

“When the president does it, that means that it is not illegal.” – Richard Nixon, 1977

A conundrum: In the USA, the extensive public demand for graphic depictions of crime has created a marketplace in which criminals can make a profit by selling their stories. Yet, allowing a criminal to benefit from his crime conflicts with fundamental beliefs and public policy. In order to resolve this conflict, the American Congress and thirty-nine states enacted a legislation to prevent criminals from receiving profits from, for instance book deals, until at the very least, their victims have been compensated. This act was dubbed the “Son of Sam”, and it, in turn, has been challenged and ruled unconstitutional in the courts of New York and other states, outlining that the law could be understood as over-inclusive, and would have prevented the publication of such works as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience*, and even *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*.

The legal system in America is confusing and not unlike a maze, full of secret passages. But where does it leave you as an American artist down on your luck, with no state funded support system to fall back on? And to whom do the acts that you’ve committed in the name of the arts, belong?

With this in the back of your mind, we would like to invite you to the opening of *Drawings From Rikers* by Joe Gibbons, opening to the public at Kunstverein on Friday February 16, from 6–8pm (following the members only preview).

Gibbons who “has made a career out of exploiting the often messy circumstances of his own life, creating unabashed works that are equal parts psychodrama, autobiography, and confession”* is presenting his new body of work. And although Gibbons himself can’t join us in person for the night of the opening, we certainly hope you will.

On view will be nineteen, pencil drawings, some in color, of watches, calendars, and something called a “Riker’s Island Burrito”, all shown outside of the USA for the very first time. The images share one common theme, time, and their ultra specific content reinforces our understanding of the context in which they were made, of how one chooses to fill the hours, connect to the material at hand, tell one’s story. A box of corn- flakes, a food tray, pills, the cover of a book, a headline, an advertisement for an Omega Speedmaster, for Silver Patrón tequila, a slice of toast. Reminiscent of Martin Kippenberger’s hotel drawings, Gibbons’ drawings from Rikers also merge life and work, integrate reflection and observation, and extend an ongoing narrative. A narrative that began, you could say, late in 1977 when, at a busy opening in the Oakland Museum, Gibbons stole a Richard Diebenkorn painting and created the fleeting yet meaningful Art Liberation Front.

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