

Dedicated to General Idea 1969-1994

Esther Schipper is pleased to present AA Bronson's *White Flag*, the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

On September 11, 2001, AA Bronson was caught in Toronto when his flight home to New York was canceled. He watched in real time on television, as two airplanes punctured the twin towers of the World Trade Center, and then as the towers collapsed. It was seven days before he could rejoin his husband in lower Manhattan. What he found there is inscribed indelibly on his brain: a thick chalky dust of glass, concrete, paper, asbestos and human flesh that covered everything; and American flags, everywhere.

*White Flag* presents seven paintings, each constructed of an American flag, purchased on eBay, mounted on raw linen, and coated in layers of an antique preparation of rabbit skin glue, chalk, and honey. This compound was, historically, used to prepare the ground upon which a painting was painted; it is literally the foundation of a history of painting. But here the ground becomes the painting itself, shrouding each flag—each with its history implicit in torn edges, holes and rips—in an elegiac ashen presence.

The title *White Flag* is not merely descriptive of the paintings: it alludes to the plant White Flag, or Cemetery Iris, a white flower popular in Muslim and Christian cemeteries, cultivated for more than 3500 years. The plant is highly poisonous, invasive, and infertile. Indigenous to North Africa and the Middle East, it traveled with the Muslims to Spain and then with the Spanish to America. In Texas it is referred to as “the flower that you can’t kill”. While engaging in a larger task of mourning a personal, cultural and political past, this work also addresses migration, and the uneasy convergence of Muslim and Christian histories.

These paintings evoke Jasper Johns' iconic white-on-white *White Flag* of 1955. They echo General Idea's *White AIDS* paintings and their *PLa©ebo (Manzoni)* of 1993. Although AA Bronson's nod to Johns' work is clearly intentional, Johns' early Pop Art paintings disavow the symbolic meaning of their flags. Bronson, on the other hand charges these flags with personal, historical, and transnational significance, and clothes them in funereal attire.

AA Bronson claims that these works came to him in a dream, and demanded to be ‘painted’, or perhaps, erased. As HIV and AIDS erased Bronson's generation and General Idea itself, and as the

spectral dust of 9/11 erased the downtown Manhattan scene of 2001, so these paintings speak to loss, absence, and mourning.

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