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Obey Giant

By Unknown

Shepard Fairey has
exploited a notion
that art can be anywhere
to compete with advertising,
so I don't consider it art.
Well, the guy is famous
for being a plagiarist.
It's vandalism.
Shepard Fairey is
pillaging the work
of important political
and cultural movements.
Shepard is a genius.
His artistic work overshadowed
by his alleged
criminal activity.
He employs cut and
paste as his artwork.
And at the end of the day,
it's a very empty experience.
I think he's our
generation's Warhol.
His work is too obvious.
He's reinvented
a political image
for today's world.
A wheatpaste artist is
not to be taken seriously.
The more famous he got
in the art world,
the less fans he had.
He created an icon.
From the very beginning when
he was doing Andre the Giant,
the joke was on the public.
It meant nothing.
Not only is Shepard
Fairey not an artist,
he's about the furthest
thing from art there is.
Things are not all
great in the world,
and it's not all the Carpenters
and love songs and Wings.

I grew up in the '70s,
and when I felt frustrated,
there was nothing
that seemed like
the creative analogue to that.
But when I discovered punk rock,
the Sex Pistols
talking about frustration,
the Clash talking
about frustration,
Black Flag, very angry music.
But they also
were not just angry
for the sake of being angry.
A lot of it was critiquing
the problem of conformity,
oppression,
corruption of power.
And all these things
connected with me
because I grew up
in a very, very conformist town
at a conformist school,
and I was--I was frustrated.
Everything that I felt
like wasn't being addressed
in other parts of the world
and other parts of my life,
punk rock addressed.
Skateboarding too.
Skateboarding was about
creative reuse of the landscape
that was intended
for other things,
and it's aggressive.
(grunting)
I was inspired by
bands putting up flyers.
I was inspired by graffiti.
Graffiti culture is
all about lettering
and putting your name up.
Colors, designs, style.
-Technical, advanced.

-Just get loose.
Get loose, and when they
see you got a vicious style,
they be wanting to get
loose about it, you know,
and that's what keep it going.
And that's what sparks graffiti.
Right.
The technique of graffiti,
people going out
and doing daring
locations anonymously,
and doing it for the sake
of saying, "I exist,"
I kind of loved that.
I'm looking for
the graffiti artists.
We are all graffiti artists.
Being from South Carolina
and watching movies
like Breakin'
and Beat Street,
my assumption ignorantly was
that I had to be black or Latino
and be in a crew
where I'd practice
in a black book
until some peer said
that I was ready
to hit the streets.
You know, it's like an art gang.
To me, street art is any art
that's done in public,
but what it's really about
is democratizing art,
making art accessible,
saying that there's room
for more in public space
than just commercial advertising
and government signage.
Where you get up,
how much you get up,
how daring the placement is,
and just the coverage,

that's everything,
especially pre-internet,
because the credit
you're getting
within that world
is based on people seeing
the different
examples firsthand.
Some giant posters.
Andre the Giant.
Here we have this week
on Piper's Pit, of course,
Andre the Giant,
supposedly the biggest
man in the world ever.
It's a pleasure to have you.
Where are you from, Andre?
I'm sorry, do you speak English?
Where--Andre,
where do you come from?
None of your business.
(crowd cheering)
The first thing I ever
did as my own street art
is the Andre the Giant
Has a Posse stickers.
I worked at a skate shop
the summer after my
freshman year at RISD,
and I was putting up
some of the stickers
of some of the brands I liked,
because I got the stickers
free at the store.
And I was trying
to teach a friend
how to make stencils,
so I looked through
the newspaper
and saw this picture
of Andre the Giant
and said, "Why don't you
make a stencil of this?"
He said, "No way, I'm not

gonna do that, it's stupid."
And I said, "What are
you talking about?
Andre's posse is taking over,"
which was just
a spontaneous joke.
We were listening
to a lot of hip hop--
Ice-T, Public Enemy,
the Beastie Boys, NWA--
and they all used
the word "posse."
I'm living large
as possible
Posse unstoppable
Style topical
It's vividly optical
Listen, you'll see 'em
sometimes I'll be 'em
Cops, critics, and punks
never ever want
to see me in power
And I made a few
stickers just as a joke.
Only a few friends
knew about it.
Put some up at some skate spots.
I had a fake ID so I put
some up in some clubs.
Put some on some street signs.
And then I noticed
that, you know,
I was out at a party
and I saw a guy
with one stuck to the front
of a plain baseball cap,
and I could see
paint chips at the edge,
so he'd clearly
peeled it off something
and stuck it to the hat.
And, you know, I asked,
"Hey, what's up with
that Andre thing?"

He was like,
"I don't know, you know,
I saw it on the street,
I thought it was fresh."
And I realized very quickly
that even though the
subject was totally silly
that it was spreading
in an underground,
mysterious way.
It impacted people.
What the hell do you
think you're doing?
And I knew that
when I'd seen things
like the Bob Dobbs
Church of the SubGenius,
the '50s guy with the pipe,
I was like, "What is that thing?
What's the story
behind that thing?
I want to know, I want to
get to the bottom of this."
I just had a feeling
that it would be
likeminded people
perpetuating it,
and I think that
that was the effect
that my Andre sticker
had on other people.
Not all of them.
There's a huge range
of reactions.
I remember seeing
somebody writing very small
in the negative space
in ballpoint pen on one:
"Nazi shit."
Any painter, any poet,
any musician sets a trap
for your attention.
That is the nature of art.
The great thing about

Andre the Giant Has a Posse
is that it somehow
doesn't have to mean anything
and it's still very cool.
It must be a cult,
it's deviant.
There's no--there's
no overt purpose.
By proclaiming this posse,
it was talking about
skate posses, right,
this idea that, like, you know,
kids form tribal communities
in music and art and
skateboarding, whatever.
But it was also
talking about how,
on a mass cultural level,
that we are unconsciously
aligning ourselves
with forces all the time.
This is my propaganda.
See, a lot of people
use models for propaganda.
You associate the product
with an attractive person,
and therefore that
makes it desirable.
I don't want to be as
straightforward as that.
One time I was in
the grocery store
behind a couple,
and the girl said,
"Hey, have you seen that
Andre the Giant sticker?"
And the guy's like,
"Yeah, I've seen that."
She goes, "What is it?"
And he goes,
"I think it's a band,"
and she says,
"Nah, I don't think so.
I think it has something

to do with skateboarding."
And he goes, "It's a band.
I've heard them before."
He just made that
up on the spot.
I thought, that's so fascinating
how, you know, people want to...
really trust their instincts
and their interpretation,
and then they're
gonna argue for that.
This paper in Providence
called The Nice Paper
printed an Andre
sticker, and they said,
"Anyone who knows what
the Andre the Giant
sticker campaign is
about wins free tickets
to The Living Room
show of your choice."
The Living Room was where
I saw Jane's Addiction,
the Ramones,
Suicidal Tendencies,
Bad Brains.
I wanted those tickets.
But I wasn't gonna let
the cat out of the bag,
so I put some
stickers in an envelope
and wrote a note that says,
"I'm sorry, I can't
tell you what it is
'cause that would ruin it,
but here's some stickers
if it's any consolation,"
and left them at their address.
Then the next week,
they ran another
picture of the sticker
with my note, and it said,
"No answers, but we do now
have a handwriting sample."

Within two weeks,
that's 30,000 impressions
in The Nice Paper,
which is 15 times
what I'd put out there.
Now this made me
think about how
certain media centers
in the United States
can make something
seem more pervasive,
more powerful,
more relevant,
more important
by just giving it attention.
At that point in my life,
I was still in college,
so I was working
on school projects.
I worked at the skate
shop for part of the time,
then I worked for
a small clothing company
called Jobless Anti-Work Wear.
They were one of the first
street wear companies.
And one of the designs
I made for Jobless
that I was paid \$50 for,
they sold tens of thousands
of units of that shirt.
All I did was I took
the still from The Shining
where Jack's doing
the "Here's Johnny,"
and then I went to Kinko's
and got on a typewriter
and typed,
"All work and no play
makes Jack a dull boy,"
a little off, you know?
It's a little off,
just like his mind.
Immediate hit,

and that was
an exciting thing for me
because it made me feel like
I could do this stuff.
We knew that he was
extremely artistic,
and back then our neighbor,
who was the art teacher
at Porter-Gaud, said,
"That child is so talented.
Don't dare give
him any lessons.
You'll ruin him.
Just let him
develop on his own."
My little circle of
friends at Porter-Gaud,
we were not the super cool group
and we were not the nerd group.
To be in the cool group,
you had to be an uber jock,
which I wasn't interested in.
And I definitely
didn't want to be teased
like the nerd group.
What you were made fun of about
was frequently things like
if you wore Toughskins jeans
instead of Levi's jeans,
or you didn't have Polo shirts.
And my parents
always said to me,
"We're not spending the money
on that type of stuff,
and if people are
mean to you about it,
then they're not real friends."
And I said, "I know,
they're not real friends."
I need all the help
I can get to survive
because it was all
preppy, spoiled,
smart little fucks.

In early high school,
I was still having to wear
a coat and tie to school,
but my rebellion
was to wear my dad's
really ridiculous
'70s paisley ties
that to me just looked like,
you know, barf on a tie,
and, okay, I have to wear a tie,
but it's not gonna be one
that everyone wants to look at.
By that time, he was into
the skateboard culture,
and he was fully
into wanting to do
nothing but what
he wanted to do.
I really just thought,
"No one here gets it,
and I'm gonna find my way
and not worry about
what anybody thinks."
We'd sat down with him
one weekend and said,
"Okay, things are
not working here,
and you would like
to run your life,
and we're gonna let you."
He very quickly said,
"I want to be an artist,
and--and I want to
go to art school."
And we said, "Fine."
So he went from
studying 14 minutes a day
to working 14 hours a day,
and created a portfolio
that got him into
Rhode Island School of Design.
Hard to do in a year.
Hard to do.
Growing up in South Carolina,

watercolor, charcoal,
oil painting,
that's the only legitimate art.
But then I go to art school
and I learn about Jasper Johns.
Duchamp.
Rauschenberg.
Andy Warhol.
Barbara Kruger.
And an artist whose name
I didn't know yet
had put these posters up
of Ronald Reagan
that was
an unflattering painting
and it said "contra" above
and "diction" below
in bold type on
a yellow background
with this black and white
unflattering painting,
and I thought,
wow, this--you know,
this is political.
Just like the way
the Dead Kennedys
were protesting Reagan,
you know, this artist
is protesting Reagan.
It's good wordplay.
It's got a little bit of
a, you know, sense of humor
but it's also
painted really well.
It's just to provoke
people a little bit,
get 'em thinking,
and also entertain them
on their way to work.
This has kind of got
all the ingredients
I'm excited about.
Take that, Ronald Reagan.
Even in death,

you're not safe from me.
That was a pivotal
moment for me.
It was the work of Robbie Conal.
Robbie Conal.
He calls his work
"urban beautification."
Others call it
a mutant media fungus.
In any case,
there is guerilla artfare
in our streets.
I was just trying
to participate,
you know, in the
national conversation
about these issues
that I cared about,
like "democracy."
You know, I put it out there,
and hopefully
it might stimulate
a little bit of thought
or get people to
talk a little bit
about who is that,
you know, ugly old white guy?
And it was illegal on purpose,
I mean, as a minor form
of civil disobedience,
you know,
like your higher crimes,
like Iran-Contra
and all that stuff,
versus my municipal
code violations.
Fuck you, you know, go ahead,
arrest me if you can find me.
This was Providence
before the vision
of a new young mayor
started to pull it back
from disintegration.
That young mayor

was Buddy Cianci.
I had an illustration class
in the fall of 1990,
and I decided that I have
to do something spectacular.
There was this billboard
for Buddy Cianci
that was just him
standing there waving
that said, "Cianci:
He never stopped caring
about Providence."
Seemed like a really
stupid billboard to me.
I didn't understand.
It didn't say anything
about a position
on any issue.
So I made a big Andre head,
put it over Cianci's head,
and then I photographed that
and I turned that in for
my illustration assignment.
One day, I got a call saying
that "your billboard on
South Main Street there
is posted with
Andre the Giant stickers
all over it."
The very next
night, I was out,
and people started
bringing me beers
to say, "Amazing,"
like, "Cheers to you."
And then on top of that,
Providence media went
completely nuts with the story
because everyone
read into the billboard.
What did the billboard mean?
It's a picture of
Andre the Giant,
so it's saying that

Cianci's a brute.
Only a few people
really knew
that it really wasn't
much of a commentary
on Cianci in that way,
but it made me realize
the power of scale.
So going from primarily
a two-and-a-half,
three inch sticker
to a huge billboard,
that really impacted
the conversation a lot more.
Then I had to have
a meeting with Buddy Cianci,
and he said,
"Look, you know,
this thing cost me money.
What are we gonna do about it?"
I don't know
whether he was for me
or against me,
but the fact of the matter was
it must have worked
because we won the election.
We are going back
to City Hall.
(cheering)
It also made me realize
that I needed to be careful
not to send the conversation
in a direction that maybe
I didn't want it to go.
I hadn't compared
what I thought
of the other candidates'
views to Cianci's,
and if this had hurt
Cianci's chances,
and I actually preferred him,
which it turned out
that that wasn't the case,
I would have been--

I would have been devastated
that I was that careless.
So it made me think
this isn't just
my own personal prank
for my enjoyment;
there--you know,
there are consequences
to this sort of thing.
The summer of '90,
I got a hand-me-down car,
Caprice classic station wagon
with wood paneling,
kind of like the Griswolds.
And it wasn't in great shape,
but I knew I could drive
it to Boston and back,
that was fairly safe.
Then I got more bold
and I started
driving it to New York.
Of course, the first night
the car gets broken into,
my skateboards get stolen.
But they didn't take
the big box of stickers.
So we walked around
the Lower East Side
and Greenwich Village
putting up stickers,
and I loved it,
but quickly I started
putting up stencils.
I realized that
the silver lamp
bases in New York
are a perfect size
for an Andre head stencil.
I would carry a messenger bag
with a couple of cans
of flat black spray paint
and a little bit
of spray adhesive
so the stencil would stick,

and I would walk around
and I would stencil.
I've gotten away
from helicopters,
from buildings
surrounded by six cop cars,
but if you do get caught,
just be polite.
That's all I'd say.
I wasn't really thinking
about the legality
of doing street art,
and the idea that
someone didn't like it
because it was not
done with permission,
that didn't really
faze me at all.
(siren wailing)
At the time,
street art wasn't so hyped.
One of the things was is that
it somehow wasn't
gonna be as real
or as subculturally genuine
as something like graffiti.
And then Shepard
really impressed
a bunch of haters,
people who were normally like,
"Oh, street art's
a bunch of, like,
you know, limp wristed
art students."
The Alleged Gallery
was the only gallery
that was showing artwork
derived from the three scenes
that I was really into.
The underground music scene,
the graffiti
and street art scenes,
and skateboarding.
During the early '90s,

graffiti was linked
to hip hop culture,
to break dancing culture,
to kind of hood culture.
And skateboarding was still,
even though there was
always a nice little
sizable contingent
of New York skaters,
it was a West Coast thing.
I trace the beginning
of street art
versus graffiti art
to the merging of
those two cultures,
which is, I think, why
people look back on that time
as important.
When I met Shepard,
he had, like,
such a thin body of work,
but the main thing
is I remember
the impression he made on me,
so I put him in the show
and Aaron Rose put
him in some shows.
And Shepard did his
best to fine art it up
for the museum show,
but basically it was still
in the real DIY,
handmade aspects
of the craft.
He was a skater
that made stickers,
and I knew the sticker,
but he didn't really
stick out to me at that point
as anyone more
special or different
than any other young
skater making stickers
on the East Coast

during that time.
But I do remember that
they were up everywhere,
and that grew and grew and grew.
So I had a few posters
and my manifesto
that was taped to
the wall in the gallery
and it talks about
a lot of my feelings
about, you know,
trend psychology,
conformity versus rebellion.
You know, a lot
of the ideas that
are still driving
my work to this day
are encapsulated in
this very short piece
that I wrote when
I was 20 years old.
There was a lot of artists
beginning to look at ways
in which we could break
down visual language,
ways in which we could subvert
this fine art of persuasion.
Artists like Thomas Campbell,
Phil Frost,
Mike Mills,
Futura,
all these people were
really important people
in the scene in New York.
If I'm able to connect
with this world,
there might be more potential
for me to earn
a living from this.
I'd graduated from school,
I was on my own,
and I was struggling to survive.
My parents were
constantly on my case

to get a "real job,"
and my idea of having
my screen printing studio,
doing my own projects
and doing things for bands,
you know, didn't seem
like it was gonna pan out.
And then all of a sudden,
this attention from
people in New York
made me think it was
a remote possibility.
The crazy thing
about Andre the Giant
being the subject
of my sticker
is that I had no interest
in professional wrestling.
When I started that,
that was just a bit of--
creative mischief would be
about as much dignity
as I'd give it.
But the idea of having
a reference point
that people might
consider in one way
and then using it artistically
in a different way,
that's provocative,
and I love provocative art.
The interesting thing is
that more and more I was seeing
this fear of the image,
as if it were
some sort of cult
or a gang or something
to be fearful of.
That was what led me
in the direction
of going in a more
"Big brother is watching you"
Orwellian way
with the imagery.

But my approach to maintaining
the momentum I had
was to create what
I call the Icon Face,
which is, you know,
a perfectly symmetrical,
cropped in,
very, very simplified
stylized version
of the Andre face.
Then I did the face
inside the star,
which has been amazing
to see the responses to that.
This is actually propaganda
that we're seeing here.
"You better just
do your own thing
and have sex with who you want
and do a whole bunch of drugs,
'cause that's
what we promote.
We're a bunch of Satanists."
"Oh, it's a pentagram
and that's Satan in there.
Oh, and it's 'cause it's Russian
or it's Chinese
or it's Illuminati.
It's definitely Illuminati."
You know, like, we use the star
in the American flag too.
But with the face
and the color red,
then it's gotta be Satan
or communist or something.
I mean, there were years
where people would
come to my website,
especially when
my website was called
AndretheGiant.com,
where they would say,
"What are you doing with
this communist style imagery

with our hero,
the Eighth Wonder of the World?
This amazing athlete,
you're disrespecting him."
And I would just say,
"I'm sorry if you're offended,
I'm doing something else.
I think Andre
the Giant's awesome."
(laughing)
One thing that Andre's
estate said to me is,
"You can't make
the Andre the Giant
Has a Posse sticker
as something that you're
selling commercially.
It looks too much like
the real Andre the Giant.
That's gonna be
copyright infringement."
They didn't want to
come after the Star Face
or the Icon Face
because they knew
that they were too far removed,
they were too transformative
for them to say,
"This is a copyright
infringement."
There was a while that
I was doing a lot of work
inspired by Russian
Constructivist work,
which is very streamlined
and minimal color palette,
and uses exclamation points,
arrows, you know,
really, really bold typography,
dramatic angles.
When I started getting into
the Russian Constructivist work,
I also coincidentally
saw this movie

called "They Live"
by John Carpenter...
which coincidentally starred
Rowdy Roddy Piper,
a retired wrestler,
so there's this connection
to the Andre the Giant thing.
The premise of the movie
is that everybody in the world
is living sort of under
this alien control,
but they don't know it.

Excuse me.

You look like your head
fell in the cheese dip
back in 1957.

(gasps)

I thought the film
was gonna be terrible
because I rented it from
the \$1 grocery store rental,
but it actually has
a fairly profound message.
I've got one that can see.
And that's that you have to...
pay attention to...
what's going on
behind the scenes,
and the manipulation,
the undercurrent of conformity
and submission.

There's a scene in "They Live"
when Rowdy Roddy Piper
puts on the sunglasses
for the first time
and he looks around
and he sees that
all the advertisements
that normally say
things like "Sale"
say "Consume,"
"Marry and Reproduce,"
"Submit,"
"Obey."

The word "obey" in that movie,
designed in
the Barbara Kruger style,
which whoever was the set
designer for "They Live"
was definitely inspired
by Barbara Kruger,
who I was already a fan of.
I'm thinking about 1984
and George Orwell,
Barbara Kruger,
and it just hit me.
What is the thing
that people do the most
subconsciously,
but that they resist the most
when commanded in a way
that they're conscious of?
You know, obey.
The first work
that I did with "obey"
was super simple.
It was just a crop in
on the grainy face of Andre
from the original Andre sticker
with a red bar below it
that just said "obey"
in Futura type.
I did that for a short time,
then later I did
the illustration
of the face that's
the simplified Icon Face
that a lot of people know now.
It's been the one
I've been using
basically since early 1996.
I started using
the word "obey" in my work
a lot more than
the word "Giant,"
even though they
both would surface,
but I became really,

really fascinated
with "obey" and people's
responses to it.
People ask me what it means
and I say, "Well, what
do you think it means?"
And they go, "I don't know,
what does it mean?"
I'm like, "No, no, no,
what do you think it means?"
And sometimes they get so mad
at being put on the spot,
it's like how people hate
to interpret poetry
or something,
or a piece of art
that doesn't--
that's abstract, like,
they get--they get mad.
They get mad because
they're uncomfortable
with their own interpretation
because it might be wrong
by the, you know,
the "experts" on the subject.
I had just moved to San Diego
and I was working as
a graphic designer.
I'd just come back from lunch
at this Mexican restaurant
that had a logo
of a cow and a pig,
both wearing aprons
holding meat cleavers
like they're about
to carve each other up
and eat each other,
but they're best friends also,
and I thought it was...
a really bizarre logo.
Just so happened that
I had moved back into town
and ran into
this guy Damon Bell

who went to, like,
the neighboring
high school to me,
and...and he...
he invited me to have lunch,
and...at his office,
and I was talking
about this taco shop.
I was saying,
"It's so bizarre
because the logo,
it's a pig and a cow
wearing aprons
and chef's hats,
and they each have
cleavers in their hands,
and they have--
they're arm in arm.
It's like they're just
gonna eat each other."
And so I say this,
and then Shepard
comes around the corner
out of the lobby
holding a 32 ounce soda cup
with that logo on it.
First thing Amanda did
was comment on the cup.
She said, "Oh yeah,
that's that new spot.
Their logo is totally bizarre."
I fell in love right away.
I didn't know who he was.
You know, I just thought,
"Oh, he's kind of
a cute skater boy,"
like, he's cute,
but I was seeing
somebody at the time.
As soon as she left,
Damon, who had
introduced her to me,
came over and said...
"She's cute, right?"

And I said, "Yeah."
And then he goes,
"Don't even think about it,
she's dating Mirko."
And Mirko was this
former pro skateboarder,
half-black, half-Italian,
total Adonis.
So as soon as I find out
that Amanda's dating Mirko,
forget it.
I've got no
chance with Amanda.
Then after that,
we kept seeing each other
around downtown
'cause I lived down there
and he worked
down there.
And so he was
like, "Oh, hey,"
and we became kind of
buddies a little bit.
Apparently things
weren't going that well
with Mirko and, uh,
one night I was at this cafe
where I always played pool
and she showed up
there and told me
that she was
there to study
and get a cup
of coffee.
So we're talking
and we're talking
and I said, you know,
"I didn't come here
to do my homework."
Um, I said, you know,
"I came here to see you."
And he was just like, "Oh."
I'm not very forward
so I was so relieved

that she said she
came to find me,
so I said, "Oh,
well, you know,
here's a...here's my card,
here's my home number
if you want to get
together some time."
So I call and
I was just like,
"All right,
he's not there."
And I called back like
a couple hours later.
Still not there.
I must have called
like five times.
I had seven missed
calls from Amanda.
That's awesome,
she likes me.
I knew he was an artist
and graphic designer.
But I don't--
I wasn't familiar with
his sticker campaign.
Later on when
we went on a date
and then we went
back to her house,
I had wheatpaste
in the trunk of my car.
So after I left her place,
there was
a construction wall
across the street, I did
a bunch of posters on it.
I started realizing
these giant
ominous face posters
were showing up
all on this wall.
And her friend was
like, "That's Shepard,

that's the guy
you're dating."
And, um...
I was sort of like, "Huh.
Did you do that?"
And he was like,
"Yeah," he did do that.
So it was sort
of like he was
decorating my
neighborhood for me.
I didn't quite understand
what he was doing.
I said, "What are you
trying to make us obey?"
But hearing his explanation
of what Obey meant
and that really it's
just telling everyone
to open their eyes,
I loved that.
When I started
dating Amanda,
I had a great
travel companion.
And someone that was
willing to be an accomplice.
We started traveling, you know,
pretty early in our
relationship together.
And we noticed most
any place that we went,
he had been there before
and there was some remnant
of what he had done.
She'd go with me
to San Francisco,
she'd go with me
to Tokyo, Hong Kong.
If it had been a good week
and I had a teeny bit of money,
we'd stay at
a \$25 a night hotel
and go out all night

putting posters up,
go out to brunch
the next day.
Yeah, it was really
a Bonnie and Clyde romance.
It was awesome.
And he never asked me
to look out for him,
but I felt compelled to be
looking around like...
Amanda just, I think,
thought it was good fun
and mischief and
something we bonded over.
Look at me and smile, baby.
Huh?
Nah!
Those cute white
legs of yours.
In the beginning
I'd grab some stickers
and I was like,
"I can put this up too."
Then I'd be
a little bit nervous
and I'd just
throw it up
and walk away
really fast
and he'd be like,
"You can't put the
stickers up crooked!"
And I'm like, "Ah..."
I'm not going
back to fix it.
That's so awesome,
it looks great.
She didn't mind staying
out at night bombing,
she didn't mind
the risk, at first.
And then I started
getting arrested a lot.
(sirens)

Everyone thinks being
arrested's no big deal
until it actually
happens to them
and they see what
it's like firsthand.
(sirens)
(radio dispatch)
Whether it's, you know,
not letting me
make my phone call,
not letting me
have access
to something
to drink
or access
to a bathroom,
putting the handcuffs
on too tight.
I've been denied
my insulin in jail
four times,
and two of the times
it was so bad
that I got really sick.
Well, in the
first few dates
he told me he was
Type 1 diabetic.
So I wanted him
to be really careful
because, I mean,
he could die.
When I was arrested
in Philadelphia,
a guard kept walking by,
every time he'd
walk by, I'd say,
"Excuse me, sir,
I'm a Type 1 diabetic.
I haven't had insulin
in close to 24 hours.
I could get very sick
from not getting my insulin."

He wouldn't even
acknowledge my existence.
And then finally came
to the door of the cell.
As he's unlocking it,
I walked up closer
to the door and said,
"Thank you so much,
I'm sorry to keep
saying something
when you're
walking by."
The moment he
had the door open,
he just goes
boom in the face,
knocks me back,
closes the door
again and says,
"Shut the fuck up
unless you want it
to be worse
the next time."
The next morning
when I got him out,
he pulls up to a taxi cab
that I'm outside with
and he gets in the
car and he's green.
And he basically gets
into the cab and vomits.
And I'm looking
at him like,
"What is wrong?"
And he said, "They
wouldn't give me my insulin."
These things happen
to people all the time,
but when I tell people
they don't believe me.
They think that I'm
exaggerating to sound cool
and it's part
of my rebel image

I'm trying
to cultivate.
I mean, this happened
in multiple places
where he wasn't
given his insulin.
That's when I started
getting really scared
about him getting caught.
Police officer--
I'm not gonna arrest you.
I'm not gonna arrest you,
I just wanna talk to you, dude.
Don't film
from that side,
film from this
side over here.
You understand why, right?
Because you're gonna
attract attention.
It was not legal,
that's for sure.
Everything
was not legal,
but, you know,
we were not thinking as much.
We didn't have kids
or something to
be worried about.
Ooh!
Thierry was unusual
in that he would
take the same risks
holding a video camera.
To get the shot,
I would go up more
to get the right
shot to film him.
Yeah, it was hard.
I would call him,
"Shepard, should we
do something tonight?
Shepard, should
we do something?"

He's like, "Oh!"
Every night.
He followed me for
five years relentlessly
is the only way
I can put it.
Yeah, this is good.
Except if you
have the light on--
I mean, I had kind of
a love-hate relationship
with Thierry.
Thierry,
get out of here
with the camera, okay?
He was very aggravating
but he could also
be really endearing.
And he's pretty crazy
in a lot of really
irritating ways
but also some
kind of cool ways.
And when I see like
the shot I'm filming
and it's a little bit dark,
I would put the light
and he would like
turn around
and like freak.
No, no, no,
don't use that.
"Turn off the light,
turn off the light!"
And I'm like,
"Yeah, yeah!"
And three minutes later,
I put back the light.
"Turn off the light!"
I let Thierry follow
me because I thought
that he would
get a perspective
that no one

else would get.
All right, let's go.
And he did.
He had a focus,
he had a goal,
and was making
it a reality.
It's why I stay
next to him.
But there is always
a beginning of it
and you got
the beginning.
When Bush was
elected in 2000,
I wasn't happy about it.
And then when
Bush started talking
about Iraq after 9/11,
I was completely
perplexed by that.
There's no question
that the leader of Iraq
is an evil man.
We know he's
been developing
weapons of
mass destruction.
And so we're watching
him very carefully.
We're watching
him carefully.
I was asked
at the time,
"Well, do you think
that, you know,
in the wake of 9/11
it's time for you
to censor yourself
a little bit
because people are very
sensitive right now?"
I said, "No, no,
now is the time

to be even
more outspoken
because so many people
are censoring themselves
that only these voices
of fear and aggression
are being heard.
I have to make work
that's, you know,
a counter-narrative."
In 2004,
before the election,
Robbie Conal,
who'd been one of
my big inspirations
with his Reagan
Contradiction,
as well as various
other political posters
and a graffiti
artist named Mear
and I all collaborated
on anti-Bush posters.
It was so moving
to me, man,
because
that's my job.
They were
doing great art,
but they weren't doing
anything near, you know,
adversarial portraits
of George fucking Bush,
you know?
And there they were,
these young guys,
coming to the old guy,
you know, my turf,
saying, "Come on, let's go.
What have you done
for us lately?"
You know, I'm going
like, "This is great."
You know, I started

crying, like...
Mine had Bush hugging
a bomb and it said,
"...Or was it hug
babies and drop bombs?"
Mear had a Bush
with a paper airplane
with an explosion
in the back that said,
"Let's play Armageddon."
Robbie Conal's was
a Bush caricature
that said,
"Read My Apocalips."
And we had a postering party.
We got everybody
to a parking lot,
gave everybody buckets
of glue, brushes,
and we plastered LA
with those posters, you know,
from Venice to East LA.
And it was--
it was pretty great.
ABC News has learned
that Senator John Kerry
will concede the
presidential election
of 2004.
Ladies and gentleman,
I give you the President
of the United States.
(cheering)
I really was stunned
when Bush was
re-elected in 2004.
(cheering)
One of the things
I thought about was
that fear seemed to be
so much more persuasive
than an aspiration
to do right by humanity.
(applause)

After continuing to make
anti-war and
anti-Bush images
throughout
his second term,
one of the things
I'd come to terms with
is that what works
in American politics
isn't the most
sophisticated argument usually.
It's the most
relatable argument.
Vivienne had
been born in 2005.
Obey Giant.
Yeah!
Bless you!
Amanda was pregnant
with Madeline.
And I was thinking
not about
what's going to...
shore up my
brand as a rebel
but really
what kind of--
what kind of
presidency do I want
my kids to be
growing up under.
Do we participate
in a politics
of cynicism
or do we participate
in a politics of hope?
It's the hope of slaves
sitting around a fire
singing freedom songs.
The hope
of immigrants
setting out for
distant shores.
The hope of a young

naval lieutenant
bravely patrolling
the Mekong Delta.
The hope of
a millworker's son
who dares to
defy the odds.
The hope of a skinny
kid with a funny name
who believes that America
has a place for him too.
(cheering)
I had seen Obama's
speech at the DNC in 2004
and I thought that that
was a strong speech.
I started to look at
more of his speeches,
more of his writing,
his policy positions,
and I thought,
"Okay, this is someone
I could actually be for
rather than just
being against stuff."
I was frequently
against stuff,
and that's a very
easy way for people
in the counterculture to go,
and it's the most common
way for people to go.
To stand for something,
in a lot of ways,
takes more courage
than to just be critical.
Senator Barack Obama!
A young charismatic
senator named Barack Obama.
Illinois Junior
Senator Barack Obama.
Hello, everybody.
Hi, how are you?
These senators

have co-sponsored
the Darfur Peace
and Accountability Act.
The most important thing
that we can do right now
is to re-engage
the American people
in the process
of governing
to get them excited
and interested again
in what works
and what can work
in our government.
We will change
the course of history,
and the real journey
to heal the nation
and repair the world
will have truly begun.
Thank you.

One of the things
that I was worried about
creating an image for Obama
was that I would be
an unwelcome endorsement.

I wanted to be
helpful not hurtful,
so I had a friend
who knew someone
that was helping with
the Obama campaign,
they reached out, said,
"Hey, do you guys mind
if Shepard does
a poster in support?"

And they said,
"No, it's cool.
We know his stuff.
Yeah, tell him
to go ahead."

The concept
was to use
red, white,

and blue tones
within a portrait
where the lighting
was hitting
Obama's face in a way
that half his
face would be red
and the other half
would be blue and white,
but that, you know,
they would be
converging in the middle.
The idea that, you know,
they can come together.
I also had been
a big fan of, you know,
the John F. Kennedy
where he's sort of
got that gaze
into the future,
and there's a reason that
it connects with people,
that idea that someone's
looking off into the distance
and they know something
about the future
that you don't know yet.
That's powerful.
So then I just looked
through Google Images
to find images that
had the right lighting,
the right tilt
to the head,
and I found about five
different reference images
that I thought I could
make the illustration from.
And then chose the one
that everyone knows.
The first 750
posters I printed
said "Progress"
at the bottom,

but then someone from
the Obama campaign said,
"Hope and Change
are really
the slogans
that we're using,"
so I changed it to "Hope"
because I do think
that for the entire
eight years of Bush,
a lot of people
felt hopeless.
So I really like--
I liked "Hope."
That's the original
"Hope" poster.
And I said, "You guys are
free to use the image."
And they said, "No, we
don't want to use the image
because it's grassroots,
it's coming
from the margins,
it's not coming
from the campaign."
And they were
right about that.
I wanted the image
to get out there,
so I put a free
download on my website.
Any time someone said,
"There's gonna be
a rally in Denver,
we need posters,"
I had people
shipping stuff out.
And any time
a magazine said,
"Can we reprint
the image?"
I sent them the file.
I was doing interviews
about it almost daily

and it just kept growing
until the election.
Eventually, I printed
300,000 posters
and half a million stickers.
They didn't offer to pay me
and I didn't ask to be paid.
I did sell a couple of paintings
of the Obama image
and 1200 prints
to pay for
the 500,000 stickers
and 300,000 posters,
but one of the things that
was very important to me
was that it
didn't appear
that I was
motivated financially
to do any of the
work I was doing.
You must be
loaded these days.
Are you rolling in it?
Is this your cash cow?
Do you say,
"Cha-ching, no more art"?
Is this it?
Are you retiring
on this thing?
No, I'm not.
What do you mean--
what do you mean?
You gotta be
making some cash
off this thing, right?
Well, it's--
I benefit from
this in other ways.
One is Obama's
gonna be president.
(cheering)
It was crazy to see
an image of mine

that wasn't created
by the Obama campaign
become as well-known
or more well-known
than anything that
was created officially.
Country first,
all right?
That's what I'm saying.
Obama sent me a letter
saying, you know,
"I'd like to thank
you for using your art
in support
of my campaign."
The bottom is signed,
"Barack Obama."
With an actual
signature with a pen.
(Shepard laughs)
Could be like Warhol
and his mom does
his signature
or his assistant
or something,
but I'd like
to believe
Barack wrote this
and signed this.
It makes me feel awesome.
He's got my vote.
(cheering)
(chanting "Obama")
It was my mom's
birthday, November 4th,
and Amanda and I
went to a big event
at this convention hall.
(cheering)
I mean, this--
this just relief
that was so
overwhelming hit me
and I just

started weeping.
It--and I
called my mom.
It was--it was
really awesome.
Black, white, Hispanic,
Asian, Native American,
gay, straight,
disabled and not disabled.
Americans have sent
a message to the world
that we have
never been
just a collection
of individuals
or a collection of red
states and blue states.
We are and always will be
the United States of America.
(cheering)
All of a sudden,
an image I made
was known
almost universally.
I walked through the
Washington, D. C. airport
on the way to
the inauguration
and there were
bootleg mugs,
t-shirts,
sweatshirts.
It was surreal.
It was ridiculous.
And it was
exciting for me
to feel like
I did something
that started
with the 750 posters
and now it was known
around the world.
Then the Obama
campaign asked me to do

a "Change" poster based
on a different photograph
and then a "Vote" poster
based on a different photograph.
And they sold those to
fundraise for the campaign.
And I also, during
that period of time,
was developing my very
first solo museum show
at the Boston Institute
of Contemporary Art.
Now it definitely looks like
the entire thing
still needs to rotate
really counterclockwise.
It was planned
before the Obama poster
was even created,
but then,
of course,
the museum was
really excited
about how much my
profile had risen
during the course
of the year.
Joining me now
is Shepard Fairey.
He is a familiar name
in the art world
for his street work
and guerilla advertising.
This is the official
inauguration poster.
Shepard was getting
a ton of attention.
Most people knew him
from the Andre the Giant sticker
to the Obama image, right?
So you had Andre
and Obama as bookends,
but everything
in the middle

most people
hadn't seen.
The prints,
the paintings,
the handpainted multiples.
Putting all of that
together in one space
had never been done.
Leading up to my
first solo museum show
at the Boston ICA,
I went out to Boston
a couple of times
and put some
posters up around town
like I normally do,
and some stickers.
One of the most
interesting things
about that show
in Boston, though,
was we did a lot
of outdoor work.
Property owners
gave us a platform
to beautify
derelict buildings.
Building owners
gave us space.
So we had
lots of walls.
That caught the
attention of a detective.
Not the posters
actually at first,
what caught
his attention
was that I said,
in an NPR interview,
that I believed
that street art
was a valid movement
and that I, you know,
I stood behind my actions

as a street artist.
And I guess he found this
very, very offensive.
Do you think the people
who do find it intrusive
to have street art on
the side of their building
or on public property,
like, you know,
stop signs,
do you think that
they have a point?
Graffiti, street art
is not appropriate everywhere,
and my approach
is to try to find
the most
appropriate places
where the art
can be integrated,
I can communicate
with people.
I'm a tax payer,
theoretically I
own a little bit
of the public
space myself.
And I can put
stuff out there
that creates the least
inconvenience for others.
I'll only put my
work on buildings
that are boarded up
or dilapidated
or already have
other graffiti on them.
We were in Boston
and it was the night
of the opening,
like the biggest
exhibition of his life,
Shepard and I get
into a taxi cab

to go to
the Boston ICA.
And then I get
a text from Amanda,
"Shepard has been
taken by the police."
Three cop cars pull up,
one of them gets
in front of our taxi,
one of 'em is behind us,
and one of 'em
blocks us in on the side.
I'm thinking, "What
the hell is going on?"
I really thought that
maybe the cab driver
had like a brick
of coke in the car.
So they had nine
undercover cars,
unmarked SUVs.
"Get out of the car,
get down on the ground."
They rip him
out of the car,
throw him
on the ground,
and handcuff him.
They pulled me out
and they arrested me
and they charged me
with 32 felonies.
(booing)
(cheering)
Let's keep this
thing moving, man.
I was horrified,
I couldn't believe it.
I was offended.
I thought, you know,
we did this show,
we're bringing this
artist to the city.
It's, you know,

tons of press for Boston.

He was shaking hands

with the mayor.

You know, it was--

it was absolutely ridiculous.

It's not like Shepard's

never spent time in jail.

It's just that, you know,

usually when he's left

in jail over the weekend

they neglect his dia--

Sorry.

They just neglect his

diabetes and everything

and it's like--

and he gets sick.

I was scared.

I was scared

for Shepard.

The street artist who

gained national fame

for his red, white,

and blue posters

of President Obama

was arrested last

night in Boston.

The Boston Globe reports

Fairey was arrested

on two outstanding warrants.

So I get a--

one of the lawyers

that somebody from

the museum knows

and we go down

to the courthouse.

And we get him out,

we get him out

really early

in the morning.

And that's

when they told me

it's because of

charges of vandalism.

(telephone keypad beeping)

Thank you so much for
tuning in to Call the Cops.
My name is
Officer Jamie Kenneally.
As always,
we got a--
yeah, a big
show in store.
Tonight we have Detective
Bill Kelly in the house.
Can I call you the
Guru of Graffiti, sir?
You can use that word--
whatever word
you want to use.
There are
police officers
that are running the
anti-graffiti squad
in Boston.
And their whole career
is about catching
graffiti artists.
And, you know,
Shepard is, you know,
he's a stag
with big antlers.
You know, I'm
sure they saw him
as a major trophy.
The difference
between graffiti and art
is permission, okay?
If it looks so good
and it's art
and it's that great,
then how come it's
not on the front door
of your parents' house?
How come it's
not on your car?
How come it's not on
your father's business?
If it's that good,

if it's art,
then maybe you should
put it on a canvas
and try to sell it.
He kept using this
phrase over and over,
that I was
someone who was...
...disrespecting
the commonwealth.
"I'm not gonna let someone
disrespect the commonwealth."
That's what
he kept saying.
"You can't come here,
disrespect
the commonwealth,
and expect not
to get arrested."
The vandalism charges
against him in Boston
are not his first.
He's been charged
with numerous
graffiti-related
or tagging charges
throughout the country.
Shepard tended to do work
on derelict buildings.
And alongside his
work are often ads
for Madewell and
Urban Outfitters,
other paper ads,
which are
just as illegal
as what Shepard's
doing, right?
There's no difference.
It's the same material,
it's put up illegally,
it's not like
these companies
are paying permits.

They pay a company
to put it up,
but it's still an illegal
form of advertising.
So it was
selective enforcement.
They weren't going
after these companies,
they were going
after Shepard.
I was arrested
based on the fact
that there were
some posters
and stickers
around Boston.
And, in fact, most of
the charges against me
were for stickers,
but they didn't--
they didn't
care about that.
They wanted to charge
me felony charges
for every single
poster and sticker
that they could find.
My understanding is
that Detective Kelly
was taking out
new charges.
He would literally
walk around town
and see a sticker
and take out
a new felony charge.
The felony charges
carried a potential
of two and a half
years per charge.
So, 32 charges adds up
to something
like 83 years,
potentially,

in prison.
So, all of a sudden,
I went from having my
first museum solo show
about to open,
the inauguration
and all the hoopla
for--around the Obama poster
that came with that.
My original art
piece of Obama
going into the
National Portrait Gallery,
the Smithsonian,
to I'm arrested in Boston
and then a couple
of days later
the Associated Press
called the office
to say, you know,
you used our photograph
for the "Hope" poster
and we want to see all
of your financial records
on the image.
The image by
artist Shepard Fairey
became an unofficial emblem
of this Barack Obama campaign.
And this is a 2006
Associated Press photo.
The AP says that
required permission.
They were very aggressive.
They said, "If
there was any money
made from it,
we want it."
Now because I'd
given all the money
back to the campaign
or invested in making posters,
that wasn't gonna be possible.
So there were some

lawyers that said,
"We're not gonna let
them do that to you,
we wanna take on your case."
I was sent on an assignment
to photograph George Clooney
who was visiting
Washington, D. C.
I found an image of Obama
and George Clooney side by side
at a Darfur conference
but it was a small,
low-resolution image.
I liked the way Obama
was looking up in that image,
so I continued to search
and I found a better
resolution crop-in
just on Obama.
I get a phone call
from a colleague of mine
named Tom Gralish,
he's at
The Philadelphia Inquirer.
He said, "Man, you know,
this is a big deal.
The Obama photograph,
it's yours,
I can prove it."
I felt good.
I was like, "Damn.
Dang, this is really cool."
When we made our counter
to the AP's claims
for copyright infringement,
we said, "I think
what I did is fair use,
but if you disagree,
I'm a reasonable person,
I would be willing to pay
the \$300 licensing fee."
I was concerned about
the attitude that was taken
by Shepard Fairey

and his attitude
was very bold.
"Yes, I took this image.
Yes, I changed this image.
I did something transformative
to this image
and I have no legal
responsibility to the AP."
And that was his position.
The photographer who took
the picture of Barack Obama
at the center
of a lawsuit
now wants to join
the court case.
Anthony Falzone,
with Stanford University's
Fair Use Project,
says there's no
infringement here.
At a minimum, fair use
protects Shepard's right
to do what he did.
I think that there
can be creativity
even within elements
of recycling,
and I absolutely
think that there's--
it has democratized
this process
in a way that's
incredibly powerful
for people who were
frequently powerless before,
and I couldn't be
happier about it.
It was brave.
But it was also
very, uh...
It was the start
of something bad.
I had been seen
putting a sticker up

by an off-duty policeman
who then, once the case
became so high-profile,
came forward and said,
"Yeah, you know,
I saw that guy.
I told him to climb
back up on that pole
and peel the sticker down,"
which I did.
And then there was
another spot
where there's
a boarded up window
where there was a poster
and it was fairly elaborate,
so they basically negotiated
with my lawyer and said,
"If he admits those two things
and accepts them
as misdemeanors,
and pays a fine,
then we'll let it go,
we'll let that be
the resolution."
Two misdemeanors,
you know, it's
a pretty minor deal
compared to 32 felonies.
Big, big, big difference.
-Thank you.
-Thank you.
I'm just glad to be
putting it behind me.
You know, I'd like
to continue making art
and move forward
with my career.
I'm just happy to, you know,
to be getting through this.
Even though Boston,
the criminal charges
were resolved by
the end of the summer

which was several months
after they were initiated,
keep in mind that I was
still dealing with
this back and forth
with The Associated Press
and now the AP's saying
that I'm trying to lie
about which
photograph I used.
There was a lot of clamor
about the image
was actually one
where George Clooney is in
the left side of the frame,
but there was no question,
it was never
that image, never,
and I don't know why the--
how the dialogue started,
who started it, or why.
When the lawsuit started
and my lawyers asked me,
"What photo did you use?"
I said, "I used
a cropped version
of this photo of Obama
and George Clooney."
Good afternoon
and welcome to
the National Press Club.
And what it
turned out was that
the cropped version
was zoomed in and shot
a couple seconds later
by the same photographer
but it wasn't just a cropped
version of the other photo.
I did not realize
that at the time
and I had never done,
you know, an overlay
or a comparison.

Why does it matter so much
which specific photo?
Because if you look here,
there's the photo
upon which it was based,
and the other one
with George Clooney in it.
You know, what's
the big difference?
It looks almost identical.
It really does
and some copyright lawyers
would argue it
really doesn't matter
which photo Fairey used,
but The Associated Press
says it matters a lot.
Bad news atmospherically
for Fairey.
Yeah.
Dealing with
the case in Boston
was incredibly stressful.
I was barely
keeping it together.
I was on the verge of a
nervous breakdown from that.
And then, to add the AP
lawsuit on top of that
and then realizing I'd made
a mistake about the image,
so what I did was I made
things way worse for myself
by just not saying
anything about it
and sticking to
my original story
that, "Oh, you know,
it was based on the cropping
of that photograph."
I didn't acknowledge
to my lawyers,
I didn't acknowledge
to Amanda,

I didn't acknowledge
to anyone that I'd been mistaken
and that I didn't even realize
there were two photos.

The other thing is
I just felt stupid,
so I tried to just
keep that a secret
and I deleted files
on my computer.

I remember the day
he told me,
he said to me,
he said, you know,
"I need to talk to you,"
and it was such a weird
"I need to talk to you"
that I thought,
"You're either dying,
you've had an affair."
And he said,

"You gotta sit down."
So I'm like, "No, no,
I'm not sitting down.
What, tell me while
I'm standing up."
Like, seriously.

I'm like, "I am not
sitting down."
And he tells me, he goes on
to tell me what happened.

And then later on when I
realized there was no--
if I went into
a deposition,
I would have to
lie under oath,
then I came forward
to my attorneys.

I was like, "Why the
hell did you do that?
Why did you do that?"
It was irrelevant as
to which photo it was."

And he said, "It's because
I swore it was the other photo."
Anything that could
be used against me,
to me, was, you know,
very threatening,
not just in terms
of a lawsuit
about potentially money,
but about my freedom.
Simple as that.
So it was heartbreaking for me
because I knew that he
didn't need to do that.
But he was not well from that.
He was upset.
You know, it's the first time
that I felt so overwhelmed
that I did something
really cowardly.
I just did everything I could
to avoid dealing with it.
And me, I'm just
sitting there like,
"If you would have
just told me,
if you would have
just told me that this--
that this came up,
I could have...
I could have gotten
you through that."
That was one of
the roughest points,
I think, in our
relationship together.
But I would have never
let him go down that road.
There's just no way.
Like, I would have, like,
thrown him under the bus
to save him.
Where we went
from there was that,

"You gotta come clean.
You gotta talk to
the lawyers about it."
The conversation
with my attorneys
was, I could tell,
very frustrating for them
and, of course, it was
very emotional for me.
They just said,
"Why didn't you tell us sooner?
The merits of your case
were strong either photo,
it didn't matter which
photo you worked from.
You would have probably
won the case either way.
But now what you've done is
you've cast the entire case
in a bad light
because you look
like a bad person,
and that is going to
taint the proceeding.
We can't move
forward with you,
we have to drop
you as a client."
A Los Angeles-based artist,
Shepard Fairey,
has acknowledged that
an Associated Press photo,
seen here on the left,
was the basis for his image
of Obama on the right.
Mr. Fairey pleaded guilty
in a New York
federal court yesterday
to destroying
and fabricating documents
during a legal battle
with The Associated Press.
Fairey could face
six months in prison.

He's gonna be sentenced
coming up in July.
Once I heard the facts
of the dispute,
it seemed to me
an opportunity
to clarify the
appropriate latitude
that appropriation
artists should enjoy
when making use of
copyrighted materials,
in particular
copyrighted photographs.
So I initially got
involved in the case
out of a matter of principle.
I believe in the
principle of fair use
and for artists to have
the right to create
new images that
are transformative
based on preexisting images.
It's been part of art-making
since art-making started.
My message to any artist
is if you wanna use something,
and you think you want to
use it to promote your work,
great.
Have the respect
towards your
professional colleague
to ask.
That's it.
That photo, without
what Shepard did to it,
was not iconic,
by anyone's stretch
of the imagination.
He made it iconic, okay?
You have to give the artist
some credit for that.

Now if he went to go
sell t-shirts from it,
and it was like a movie star,
that's a situation
that has to be
dealt with financially
for the photographer
no matter how dime-a-dozen
the photograph is.

But the freedom to use
an image of a political figure
in order to express an idea
or to protest something,
that makes a big difference.

There was probably a line
of photographers up front
snapping pictures
all with long lenses,
very impersonal.

Hello!

Freedom of speech is a really
important thing in this country
and Shepard saw something
in that particular photograph
and thought,

"This could be something."

Fairey says he didn't
violate copyright laws
because his use of the image
should be considered
fair use under the law.

The AP alleges that Fairey's
image directly copies
all the striking
elements of the photo
and adds nothing
substantial to it.

News gathering itself
really would be under threat
if anybody could copy
whatever they liked
and make whatever use
they pleased of it
without paying.

The Associated Press was demanding an amount of money that would have bankrupted Shepard. Considering that to license a photograph is, at the very most, a few thousand dollars and they were asking for millions of dollars. The AP wanted to make a very serious case, precedent, that you steal or you take from the AP and the long arms of the AP will come back to get you. The Associated Press is wealthy and well-represented by lawyers. So they have the resources to press hard over a long period of time, which Shepard did not. Shepard and Amanda were being drained. It was a dark time for me. It was very, very, very stressful and depressing. I could just see this, like, overwhelming cloud over him. However, we have children and he's a wonderful father and he really, you know, he was still there, he was still Dad. The girls are number one. If anything, I almost felt like he felt more at peace just being with them. Madeline was one year old. Vivienne was three. Amanda was really stressed out just being a mom and dealing with all of it. It would have been

very different
if it were just me.
This is tape number one,
volume five
of the videotape deposition
of Mr. Shepard Fairey.
That was one of the most
stressful things for me
was having to go through that
because in a deposition,
if you don't give them
the answer that they want,
they then ask it
five more times
in a slightly different way
and they tried to
make it seem like
there were malicious
aspects to everything
and there really wasn't.

Um...

I thought I did, yes.
The Associated Press
were brutal on him.
They were absolutely brutal.
They were going to crucify him
at a level that
I really didn't understand.

(clears throat)

Have you had a chance
to look at the transcript?

Yes, I did.

Where in there
do you tell Ms. Gross
it was wrong for Mr. Fairey
to use your photograph?

I didn't say that.

Okay, let's take a break.

It was time to take
a break for lunch
and I said,

"Hey, hey, Shepard,
do you wanna go get some lunch?"

And the suits were just

totally freaking out.
We looked at our
lawyers and we said,
"We are going to lunch,
see you later."
When I had lunch
with Mannie Garcia,
I explained to him that,
"I respect photographers,
I collaborate with
photographers all the time.
I also side with people
who feel like they're,
you know, under the boot
of a corporation.
And I think that you and I
are definitely
more like each other
than we are like
the people from the AP."
Shepard extended his hand to me
and he apologized.
And he said, "I should have
contacted you earlier,
but I apologize.
I want to make it right."
I think as he got to know me
a little more and understand
that I was never doing
it for personal gain,
that even getting
recognition out of it
was not something I
expected or was going for,
and, you know,
we bonded over the stress
that we'd both gone through.
Well, we were just about
to hash it out in court
and I swear,
the AP was like,
"Oh, we wanna settle."
The Associated Press
should have,

and probably was, worried
because this is
the kind of case
that, particularly
if decided on appeal,
would disadvantage
them in negotiations
with artists of all sorts.
So from their standpoint,
getting a significant
sum of money from Shepard
and not getting a final judgment
was the goal.

Shep made agreements
with the AP,
the AP had to make agreements
and settlements with me,
and so it took a while
and it was painful.

I asked my lawyers,
"How much money do you
think went into this
before we got to this point
where it's I can
go in my direction,
Shep goes in his direction,
and the AP goes
in their direction?"
And they estimated it
somewhere around \$15 million.
And most of that money was
spent by The Associated Press.

Lawyers.

Lawyers.

It never got to the point
where it went to court
where a judge
could make a decision
on whether it was
fair use or not.

Had the case proceeded all
the way through to the end,
I'm quite confident
Shepard would have won.

You may never recognize
me on the street,
you might recognize
Shepard Fairey.
But I'm the guy
that made the image
that this guy
made the poster
to elect the first
black president.
And, uh, it's still cool.
I'm still good with it.
I don't have any issues.
It was humiliating.
It was something I was
really, really ashamed of.
and it's, you know,
who knows how long it'll be,
you know, an albatross
around my neck
as far as public
perception goes,
but it's gonna be something
that is gonna haunt me forever.
When that all
was finally over,
I moved on the way
I almost always move on
from things that are stressful,
I just do more work.
Work's good therapy for me.
I had seen one
of the museum shows
and was very impressed
by the portraits.
They were way
beyond what we knew
from the Obama portrait,
and I thought
that Shepard Fairey
is one of the most
original, insightful
portrait artists alive today.
I'd been asked

by Jeffrey Deitch,
who was the gallerist
that I most looked up to
and admired for his
program at his gallery,
Deitch Projects in New York,
to do a show.

I proposed
a particular theme to him:
a portrait of America.

Portraits of
underground heroes
and some of our
political heroes.

Having a show to work toward
gave me something to
really put my energy into.

All of my frustrations
about things going on
socially and politically
and just my own
frustration with myself.

It took at least
a year to create
this phenomenal
gallery of portraits.

This was the show that
I eventually decided
to title "May Day."

I had a lot of fears that
showing at Deitch Projects,
which is a gallery that
is taken very seriously
by the art world,
that it would be a little bit
out of my comfort zone.

I knew that there would be
a lot of people hoping
that I would not
make a strong show
so they could say that all the
hype around the "Hope" poster
had been a one-hit wonder,
that I was not to be taken

seriously as an artist.
And I felt a lot of pressure
to prove otherwise.
The morning of the opening,
they began lining up very--
like seven in the morning,
and then when we
opened the full show,
there were so many people there
the street was
basically shut down.
You know, I'm very,
very fortunate
my artwork's known
to a lot of people.
I have a successful art career,
I have a successful
clothing line
which has been, you know,
an amazing source of income
for me to do things that I never
could have done otherwise.
Now, I have
the kind of resources
to put money into things
that I care about.
People don't know that he does
a lot of the stuff for free.
Marriage equality,
Citizens United,
money in politics,
the criminal justice system
and mass incarceration,
climate change.
It was easy for me
when I was younger,
and I'm just doing
a few stickers and stencils,
to say, "This is really
good for what it is."
But when you get to the scale
of the Eiffel Tower,
you better make it count.
The Paris Climate Conference

unites leaders,
government officials,
scientists,
and influential speakers
from around the world
to promote global action
for addressing climate change.
This will mean establishing
what individual countries
will do to control
greenhouse gas emissions
and providing financial
support where needed.
I created a globe
that was suspended
between the first and second
tiers of the tower.
You could see
a mandala from beneath,
you could see floral imagery,
and then woven in
were different images
about the environment,
some championing green energy
and some cautioning our
reliance on fossil fuels.
What I found out
was that no artist
had ever done
a three-dimensional installation
at the Eiffel Tower.
I'm the first artist
in history to do it.
That's really incredible for me.
To have the entertainment value
and the spectacle
and serious content
all come together,
that's rare.
It was something that I was
proud of aesthetically.
It said what I wanted to say
and it was getting attention
in a really amazing place.

I think the idea that
art can become a symbol
or a starting point
for conversation is--
you know, that's exciting,
and sure, there are
a number of people
who care about policy
that were probably gonna be
engaged in the climate change
conversation anyway...

Thank you.

Thank you, sir,
all right.

...but if the art
lured some people
that wouldn't have been
into that conversation,
that's very valuable to me.

And we have our first
projections of the night.

Take a look at this.

Donald Trump, folks,
we project,
will win in Kentucky.

He's gonna have
to win someplace
we didn't think
he was gonna win.

Donald Trump will win the state
of Ohio, a big one here.

This is a dramatic,
very stunning event.

Donald Trump has won
the state of Pennsylvania.

Donald Trump will win
the state of Florida.

The most surreal election
we have ever seen.

(crowd chanting "USA!")

My need to make my work topical,
it comes from everything
that I've been into in my life
that's made my life

feel meaningful.
Now I'm trying to find ways
to take a lot of my frustrations
and my impulses and channel
them in a constructive way.
And using my art
to say something
is the most constructive
way I can think of.
We want to take you to D. C.
We have been monitoring
the Women's March
coming out of Washington.
It's expected to be the biggest
inauguration protest
in U. S. history.
We're starting to see
the groups gather,
they're getting
a little bit bigger.
And if you think
it's a phenomenon
that's mostly
confined to Washington,
take a look at this.
Marchers spread
across the country.
Well, that chilly, windy weather
not keeping an estimated
20,000 people
from the Women's March.
The city was preparing
for about 200,000 marchers.
By early this morning,
estimate had more than doubled
to at least a half a million.
Women-led marches took place
in over 600 locations
spread across seven continents.
(cheering)
I definitely consider
myself an artist
before an activist.
Because if you call

yourself an activist,
you're never doing enough.
For an artist, I do a lot.
I will outlast anybody.
I've outlasted
generations of haters.
I mean, they come and go.
You know, I think that
we only have so much
time on the Earth
and I'm not gonna
waste a second of it.