

artillery

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KILLER TEXT ON ART

EVERYDAY POLITICS

SEX, RACE & BIG BROTHER



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+ GUEST LECTURE: BARBARA KRUGER

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curfew

Not since 1952's "I Like Ike" has a political message been as lionized, vilified and plagiarized as Shepard Fairey's "Hope" and "Progress" Barack Obama posters. In a small hamlet in Germany in September, I picked up the local paper not even understanding the publication's name, but the image splayed across its front page — the now familiar red, white and blue hues of Fairey's ode to the democratic nominee.

As in the case of most elections, no political message goes unpunished. Weeks before the election, the social action committee "Americans For Visual Literacy" (AVL) published a scathing missive about the senator's support for a career criminal — "the poster was designed by [Fairey] one of America's leading graffiti vandals" — charging the artist with using plagiarized communist imagery to help sell a politician; writing "DO YOU KNOW" on the poster is the 2008 democratic equivalent of the 'Che Guevara Poster' (with all that implies)." They ended their bullet point accusation — links to major papers that wrote about Fairey buttressing their facts — with "Only Fools Find 'Hope' In Empty Statesmen, Hollow Opportunists and Vile Imagery."

Spelling the senator's name "Barak," yet calling themselves Americans for Visual Literacy: some, including myself, initially thought this was a joke. However contacting AVL, I received a 12-page response that cleared up any misconceptions I may have had —

the spelling was intentional, one section read, to make the name "appear more Russian." A day after AVL's message arrived in various inboxes, Fairey had responded on his website to the "2008 Obama Poster Facts" with such phrases as "It is very sad that people like you resort to such sleazy tactics, and that decent people have to spend time combating small mindedness and disinformation." And after receiving over 750 hate mails AVL's Yahoo account was terminated by the internet giant. While this election seemed to pervert that common life-speech phrase into "I disagree with what



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As I prepare to send this out for publication, a few weeks before the election, as AVL heads



PINKO ARTIST

TROUBLEMAKER SHEPARD FAIREY: He says what

another e-mail blast, I'm actually thrilled: I think that the image that has defined this election was born as a wheat poster pasted on the streets of LA — illegally — by an artist who, despite his success within walls, prefers to work outside of them. I look beyond AVL's hyperlinks to articles in the Washington Post, LA Times, The New York Times and that German paper, and am proud that in the election a grassroots campaign, born from a street artist, turned into the image of the election, if not the image of the year. Whoever wins on November 4th, thanks to Fairey — and his detractors — to him has been a victory for urban art. ☺

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