

Book Review

VISUALS

Other Worlds



A man carrying rapeseed, from "In the Footsteps of Abraham: The Holy Land in Hand-Painted Photographs."

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W.P.A. and social realist propaganda posters have inspired a lot of contemporary alternative art and design. These heroic and romantic images are extremely easy to parody or manipulate as commentary on today's social and political woes. Shepard Fairey, the street artist whose OBEY logo is one of the most ubiquitous and best known guerrilla art projects, blends socialist realism with other retro design conceits and has developed his protest style into a branded business, which he uses to critique the commercial and political system. But commerce (his fashions and accessories sell in trendy

boutiques) and politics (he is routinely fined or arrested for posting his work on city streets) are not always great bedfellows, and Fairey has become a lightning rod — **critics claim he has sold out, while admirers applaud his ethos.** **"In so many ways, today, Shepard Fairey is the artist to beat," Sarah Jaye Williams writes** in *OBEY, E Pluribus Venom: The Art of Shepard Fairey* (Ginkgo Press in association with Obey Giant, \$29.95), an image-rich catalog of posters, prints and murals produced in 2007 for an exhibition originally shown at the Jonathan LeVine Gallery in New York. Why the artist to beat? Because in the past decade, Fairey has gone from posting street stickers and flyers on lampposts to hanging gigantic wall coverings in galleries and cultural institutions.