

Spacejunk 
Art Centers

PRESS KIT

1001 REASONS TO (DIS)OBEY

THE ART OF SHEPARD FAIREY

	1989	THE ART OF SHEPARD FAIREY	2023	
8 MARS – 9 JUILLET 2023 MUSÉE GUIMET – LYON				
1001	REASONS TO (DIS)			OBEY

Table Of Contents

- 01 - *General Information***
- 02 - *Editor's note: Jérôme Catz***
- 03 - *The artist : Shepard Fairey***
- 04 - *The exhibition: 1001 REASONS TO (DIS) OBEY***



General Information

Spacejunk Lyon, in partnership with the City of Lyon, is honored to present the largest exhibition ever created around the artist Shepard Fairey, entitled **1001 REASONS TO (DIS)OBEY**.

The exhibition will take place at the Musée Guimet from March 8 to July 9, 2023. During a four-month period, the ancient Museum of Natural History will open its doors again to present the works of this pioneer of Street Art.

This retrospective is the result of a meticulous work which offers you a total immersion in the universe of one of the greatest street artists of all time: Shepard Fairey, better known as *Obey*.



Musée Guimet, 28 Boulevard des Belges, 69006 Lyon



The exhibition takes place from 8 March to 9 July.
From Tuesday to Sunday, from 10am to 19pm.
Open on public holidays.



Full price : 9€
Reduced price : 6€
Children under 14 years old : free entry



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1. EDITOR'S NOTE: JÉRÔME CATZ

CURATOR OF THE EXHIBITION, AUTHOR

In 1965, Ernest Pignon-Ernest created his first works in Provence, in the spirit of what Street Art is today. The same year, the art of *labelling/tagging* was born in New York: 1965 marked the beginning of this artistic movement that we call Street Art today. 24 year later, Shepard Fairey created his first silk-screen stickers outside New York and make the way of an art which is accessible to everyone.

Street Art is a powerful artistic movement, a true reflection of our world, but it is above all a popular movement that accompanies us all in our daily lives. It generously offers us the spontaneous works of artists who take the floor with great visual interventions on the walls. It has already been proven that this discipline draws the interest of a large and varied public.

Real street artists show boldness, risk-taking, commitment, research and innovation. They are present everywhere, questioning constantly, provoking often, and always *sobering up* the walls. They force us to see their existence, to question the right of expression in the public space and push us - often - to curiosity. They *blow up* the social barriers between the public and shuffle the *sacred* cards of THE culture.

Street Art is to be seen, it is not to be ordered. By addressing everyone, it represents free expression, the desire to share, generosity. It is a good representative of popular culture, of this "Pop Art" which always triumphs, because it is the art which makes most people vibrate, provokes the most sincere emotions to a great number of people which ensures a *lasting bond*, that the world's intellectual elite wants it or not.

Shepard Fairey is an artist whose work I have been following assiduously for over 25 years. He is for me one of the best representatives of what quality Street Art is. An art that is offered to a large number of people in a public area, both physical and digital.

An art carrying, with its recognizable artistic feature, a message about our society. For thirty-three years, the artist has been working to produce artistic, political and socially committed content that is accessible to all.

It is around more than 1000 works, films and objects that we intend to offer here a global vision of Shepard Fairey's work, from the creation of his first sticker in 1989 to his latest pieces, with as many anecdotes and precise information.

His artistic creations such as the first hand-screen prints, the unique paintings on canvas, including his famous HPM (Hand Painted Multiple), the screen prints on metal, on wood, and even on T-shirts or on skateboards will be presented in the museum.



DIS OBEY - 1997 - 24x61cm - screen print on paper - edition of 100 copies

2. The artist : Shepard Fairey

After a period of creating stickers from 1989 to 1994, Shepard Fairey becomes interested on posters. Sticking his character André The Giant everywhere, on highly visible surfaces such as bridges, the sides of expressways or other extremely busy passages, his icon attracts the attention of many of his contemporaries. Inspired by John Carpenter's film Invasion Los Angeles (They Live), in 1995 Shepard added the slogan "OBEY" (a word that appears throughout the film), under André's stylized face: the message became clearer. From 1998 the media success is there, and will only increase on 2008, when the team of Barack Obama chooses, for the presidential election campaign the portrait made by the artist. Since 2006, his exhibitions have been held in prestigious places and museums, his monumental murals have flourished in several major cities around the world, and his work has been enriched with topics that are increasingly committed to the causes he considers important to support, often in the form of a poster for sale, the profits of which are donated to the action concerned.



HOPE - 2008



LOVE UNITES- 2008

3. The exhibition : 1001 REASONS TO (DIS)OBEY

As soon as Shepard Fairey mastered silk-screen, he immediately became involved in three areas that he likes the most: Politics, social commitment and music. An excellent DJ himself, he signs his numerous performances under the pseudonym DJ Diabetic or MC Insulin, (Shepard Fairey is diabetic). His ability to produce posters himself with his remarkable graphic style, made him one of the most known designers of concert posters of the time. Meeting his idols on the festivals for whom he created the posters and then printed them, it was his way to make them known to the public. Since 1995, Shepard Fairey has devoted a good third of his production to the world of music, making a lasting visual mark on this industry.

If it is difficult to speak of a "period" devoted to certain musical trends; we can note that the arrival of Rap is at the end of 2002. Before that, the artist is in direct contact with the Punk and the Rock, music which has been affectionated by the skateboard scene of the East Coast of the United States, where the artist grew up. In any case, one thing is certain: it is the message more than the melody that counts for Shepard Fairey. One could say that he chooses his artists based on their activism. If you use your audience to get a political message across, you have your place in the artist's pantheon!

Concerning the social or even societal commitment, one of his very first posters is *Stop Racism* which was published in 1989. Since then, he has never stopped campaigning for the equality of all, regardless of gender, origin or religion.

In 1997, the artist was already committed to the climate and the following year, the first politically committed works appeared. With the works *Saddam* (Hussein) or the series *Islam* of 1998, Shepard opens the door to a large number of socio-political works that will follow until the election of Barack Obama in 2008.

1995 - 1999 HAND-SCREEN PRINTS, RARE PIECES, ROCK & ROLL AND ACTIVISM!

Shepard Fairey produced his first works from 1989, but at a random and very low rate; in 1995 for example, only 7 works are referenced on the artist's Wiki... All the works are produced in a very artisanal way, in very small series, and few of them have managed to be preserved in good conditions. Things started to get serious in 1996 with more than 30 different visuals made in this year.

Among the first works that Shepard Fairey will create, the silk screens related to music are numerous, but *The Beatles Set*, considered, by the specialists of the artist's work, to be the grail in the history of Street Art. This series created between 1996 and 1997 is the first series of 4 works around the same subject. Based on the four portraits made by the photographer John Kelly appearing in the 10th album of the legendary band, Shepard Fairey represents John, Paul, Ringo and ... Andre instead of George Harrison. In addition, it is highly noted that The 5th Beatles was created only to 14 copies. The set shows the irreverent side of the street artist, which he explains as such: "With the *Beatles* series, I diverted a more cultural subject than Andre the Giant or professional wrestling. In some ways, the Beatles are such an institution of popular culture, so revered, that replacing George Harrison's face with Andre's is irreverent. But since everyone associates only positive vibes with the Beatles, there was a kind of Pavlovian euphoria in simply producing the Beatles portraits and associating André with them. This is one of my most sought-after series, and another example of cultural reinterpretation and the result it can generate. But I don't feel guilty about anything, because reinterpretation is usual in art and there is a lot of it in culture."

1996

Appearance of the Giant Star Obey logo where André's face is inserted into a five-pointed star. This graphic icon will become one of the artist's signatures.

1997

The militant works of this period will fluctuate between ecology (AIR, Act Now Pay Later) and the first reinterpretations of communist propaganda around the theme of Big Brother. André The Giant is used with all the graphic elements of the constructivist aesthetic.

1998

The two series, that emerged, set the tone for the next 10 years: while the *Communists* print set associates political leaders with André the Giant by alternating the slogans Obey and Giant with the characters, the *Islam* print series highlights iconic figures - real or not - of the Black Panther movement with only the slogan "Giant" and the figure of André into a star... a subtle look at variations between "villains" and "heroes."

1999

The print *Website* is surely the most important of this year, because it announces the beginning of the digital form which will seize all the movement of the street art; a turn that the artist will take with attention and professionalism!

2000 - 2002

THE ARRIVAL OF MECHANICAL PRODUCTION, RARE WORKS ON WOOD AND METAL, PROPAGANDA, PUNK & ROCK N' ROLL!

Shepard Fairey started the mass production in the early 2000s, investing in semi-automatic machines that allowed him to produce between 100 and 300 copies of each of his visuals. The silk-screen remains of high quality, but the dose of paint used in each pass is optimized, and even if the works gain in uniformity, they lose in matter as well as in their artisanal side.

The series with a high intellectual content are set up with the six prints *The Medium is the Message* directly inspired by the concept of Marshall McLuhan or the series of ten serigraphs *Urban Renewal* created from photos of the artist. This collage is a proof of his work and shows the importance of preserving the trace of this ephemeral, by nature, art.

Music also has a strong presence during these years and when Joe Strummer died in 2002, Shepard made his *Punk Set* series, which included Henry Rollins. The singer of Black Flag and then of The Rollins Band is a figure who has accompanied Shepard Fairey since his beginnings, as he is also an early activist and a workaholic... like the artist!

In 2000, the first silk-screen prints on wood and metal began to appear. These works, edited in two or three copies, are considered as unique pieces. Being easier to produce by the artist, they remain quite accessible compared to the larger number of pieces on canvas.

2003 - 2008

POLITICS, RAP, PUNK & ROCK N' ROLL !

Shepard Fairey uses his work to criticize institutional politics. By diverting logos and symbols of America, he attacks the actions of the government on topics such as education, war, authoritarianism and plays with the icons of the time, shamelessly associating Nixon with Lenin and Mao...

George Bush Jr. has been president of the United States since 2001. His policy, led by him and his administration, seems to be an inexhaustible subject for the artist, who will attack him on all fronts during the two consecutive terms of the Republican president.

As far as music is concerned, rap music makes its appearance in the graphic universe of the artist. Public Enemy is the first group to officially receive the favors of Shepard Fairey. Rick Slick, Biggie, LL Cool J and Tupac Shakur are next in *The Rappers Set* published between 2003 and 2004.

2004

The work *Bush Hell* showing Bush as a vampire is used as a promotional poster for the newspaper LA Weekly.

2005

The large formats in silkscreen are more numerous and allow to highlight certain topics such as the series *Rise Above* (political) or *Obey* (historical). With the war in Iraq, that began in 2003, peace is more than ever honored by the artist, especially through the figure of the woman.

2007

Shepard is hyperactive this year, the number of published works is impressive, notably around the exhibition *E Pluribus Venom* presented in New York in the middle of the year. It was the height of his frontal criticism of Bush's America.

2008

Barack Obama's campaign team noticed the poster that the artist had made spontaneously to support the best anti-Bush candidate! The visual of the artist will become the icon of the Democrats' campaign and the *HOPE* poster one of the most famous images on the planet, honoring not only the artist but also the entire street art movement.

2009-2010

Following the election of Barack Obama, whose campaign portrait Shepard Fairey signed, the artist's favorite topic - political commitment - disappeared. As much as the Bush administration inspired the artist, the victory of his champion deprived him of a type of intellectual production. The topics, that he has dealt with since then, will evolve around ecology, lobbies and artists ; topics that Shepard Fairey enjoys the most. Strangely, only ten silkscreens with a music theme were produced in 2009 out of the 108 produced in general during that year. The same goes for 2010, when only 15 pieces will be produced, including the "canvas" series created from unique works and then edited in silkscreen.

The low production of the artist around one of his favorite subjects is perhaps explained by the fact that he is preparing a large exhibition around music, with a bold bias ...

2011-2014

Before Barack Obama's re-election, the artist will strongly support the *Occupy Wall Street* movement of 2011, and will start to question the Obama administration about the ever more visible power of the financial lobbies. Ecology and music become also the artist's main topics.

The exhibition *Revolution*, presented in Los Angeles at the end of 2011, then in New York the following year, compiles two series of 36 works in the format of records of 45 rpm. Interesting combinations of graphics, images that are already created by the artist or new topics (72 works), take us to an imaginary record shop where we discover as many previously unreleased albums, as many off-the-shelf series, rare and precious pieces. Some of the works will be published in larger formats to become "master pieces" ... The success is there and Shepard Fairey renews the experience with a new box set of 50 pieces in 2014, retracing the history of music and its 25 years of visual productions in one go!

2015-2018

The anti-lobby activism takes more and more place in the work of Shepard, as well as ecology with the *Earth Crisis* exhibition in Paris and his intervention under the Eiffel Tower during the Cop21. The election of Donald Trump has once again launched the artist into the political message where he excels! Unconditional defender of the rights and place of women in society, his triptych made for the *Women's March* in January 2017 is considered by collectors as the equivalent of the portrait of Barack Obama...

2019-2023

30 years of career, that's worth celebrating! To celebrate his 30 years of production, Shepard Fairey will be on the road all year long in 2019, participating in exhibitions around the world. For the next three years, the artist will once again focus on highlighting social injustices, denouncing racial discrimination, helping to raise funds for health actors against covid and motivating voters to go out and vote... whatever their choices...

CURATOR OF THE EXHIBITION

Jérôme Catz is the founder and curator of the Spacejunk art centers in France (Grenoble, Lyon, Bayonne) since 2003. He is also the artistic director of Street Art Fest Grenoble-Alpes, the largest street art festival in Europe launched in 2015 and Street Art Rillieux whose first edition took place in 2022. A specialist of Shepard Fairey's work, he is the author of the books *Street Art Mode d'Emploi* (Flammarion 2013, Thames&Hudson 2014) and *Street Art le Guide* (Flammarion 2015) as well as other in-depth articles on the discipline.

Jérôme Catz also teaches street art as a part-time lecturer at Grenoble Alpes University since 2019. Very attached to the culture of curating, he militates actively for the recognition of the emergent plastic arts within the world of the culture.

