

PANOPTICANDA

My work defuses the power that media has over our society. Media uses fear as a form of propaganda to control our actions, which makes it a powerful force.

These are images based on fear. Fear is an interesting topic. Why is it in our society we are obsessed with certain images of fear and panic? Sometimes these images can be an anonymous fear (here represented by masks), while others seem to have little or no effect on the public psyche. Why do we pick and choose our images of fear? I believe that mass media is to blame.

This set of imagery was inspired by living in a post 9.11 society. To me 9.11.01 was just another media exploited frenzy using fear tactics as a way for viewers to tune in and readers to buy magazines. Terror, anthrax and fundamentalism have all become household words.

Fear in art is nothing new however. It has been used in the visual arts for centuries in varying degrees as propaganda. What is unique about this age is that media has a much larger influence than ever before. The average person views the television and advertising as some version of the truth. I believe that this is due in part to the degree to which the average person is bombarded by images daily. Product advertising accounts for 2/3 of the space in newspapers. The average person will also see around 1600 advertising messages a day. By the age of 20, the average American has seen over 1,000,000 advertisements and over 40% of our mail is advertisements.

The major form of imagery that media uses are images that are meant to prompt the average person into action (product purchase.) Unfortunately, the best images to motivate people and get a reaction are images of fear. Fear motivates people to do something or stop doing something. Media on a daily basis tells us a variety of fallacies, such as germs threatening the lives of our children or perhaps our social status, depending on the degree of whiteness our teeth have. In a lifetime, the average American will see one full year of T.V. commercials.

News, as well as advertising seems to exploit human beings' desire for shock value. When an image is found to create a sense of alarm (usually images of pain, suffering, hate, and fear,) the media powers begin to exploit it. News media capitalizes on our natural voyeuristic qualities. They magnify and exaggerate an image or idea so it multiplies again and again until it has become an uncontrollable, almost demonic entity. The purpose in creating my images of fear is an attempt to defuse the powers of media fear used against the public.

By creating sensationalized, dramatized, and exaggerated scenarios of the reality that media creates in the public eye I am creating a caricature of a caricature. By doing this I believe that I can help release the anxiety that has been placed on the average person. In short, I am working to de-construct media-instilled myths.

These scenarios are rendered in a style reminiscent of propaganda art: specifically, Russian World War II propaganda art. I have always admired their use of unusual perspective, limited color palette, dramatic text and design to create maximum effect. This style has the ability to reach out and grab a viewer. Created in a computer graphics and manipulation program, the medium I've used is also meant to be a reflection of mass media.

My creation blows up the daily powers of fear to an extreme ratio, then puts this spectacle into the gallery environment. When the viewer sees it in this situation, it will become a tangible thing made of shapes and colors, instead of the specter of fear. It now becomes isolated. The threat is neutralized, maybe turned into a novelty. The fear is now a form of entertainment for the public.

—Max Grundy