

Kai Matsumiya presents a range of work by Rainer Ganahl exploring the linguistic and visual terms associated with each administration for his show *“Legacy: Bush, Obama, Trump”*. Such terms, the artist contends, become symptomatic of each presidency.

In his *“War on Terror”* series, the artist rendered such expressions with a ballpoint pen in the style of Alighiero e Boetti’s airplane drawings: “Axis of Evil”; “9/11”; “Freedom fries”; “Homeland Security”; and other terms that refer to various terror attacks, wars, lies, political theater, and name calling.

*“Why do they hate us?”* reveals a postcard mailing project with fake stamps comprised of works on paper. An embroidery piece from Ganahl’s *“Afghan Dialogue”* series recycles network news design, branding, and labeling strategies, and incorporates reactions to the content by the Afghan embroiderer who stitched it. The same interaction informed the *“Iraq Dialogue,”* works that the artist produced with factory workers from the Arab worlds on ceramic tiles, a long-revered tradition in many Arab countries.

Ganahl’s *“News Paintings,”* first shown at MUMOK-Vienna in 2003, draws imagery from news websites in over-sized fashion with the painting medium, and was a response from the spectacular reports and images of suicide attacks and warfare from the time. In nearly all cases, the artworks in *“Legacy: Bush, Obama, Trump”* had been executed shortly after events which informed them.

The Bush administration packaged the Iraq War as prime-time television spectacle and labeled it *“Shock and Awe.”* While the Hussein regime never produced “Weapons of Mass Destruction,” as was accused by the Bush administration, a strange irony came about when mass destructive weapons then rained down on Iraq which resulted in destabilization of the world to this day. Asymmetrical warfare in the form of terrorism, i.e. “Evil Doers”, went hand in hand with the rising internet media culture.

After a brief pause, Ganahl continued his website News Paintings again during the Obama administration with the arrival of the news imagery of the well-choreographed beheadings from ISIS. Such imagery surpassed the shock value of suicide bombings as the new media novelty. Meanwhile, Obama institutionalized a major military innovation which promoted surgical stealth operations from the air: drone warfare. The artist thus returned to Boteti’s ballpoint pen technique with his two-color depictions of war drones, found via Google images. This war strategy produced its own vocabulary, like “Extra Judicial Killings” and “Predator”.

Just entering office, President Trump has brought forth a sea of terms that speak for themselves: “Fake News,” “Alternative Facts,” “Extreme Vetting,” “Sad!”, “Bad Hombres”—and his main slogan: “Make America Great Again.” Ganahl rendered these slogans with a script invented in 1930 by Rudolph Koch who adhered to Nazi ideology. For this series Ganahl added his own term, “TRUMPUTIN,” reminiscent not only of the charlatan advisor Rasputin who contributed to the fall of Czarist Russia through salaciousness and mysticism, but also of the 1970s-disco song “Rasputin” (“lover of the Russian queen”) by Boney M. Befitting of the chauvinist, sexist realities of our new president. The song will play in the gallery. The exhibition, “*Legacy: Obama, Bush, Trump*”, opens March 5 and remains on view through April 23.

Rainer Ganahl will host reading seminars at the gallery during his exhibition with a primary focus on Hannah Arendt’s “*Origins of Totalitarianism*”.

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