrace of the sentimental and the well-worn appears to be not ironic but genuine. These artists want to be included, to “be there” as they fling their messy private selves against the cold shoulder of official history. Phil Whitman’s rendition of Jimmy Carter baptizing the artist’s mother, Rachel Mason’s pseudo-Fascist sculpture of herself locked in a passionate kiss with George W. Bush, and Diango Hernández’s placement of his head on the shoulder of every president from Eisenhower to George W., embody this expression.

What is distinctly American about our highest leader is that Mr. President is just another Mister. Our contemporary obsession with celebrity underscores the “hook” in the American Dream: anyone can be president. As image is increasingly controlled by media, and the spectacle of the private is used for the vicarious pleasure of the public, it is part of our contemporary understanding that “Mr. President” belongs to us all—and, at least in the context of this show, is up for grabs.

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

BILL ADAMS
YASSER AGGOUR
MELANIE BAKER
JESSE BERCOWETZ AND MATT BUA
GEOFFREY CHADSEY
ENRIQUE CHAGOYA
CHUCK CLOSE
ROBERT COLESCOTT
JAMES ESBER
LLYN FOULKES
WAYNE GONZALES
JONATHAN HERDER
DIANGO HERNÁNDEZ
DAVID HUMPHREY
KOMAR AND MELAMID
ANDREW LENAGHAN
KERRY JAMES MARSHALL
RACHEL MASON
DAVE MCKENZIE
DAVID OPDYKE
GRETA PRATT
JUSTIN RICHEL
PETER SAUL
MARTIN SCHOELLER
ROBERT TERRY
BRIAN TOLLE
JEFFREY VALLANCE
ANDY WARHOL
PHIL WHITMAN
MARTIN WILNER



BILL ADAMS

Born 1957 in New York City; lives in New York City

Amongst the many stand-ins I employ in my drawings, Lincoln is the most recognizable. His cameo role in the space of the drawing sets up a context, where the others are measured (fairly equally) against him.

—Bill Adams

Untitled, 2005
Watercolor on paper
22 x 30 inches
Courtesy of KS Art, New York

* Statements are provided by the artist except where noted.



YASSER AGGOUR

Born 1972 in Newark, New Jersey; lives in Brooklyn, New York

George and Abe was conceived to reconcile my contempt for the sloppy jingoism, patriotic kitsch, and unimaginative leadership that followed 9/11 on one hand, and a genuine love affair with much of the American experience on the other.

—Yasser Aggour

George and Abe, 2003
C-print
30 x 39 inches
Courtesy of the artist



MELANIE BAKER

Born 1956 in Columbus, Ohio; lives in Brooklyn, New York

I work in charcoal for the power of the blackness: the deep, endless space it can represent. Power structures, on both a political level and a personal one, have long held an ambiguous fascination for me. I look for the subtle gestures of power—the way the hands chop the air or thump the chest, the curl of the mouth speechifying—and the accoutrements—the microphones, the podium, the serious pinstripes.

—Melanie Baker

Podium, 2003
Charcoal
43 x 96 inches
Courtesy of Roebbling Hall, New York



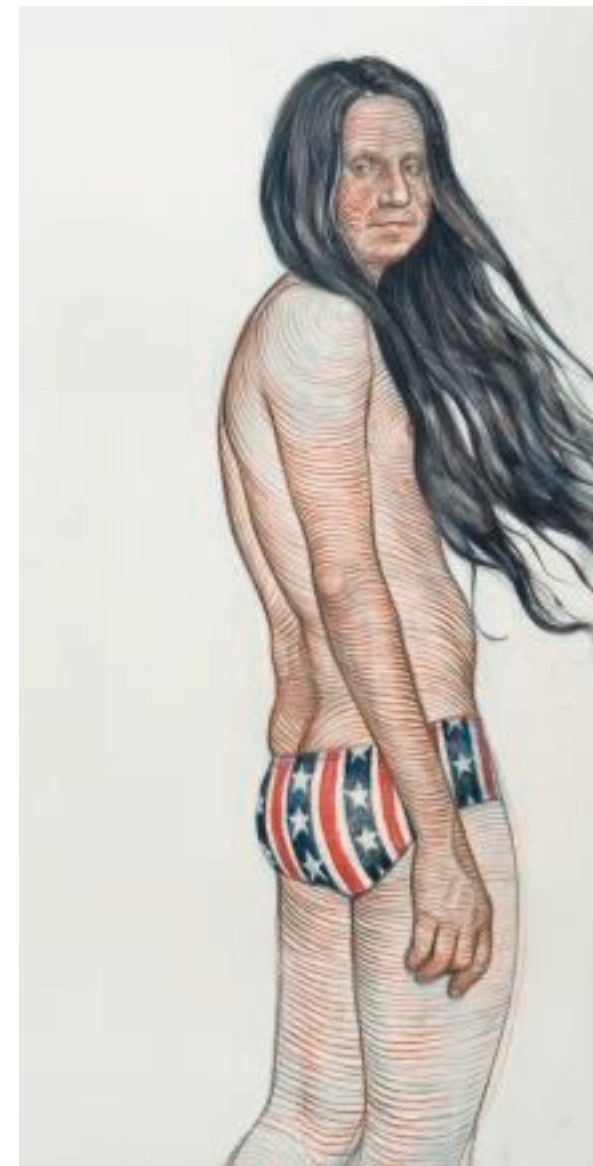
JESSE BERCOWETZ AND MATT BUA

Jesse Bercowetz born 1969 in Boston, Massachusetts
 Matt Bua born 1970 in Wilmington, North Carolina
 Both live in Brooklyn, New York

William Henry Harrison, who spent thirty days as our ninth president, had a keen interest in the so-called "Indian burial mounds" found throughout the U.S. In his 1839 book, *Aborigines of the Ohio Valley*, he questioned the potential origins and purposes of the large "serpent" mounds, pyramids, tumuli, and "falling gardens" left over from America's pre-history. "We could scarcely believe it to be the work of human hands." —Henry Hugh Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana* (Baltimore, 1814).

—Jesse Bercowetz and Matt Bua

Portrait of William Henry Harrison, 2006
 Mixed media
 64 x 34 x 27 inches
 Courtesy of Derek Eller Gallery, New York



GEOFFREY CHADSEY

Born 1967 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania;
 lives in San Francisco, California

The presidents appeared in my work simply as the emergence of the everyday object—namely, the portraits on the \$1 and \$5 bills. There was a sense of "queering" these icons, of sneaking a familiar visage into something almost naked, almost lurid, but mostly it was about bringing the line quality of the currency's etching into the drawing.

—Geoffrey Chadsey

Sweet George, 2006
 Watercolor pencil on Mylar
 42 x 22 inches
 Collection of Bill Previdi



ENRIQUE CHAGOYA

Born 1953 in Mexico City, Mexico; lives in San Francisco, California

Enrique Chagoya's series *Poor George (After P.G.)* is an appropriation of Philip Guston's *Poor Richard* drawings. Produced in 1971, Guston's biting caricatures portray Richard Nixon as a scoundrel and purveyor of corruption. In replacing Nixon with the figure of George W. Bush, Chagoya's equally satirical view of the current administration points to the potential consequences of ignoring the lessons of history.

—Corinna Ripps Schaming

Poor George (After P.G.) #14, 2004
 Ink on paper
 14 x 16 inches
 Courtesy of George Adams Gallery, New York



Poor George (After P.G.) #9, 2004
 Ink on paper
 14 x 16 inches
 Courtesy of George Adams Gallery, New York

CHUCK CLOSE

Born 1940 in Monroe, Washington; lives in New York City and Bridgehampton, New York

This photograph of President Clinton taken in his Harlem office on August 9, 2005 is the basis for a painting completed this year.

William J. Clinton, 2005
Giclée print on paper
53 x 44 inches
Courtesy of Pace/MacGill, New York





ROBERT COLESCOTT

Born 1925 in Monroe, Washington;
lives in Tucson, Arizona

When I first got the idea for the painting, I thought that everybody would get it. I just thought, this is ridiculous, this is funny. There is a layer about tokenism and another about education, and everybody will get it. It never occurred to me that there would be those who wouldn't get it and who would take offense at it. I just did it with the assumption that this was going to be my historical painting, my bicentennial statement about American history.

—Robert Colescott, in *American Visions*, June/July 1997

George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware:
Page From an *American History Textbook*, 1975
Oil on canvas
78 ½ x 98 inches
Collection of Robert H. Orchard



JAMES ESBER

Born 1961 in Cleveland, Ohio; lives in Brooklyn, New York

The image of Nixon, being both iconic and uniquely recognizable, is a prime template for mutation toward abstraction, shrugging off grotesque graphic distortions and stubbornly retaining its identity. The parceling of individual features into disparate regions of mark-making is meant to test the limits of recognition and to expand the features of a face into the terrain of landscape.

—James Esber

Big Red Dick, 2005
Ink on paper
39 x 30 inches
Collection of Carlo Bronzini Vender



LLYN FOULKES

Born 1934 in Yakima, Washington; lives in Los Angeles, California

America has turned into a nation of corporate greed, its citizens condemned to living in a fairy tale and selling their souls for big bucks.

—Llyn Foulkes

Washingtonland, 2006
40 x 40 inches
Oil and acrylic on wood panel
Courtesy of Kent Gallery, New York



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAULA COOPER GALLERY, NEW YORK

WAYNE GONZALES

Born 1957 in New Orleans, Louisiana; lives in New York City

The artist prefers not to comment on the work.

White House, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
45 x 57 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York



JONATHAN HERDER

Born 1965 in New York City; lives in Brooklyn, New York

Inasmuch as these portraits of presidents rest on the sole information of their subjects' hair, they test their iconic resilience. While the identities belonging to these haircuts will not be evident to all who view them, the fact that any can be recognized by many—as per my experience and in a non-topical context—seems notable. Curiously, it seems few pop personages would endure this experiment as well as the presidents.

—Jonathan Herder

History of Executive Hair #35, 2006
Graphite on paper
17 x 14 inches
Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn



DIANGO HERNÁNDEZ

Born 1970 in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba; lives in Dusseldorf, Germany

I am tired of this long conflict between Cuba and the U.S., between Right and Left, between the past of my country and the promised future that will never happen. What will I do now? I guess there are not so many possibilities. I am going to take out, as we do with small and fragile pieces of glass, all the things that the Cuban and American governments have put inside of me, and in the process of taking them out and putting them in a different order here and there, I am going to do art.

—Diango Hernández

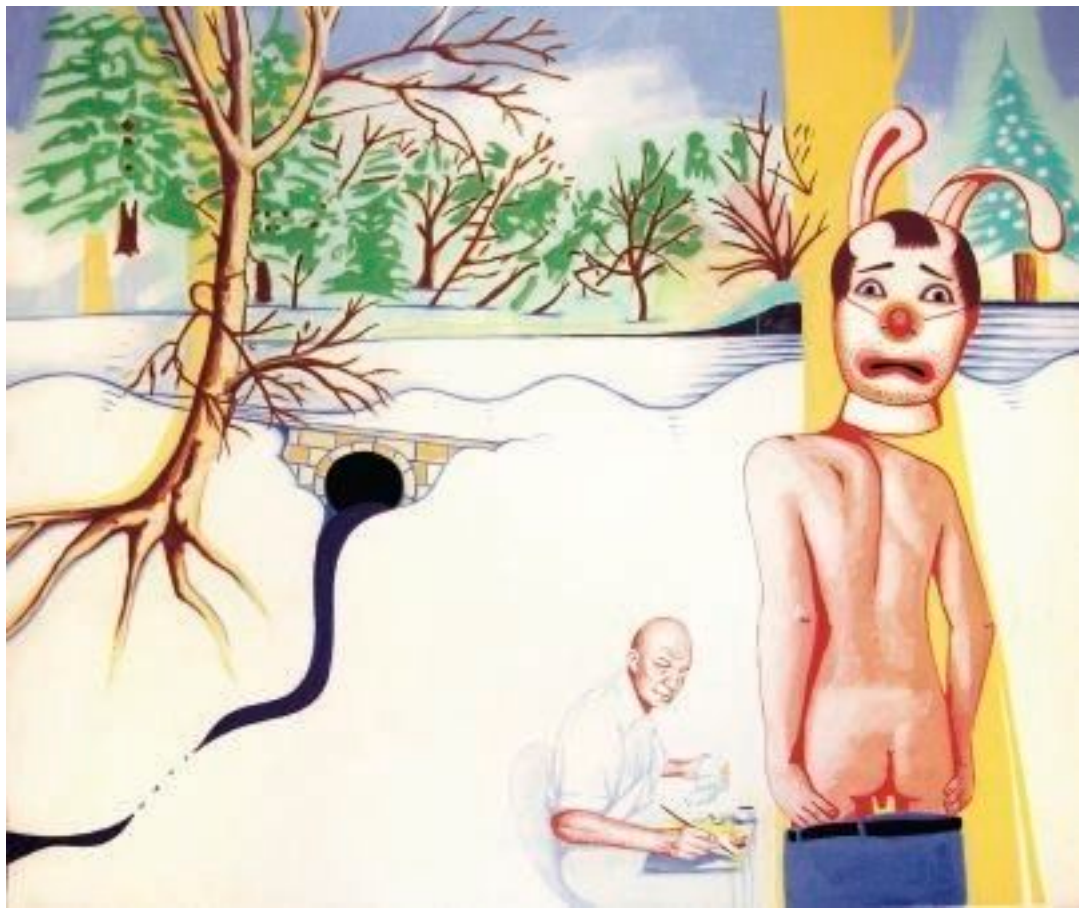
Wake Me Up, 2006

Set of ten: ink, water, and inkjet print on ruled paper
13 ½ x 8 ½ inches each

Chadha Art Collection, Voorschoten, The Netherlands
Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York



PHOTO: JASON HANDELLA



DAVID HUMPHREY

Born 1955 in Augsburg, Germany; lives in New York City

My paintings are frequently depictions of depictions. I will copy an amateur painting, for instance, the way a band might cover a song written by someone else. I try to get inside the other person's point of view to stretch my own. The focused determination and particular handwriting of the amateur brushstrokes can have an awkward and sometimes heartbreaking beauty. I found the paintings of Dwight David Eisenhower on the Internet. Like myself, he was making copies of images from Hallmark greeting cards. My paintings treat Eisenhower's blankness pathologically. I complicate Ike's earnest competence with sexual overtones and semiotic horseplay. I play fast and loose with the historical record. Like an amateur, I screw things up in my own way.

—David Humphrey

Ike Paints From Life, 2005
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 72 inches
Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York



KOMAR AND MELAMID

Vitaly Komar born 1943 in Moscow; Alex Melamid born 1945 in Moscow
Both live in New York City

The Wings Will Grow is typical of the Russian conceptualist duo's Socialist realist style. Merging patriotic images from the former Soviet Union and the United States, they create a dreamlike scenario in which the archetypal role of the father figure is shared by the founding fathers of both nations.

Pointing up that Russians and Americans share an over-the-top emotional attachment to arcane national symbols, Komar and Melamid once disclosed that Russian émigrés have dreams in which George Washington becomes confused with Lenin.

—Corinna Ripps Schaming

The Wings Will Grow, 1999
Silkscreen
41 ½ x 27 ½ inches
Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc., New York

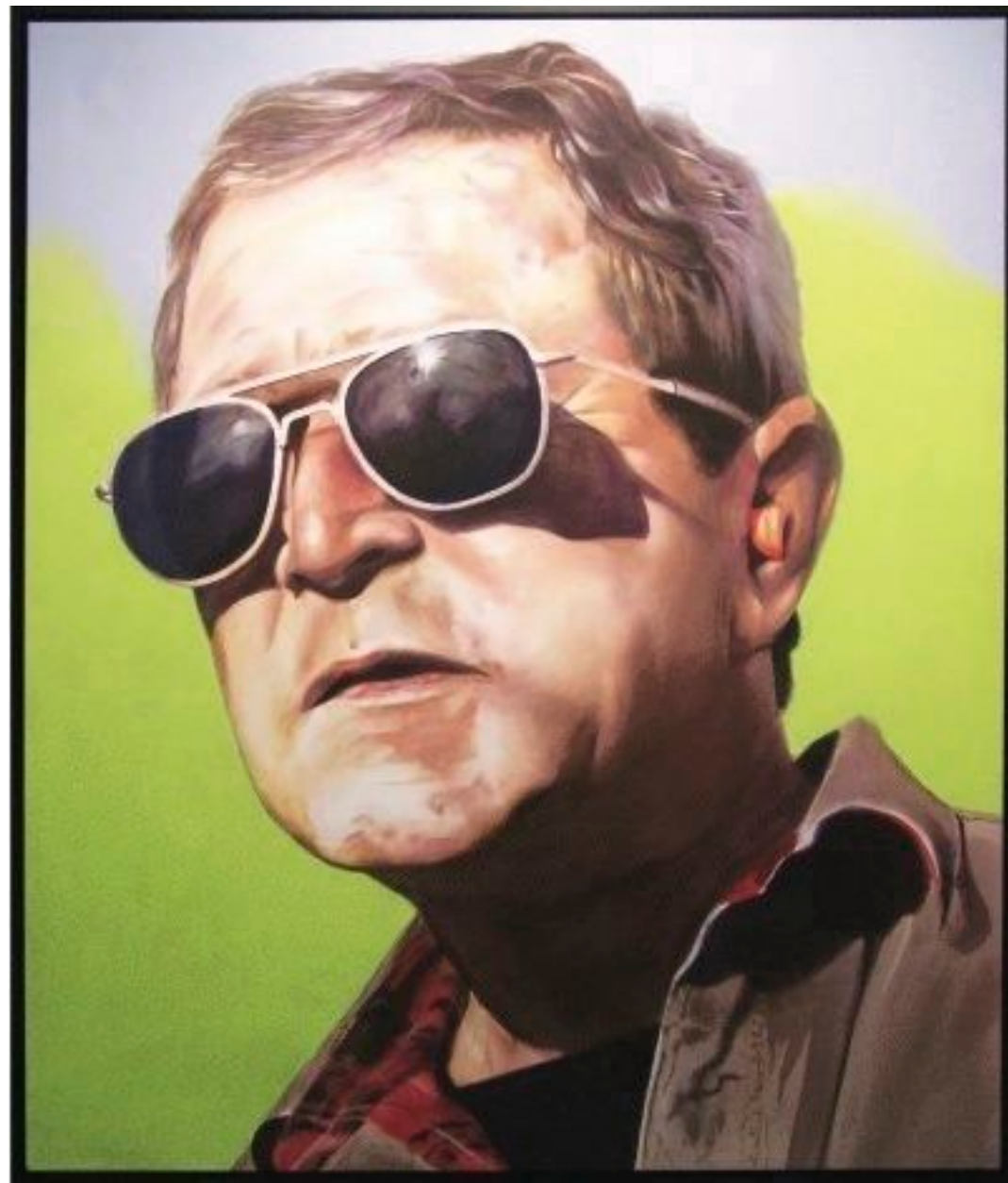
ANDREW LENAGHAN

Born 1965 in New Brunswick, New Jersey; lives in Brooklyn, New York

Based on a photograph of the president at his Crawford Ranch, Andrew Lenaghan's *Portrait of GWB* appears to embody the American spirit of rugged individualism. Closer scrutiny of the details, however, reveals a less-heroic reading: the non-reflective aviator shades, the earplug, and the down-turned mouth diminish the Marlboro Man bravado so handily crafted by the media. Instead, Lenaghan's unconventional portrait asks the question: why does the admiration of style continue to trump substance in our current state of affairs?

—Corinna Ripps Schaming

Portrait of GWB, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
82 x 69 inches
Courtesy of Hall Collection





KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

Born 1955 in Birmingham, Alabama; lives in Chicago, Illinois

Memento is one element of a project that can be thought of as a requiem for the civil rights and Black liberation struggles of the 1960s. Commemoration is the theme. Each of the works identifies individuals who contributed to the dynamic political and cultural life of the time, but who died between 1959 and 1970. The inspiration for the project was a felt banner memorializing John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy with the phrase, "We Mourn Our Loss." I saw this "memento" in a great many African American homes...The Kennedys and King were almost deified, a trinity of martyrs. The hopes of the Civil Rights Movement seemed to die with them. But many others gave their lives in the pursuit of justice and equality. Most passed unrecognized...*Memento* addresses this lack by expanding the pantheon to include such figures as Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, and others.

—Kerry James Marshall

Memento, 1997
7-color lithograph with gold powder
30 ¼ x 44 ¼ inches
Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle



RACHEL MASON

Born 1978 in Los Angeles, California; lives in New York City

Kissing President Bush is a plaster cast sculpture of myself and the president locked in a kiss. It reflects my emotional state of mind during the Bush presidency; it contains conflicting feelings of protest, concession, alienation, seduction, and grappling with power.

—Rachel Mason

Kissing President Bush, 2004
Plaster
72 x 36 x 24 inches
Collection of Melva Bucksbaum and
Raymond Leary



DAVE MCKENZIE

Born 1977 in Kingston, Jamaica; lives in Brooklyn, New York

In November of 2003, the *New York Times* ran an article by Alan Feuer entitled “Mr. Clinton, Your Harlem Neighbors Need To See You More Often.” This article became the starting point for a performance that would last several months. Each week, I wore a suit and a Bill Clinton mask and walked up and down 125th Street in Harlem in an effort to make the image that people claimed they were missing. I wanted to allow people an opportunity to laugh, voice their opinions, and, if possible, mistake me for the president. This video documents one day of this recurring performance.

—Dave McKenzie

We Shall Overcome, 2004

Video

5 minutes, 46 seconds

Courtesy of the artist



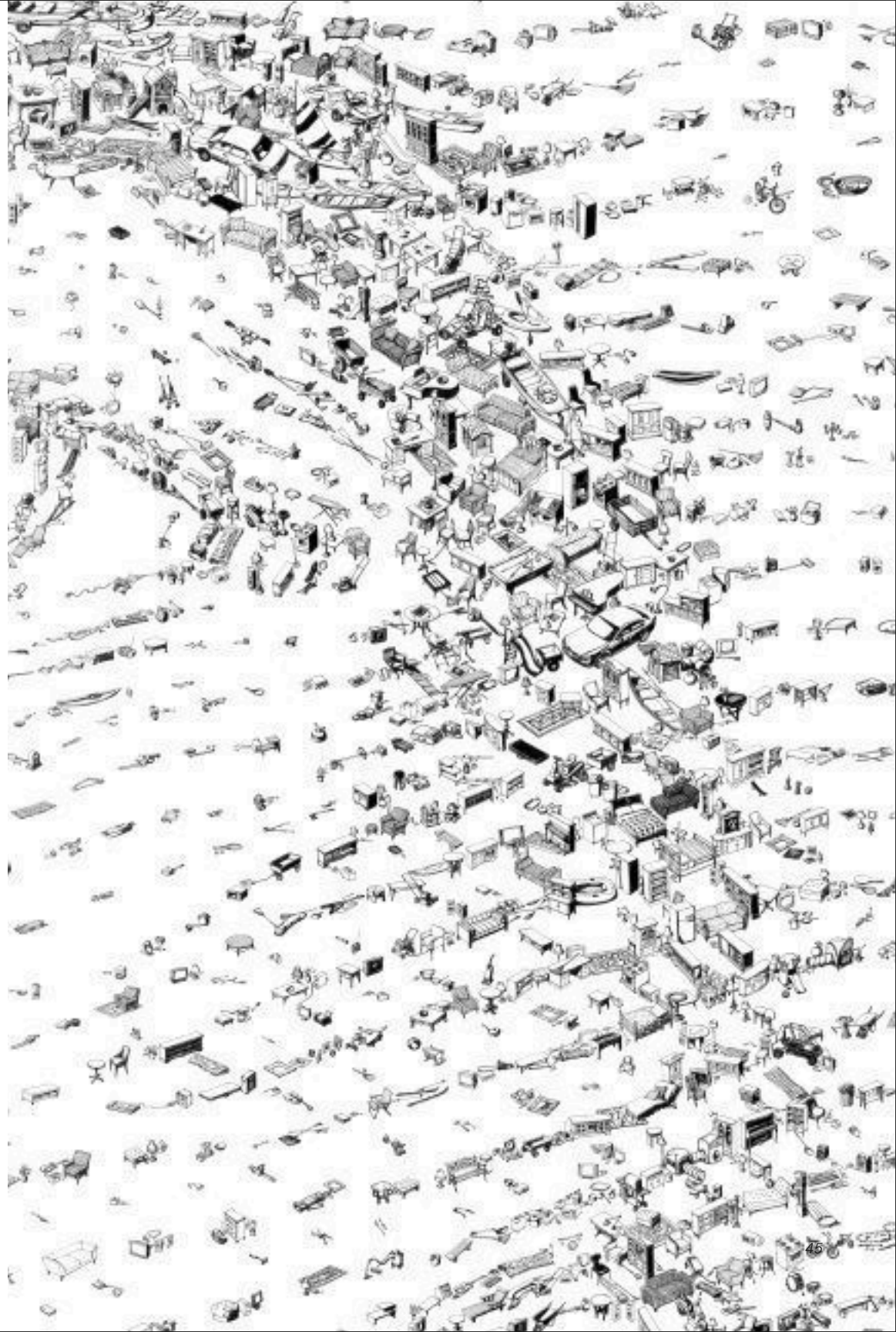
DAVID OPDYKE

Born 1969 in Schenectady, New York; lives in Brooklyn, New York

George Washington and the other American Revolutionaries succeeded. Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness are here and now, displayed on their way in and out of wallets and pockets everywhere. Dead presidents are dead no longer, reincarnated in the stuff of the American Dream: cars, televisions, sofas, and leaf blowers.

—David Opdyke

The One, 2006
Pen on paper
35 x 46 inches
Collection of Frank and Patty Kolodny;
Courtesy of BravinLee programs and
Roebling Hall, New York





GRETA PRATT

Born 1955 in Minneapolis, Minnesota; lives in Ringwood, New Jersey

I am exploring Americans' search for identity, both individually and within a common culture. My photographs of presidents and recreated history question the authorship of history, and raise questions about how history is remembered and how this history shapes national identity.

—Greta Pratt

Abe's Traveling Log Cabin, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 2000
 Light-jet print
 30 x 30 inches
 Courtesy of Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston



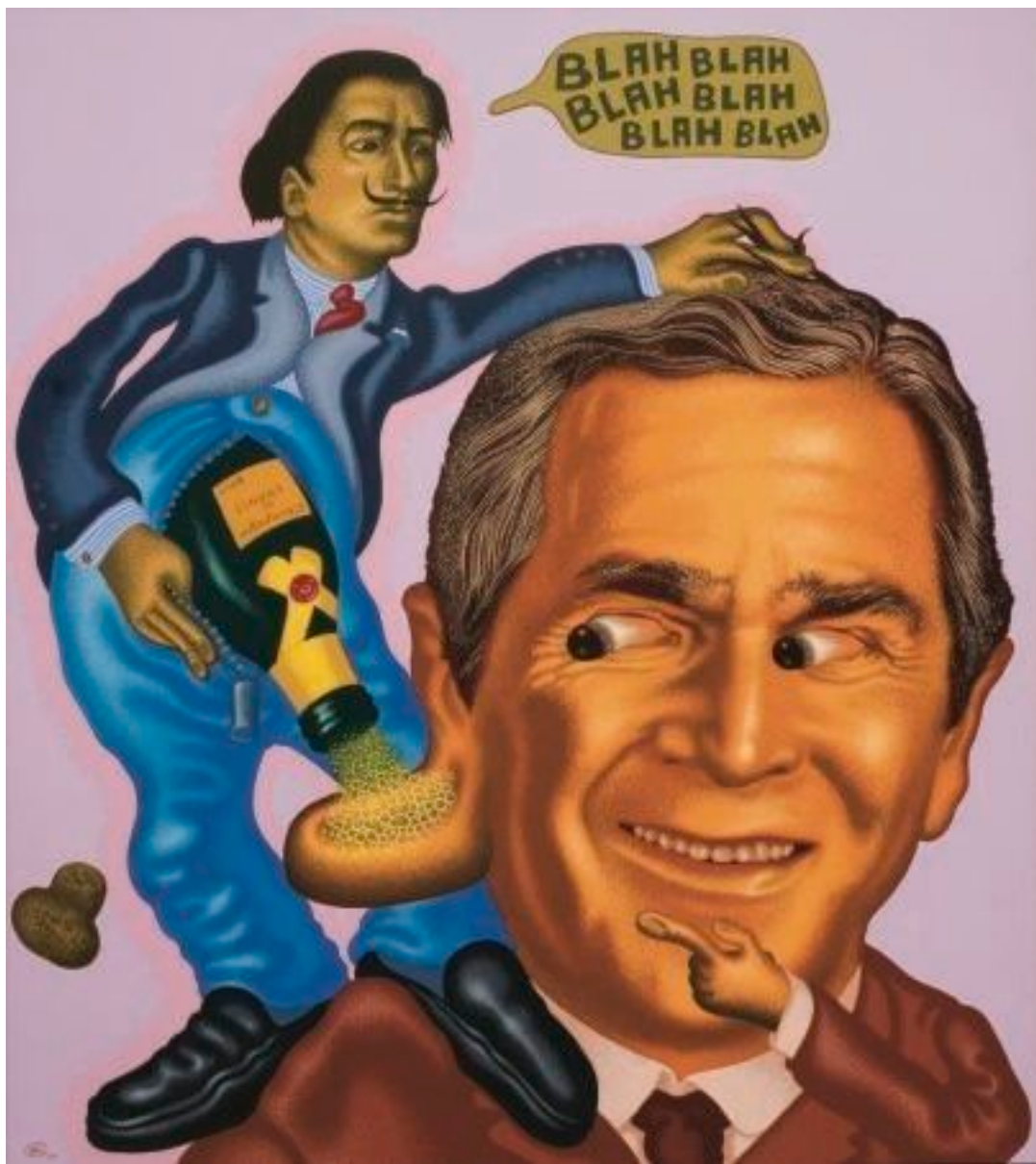
JUSTIN RICHEL

Born 1979 in New Brunswick, New Jersey; lives in Maine

The *Black Abe* paintings are a synthesis of ideas plucked from common textbook references, primarily Lincoln's bouts of "black" depression and his most celebrated act as president, issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. My paintings subvert the traditional genre of portraiture by approaching the subject with the sentiment of an iconoclast. Yet my intention is to "rebuild" the image rather than destroy it. I take advantage of the cyclical nature of history and its unfailing tendency to repeat itself.

—Justin Richel

Black Abe, 2005
 Egg tempera on panel
 7 x 5 inches
 Courtesy of the artist



PETER SAUL

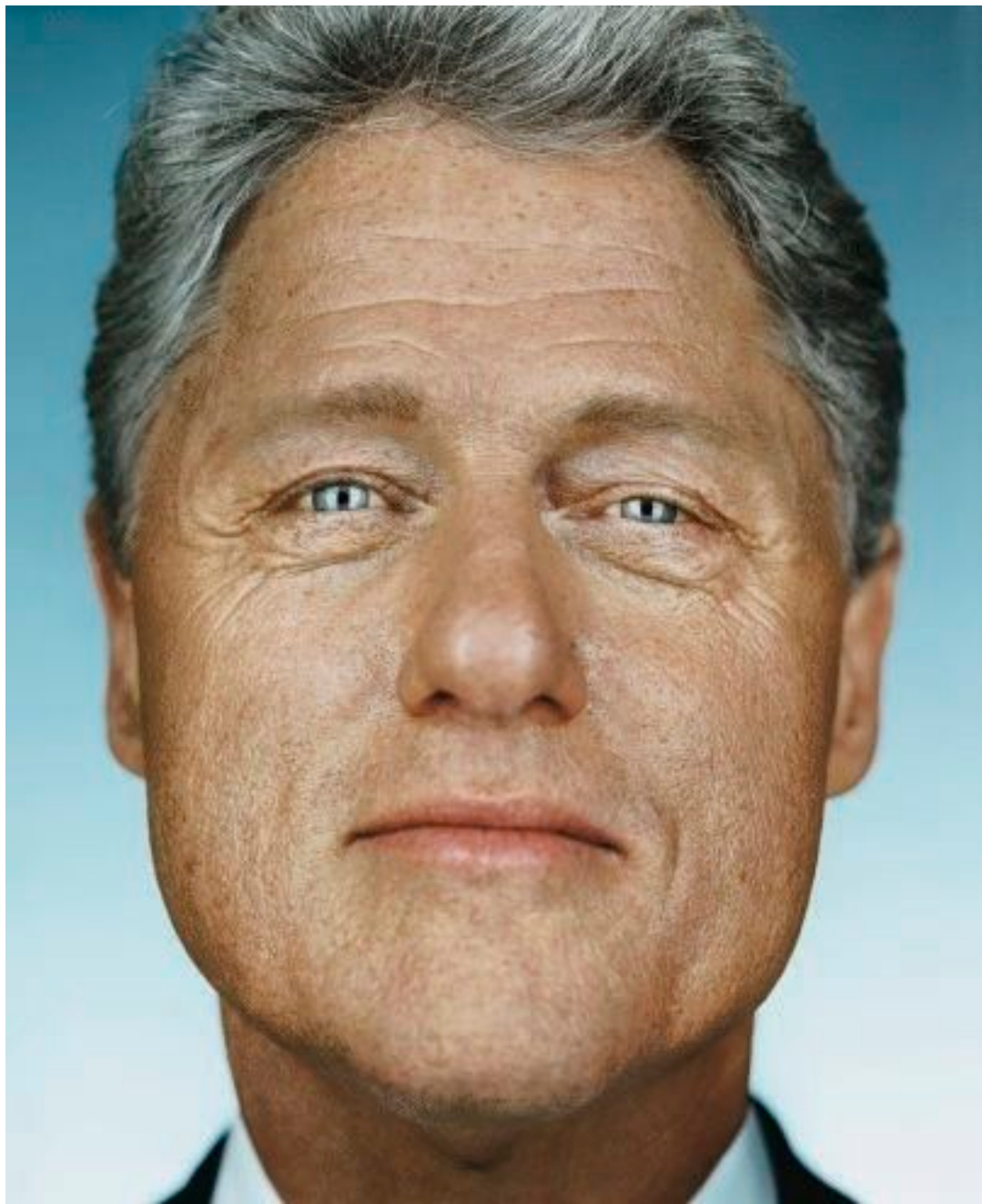
Born 1934 in San Francisco, California; lives in Germantown, New York

The picture of President Bush getting some liquid advice from Salvador Dali (the famous Surrealist) is my reaction to the president's speeches. The smaller picture shows President Reagan as a great, though perhaps elderly, beauty who can dispense money and power.

Politics is simply another interesting piece of subject matter, like landscape, abstraction, or anything else. Politics has been kept out of the official history of modern painting out of fear that any political idea would have merely temporary appeal and detract from lasting plastic values. If so, so what? Or as Dali might have said, "Blah, blah."

—Peter Saul

Dali Advises the President, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
74 x 66 inches
Courtesy of Hall Collection



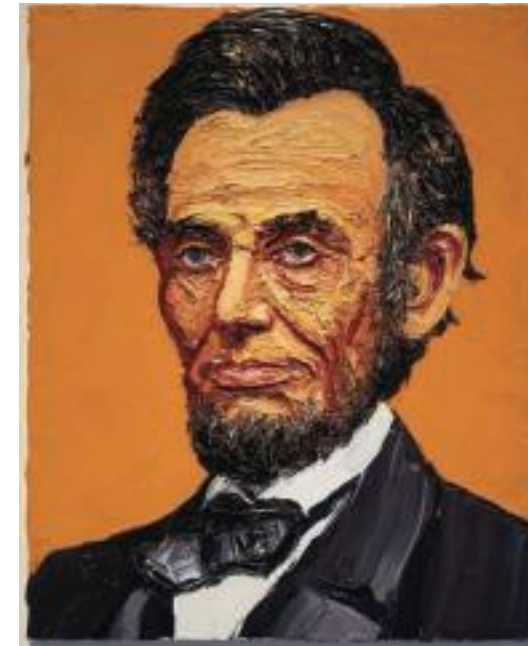
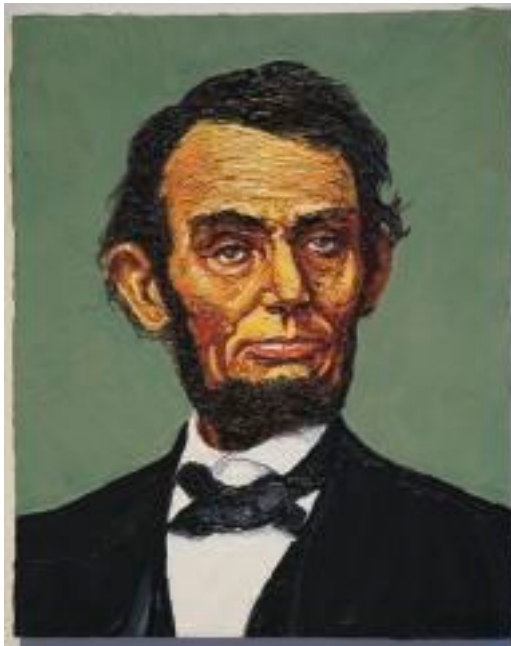
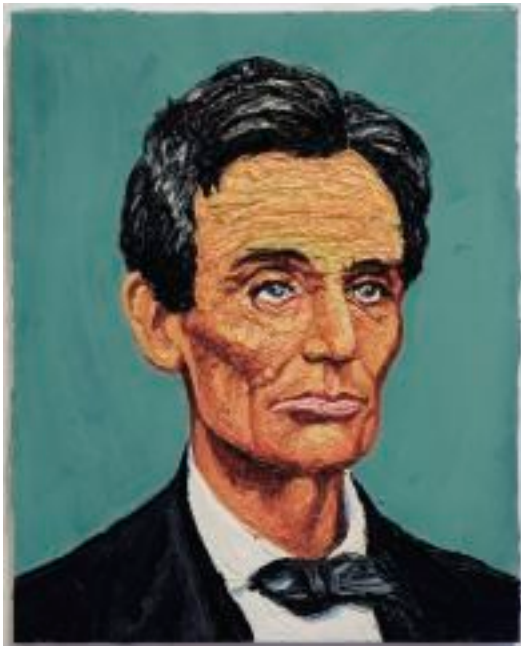
MARTIN SCHOELLER

Born 1968 in Munich, Germany; lives in New York City

[These portraits] strip away everything that has ever been employed to protect the celebrity, to create the celebrity. The hyper-closeup has a leveling, democratic effect; there is no facade, no trickery.

—David Remnick, quoted in *Close Up: Portraits 1998–2005* by Martin Schoeller

Bill Clinton, 2000
Chromogenic print
40 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Hasted Hunt Gallery, New York



ROBERT TERRY

Born 1955 in Broken Brow, Nebraska;
lives in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania

When I look upon the face of Lincoln, I see a man with the future of America in his face. His eyes seem to hold a real heartache for all of the suffering that has been our past and that will be our future still. His firm and sad smile has a look that seems to include all of our lives and our dreams and hopes for a better life. He is the great example of hard work and principled action made humble in search of God's will.

—Robert Terry

LEFT TO RIGHT: *Lincoln, Summer of 1860, 2005* All four works:
Lincoln, February 9, 1864, 2005 Oil on canvas
Lincoln, November 8, 1863, 2005 20 x 16 inches
Lincoln, January 8, 1864, 2005 Courtesy of the artist



BRIAN TOLLE

Born 1963 in Queens, New York; lives in New York City

The Declaration of Independence desk, Tolle's handmade replica of one in the National Museum of American History, has become a major icon of U.S. history. In the nineteenth century, it was described as a monument greater than any cast in bronze or carved in stone. Thomas Jefferson predicted its value, writing that "[p]olitics, as well as religion, has its superstitions. These, gaining strength with time, may one day give imaginary value to this relic, for its association with the birth of the great charter of our independence." Tolle has used this metaphor as a description for art in general and has reflected on the ingenious personal relic throughout his career.

—Brian Tolle Studio

Declaration of Independence Desk: Thomas Jefferson, 1994

Mixed media

9 ¾ x 14 ½ x 3 inches

Collection of Margaret Murray

JEFFREY VALLANCE

Born 1955 in Torrance, California;
lives in Las Vegas, Nevada

...I chose to mount one of my "infiltration" exhibitions in the Tijuana Wax Museum. The museum offers displays of historical figures, famous celebrities, a hall of presidents, and a gruesome pit of Hell. I studied the site carefully and decided to place within the museum three new wax figures, among them Richard Nixon. I located a master wax-figure maker...in Mexico City...[and] went to his studio to supervise the construction of the Nixon figure.

I wanted to place Nixon not in his most obvious location, the hall of presidents, but in Hell, where many of his detractors believe his soul resides. He would stand forever frozen, clutching the Watergate tapes, his self-made seeds of destruction. Nixon is a tragic figure of epic proportions—the fallen hero, the underdog, the king, the crook, the clown. His waxy face expresses anguish and bitterness over the tragedy of the Watergate scandal. In his personal Hell, he is doomed to replay the fateful Watergate tapes for all eternity.

—Jeffrey Vallance

Richard M. Nixon, 2000

Wax, found suit, tie, shoes, Watergate tapes
69 x 25 x 20 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin,
New York



ANDY WARHOL

Born 1928 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; died 1987

In 1972, a large segment of the American public was angered by President Nixon's failed promises to end the Vietnam War and by the discovery of the White House "dirty tricks" that led to the Watergate scandal. Warhol's strident satire captures the anti-Nixon sentiment shared by much of the electorate, and urges them to exercise their right to vote him out of office.

—Roberta Bernstein

Vote McGovern, 1972

Silkscreen

42 x 42 inches

Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc., New York



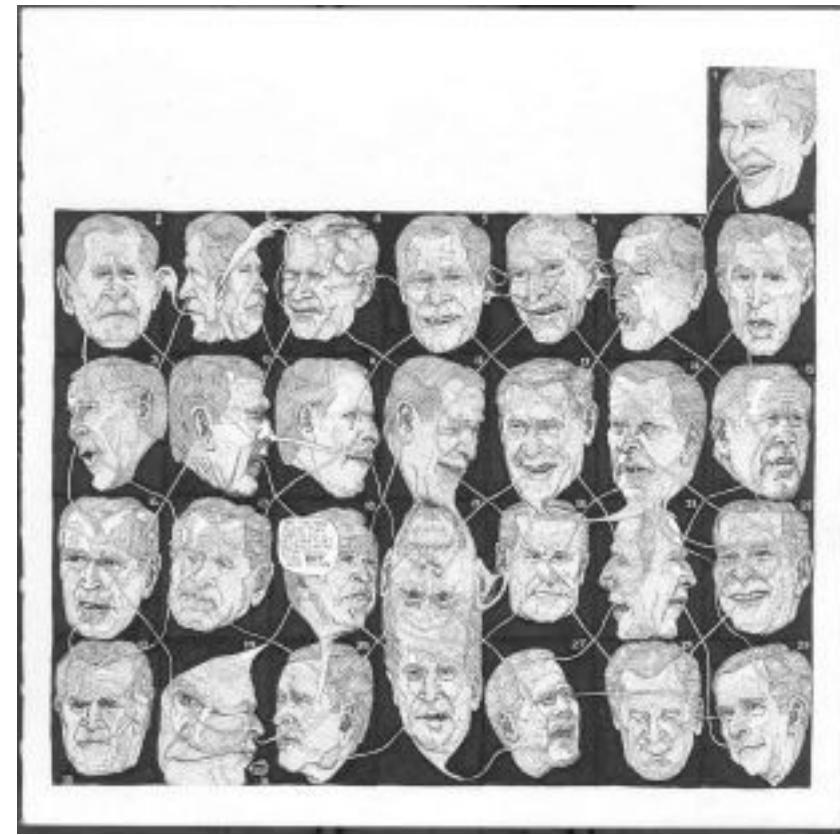
PHIL WHITMAN

Born 1976 in Saratoga Springs, New York; lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts

In our contemporary culture, a president's Christianity is often viewed as a reactionary social position. I wanted to suggest, through my mother's hero Jimmy Carter, that religious faith could indeed be a catalyst for socially progressive works. This type of faith, however, demands a self-deprecating sense of humor, and the self-portrait figure on the diorama hints at this.

—Phil Whitman

Jimmy Carter Baptizing My Mom, 2006
 Polymer clay figures and diorama
 materials on MDF
 60 x 18 x 25 inches
 Courtesy of the artist



MARTIN WILNER

Born 1959 in New York City; lives in New York City

In my ongoing diaristic project, *Making History*, I chronicle daily events in the form of the Roman calendar, using elements of cartooning, cartography, calligraphy, and Surrealism to observe the ebb and flow of our times. The philosopher George Santayana once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." In this particular triptych of a sort, *Making History: July, August, September 2006*, I specifically use the element of repetition of a single theme to comment upon the ahistorical approach of our current president, George W. Bush, in his war on terror and the related entanglements of the war in Lebanon.

—Martin Wilner

Making History (July), 2006
 Ink on paper
 11 ½ x 11 ½ inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn

CHECKLIST

- Bill Adams**
Untitled, 2006
 Ballpoint, watercolor, and colored pencil on paper
 18 x 27 inches
 Courtesy of KS Art, New York
- Untitled*, 2005
 Watercolor on paper
 22 x 30 inches
 Courtesy of KS Art, New York
- Yasser Aggour**
George and Abe, 2003
 C-print
 30 x 39 inches
 Courtesy of the artist
- Melanie Baker**
Podium, 2003
 Charcoal
 43 x 96 inches
 Courtesy of Roebling Hall, New York
- Jesse Bercowetz and Matt Bua**
Portrait of William Henry Harrison, 2006
 Mixed media
 64 x 34 x 27 inches
 Courtesy of Derek Eller Gallery, New York
- Geoffrey Chadsey**
Sweet George, 2006
 Watercolor pencil on Mylar
 42 x 22 inches
 Collection of Bill Previdi
- Retreat*, 2005
 Watercolor pencil on Mylar
 35 ½ x 47 inches
 Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
- Enrique Chagoya**
Poor George (After P.G.) #9, 2004
 Ink on paper
 14 x 16 inches
 Courtesy of George Adams Gallery, New York
- Poor George (After P.G.) #12*, 2004
 Ink on paper
 14 x 16 inches
 Courtesy of George Adams Gallery, New York
- Poor George (After P.G.) #14*, 2004
 Ink on paper
 14 x 16 inches
 Courtesy of George Adams Gallery, New York
- Chuck Close**
William J. Clinton, 2005
 Giclée print on paper
 53 x 44 inches
 Courtesy of Pace/MacGill, New York
- Robert Colescott**
George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page From an American History Textbook, 1975
 Oil on canvas
 78 ½ x 98 inches
 Collection of Robert H. Orchard
- James Esber**
Big Red Dick, 2005
 Ink on paper
 39 x 30 inches
 Collection of Carlo Bronzini Vender
- Lincoln #6*, 2003
 Graphite
 17 x 14 inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- Lincoln #11*, 2003
 Graphite
 17 x 14 inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- Lincoln #4*, 2002
 Graphite
 17 x 14 inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- Llyn Foulkes**
Washingtonland, 2006
 40 x 40 inches
 Oil and acrylic on wood panel
 Courtesy of Kent Gallery, New York
- Wayne Gonzales**
White House, 2004
 Acrylic on canvas
 45 x 57 inches
 Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
- Jonathan Herder**
History of Executive Hair #33, 2006
 Graphite on paper
 17 x 14 inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- History of Executive Hair #35*, 2006
 Graphite on paper
 17 x 14 inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- History of Executive Hair #37*, 2006
 Graphite on paper
 17 x 14 inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- History of Executive Hair #39*, 2006
 Graphite on paper
 17 x 14 inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- History of Executive Hair #41*, 2006
 Graphite on paper
 17 x 14 inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- Making of a Legend*, 2006
 Ink and stamps on paper
 9 x 19 ½ inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- Battling Postage Stamps*, 1996
 Watercolor, graphite and stamps on paper
 11 x 41 ½ inches
 Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn
- Diango Hernández**
Wake Me Up, 2006
 Set of ten: ink, water, and inkjet print on ruled paper
 13 ½ x 8 ½ inches each
 Chadha Art Collection, Voorschoten, The Netherlands; Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York
- David Humphrey**
Ike's Bridge, 2006
 Acrylic on canvas
 66 x 84 inches
 Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York
- Ike Paints From Life*, 2005
 Acrylic on canvas
 60 x 72 inches
 Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York
- Komar and Melamid**
The Wings Will Grow, 1999
 Silkscreen
 41 ½ x 27 ½ inches
 Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc., New York
- Andrew Lenaghan**
Portrait of GWB, 2004
 Acrylic on canvas
 82 x 69 inches
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- Kerry James Marshall**
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Greta Pratt

*Abe's Traveling Log Cabin,
Hodgenville, Kentucky*, 2000
Light-jet print
30 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Bernard Toale
Gallery, Boston

*Nine Lincolns, Hodgenville,
Kentucky*, 2000
Light-jet print
30 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Bernard Toale
Gallery, Boston

*Washington Crossing the
Delaware, Washington
Crossing, Pennsylvania*, 1991
Light-jet print
30 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Bernard Toale
Gallery, Boston

Justin Richel

Black Abe, 2005
Egg tempera on panel
7 x 5 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Black Abe, 2004
Gouache on paper
10 x 8 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Peter Saul

Dali Advises the President,
2004
Acrylic on canvas
74 x 66 inches
Courtesy of Hall Collection

Ronald Reagan in Grenada,
1984

Acrylic on canvas
82 7/8 x 70 1/8 inches
Courtesy of Hall Collection

Martin Schoeller

Bill Clinton, 2000
Chromogenic print
40 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Hasted Hunt
Gallery, New York

Robert Terry

Lincoln, January 8, 1864,
2006
Oil on canvas
20 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Lincoln, May 20, 1860, 2005
Oil on canvas
20 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Lincoln, Summer of 1860,
2005
Oil on panel
20 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Lincoln, November 8, 1863,
2005
Oil on board
20 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Lincoln, February 9, 1864,
2005
Oil on panel
20 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Brian Tolle

*Declaration of Independence
Desk: Thomas Jefferson*,
1994
Mixed media
9 3/4 x 14 1/2 x 3 inches
Collection of Margaret Murray

Jeffrey Vallance

Richard M. Nixon, 2000
Wax, found suit, tie, shoes,
Watergate tapes
69 x 25 x 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Lehmann Maupin, New York

*Donation to the Gerald R.
Ford Museum*, 1998
Mixed media on paper
22 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Lehmann Maupin, New York

*Image of Nixon Found in
Nature Ex-President's
simulacra seen in perennial
comeback*, 1998
Mixed media on paper
22 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Lehmann Maupin, New York

*President Washington vs.
Saint Longinus*, 1998
Mixed media on paper
22 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Lehmann Maupin, New York

Andy Warhol

Vote McGovern, 1972
Silkscreen
42 x 42 inches
Courtesy of Ronald Feldman
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*Jimmy Carter Baptizing My
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Polymer clay figures and
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60 x 18 x 25 inches
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Ink on paper
11 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches
Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn

Making History (August),
2006

Ink on paper
11 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches
Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn

Making History (September),
2006

Ink on paper
11 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches
Courtesy of Pierogi, Brooklyn

The University Art Museum would like to acknowledge the following people for helping give shape to the exhibition: George Adams, Mary-Presley Adams, Carolyn Alexander, Joe Amrhein, Joel Beck, Roberta Bernstein, Jan Endlich, Frayda Feldman, Jeanne Finley, Adam Frelin, Summer Guthrey, Alexander Haviland, Michele Heinrici, Ron Jagger, Greg Kustera, Alex Makenzie, Jessica Murray, Oliver Newton, Vlasta Odell, Judy Sagal, Sally Saul, Meredith Schwab, Kerry Schuss, Susan Swenson, Lauren van Haften-Schick, Douglas Walla, Ann Wolf, and Beth Zopf.

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