



SHEPARD FAIREY

MAY DAY

MAY 1 – MAY 29, 2010
18 WOOSTER STREET

Deitch Projects is pleased to present *May Day*, an exhibition of new work by Shepard Fairey, as its final project. Titled not only in reference to the day of the exhibition's opening, the multiple meanings of *May Day* resonate throughout the artist's new body of work. Originally a celebration of spring and the rebirth it represents, May Day is also observed in many countries as International Worker's Day or Labor Day, a day of political demonstrations and celebrations coordinated by unions and socialist groups. "Mayday" is also the distress signal used by pilots, police and firefighters in times of emergency.

With energy and urgency befitting the title *May Day*, Fairey captures the radical spirit of each of his subjects, using portraiture to celebrate some of the artists, musicians and political activists he most admires. Says Fairey, "These people I'm portraying were all revolutionary, in one sense or another. They started out on the margins of culture and ended up changing the mainstream. When we celebrate big steps that were made in the past, it reminds us that big steps can be made in the future."

Many of the steps Fairey refers to involve the advocacy of the working class, put forth in the songs of Joe Strummer and Woody Guthrie and the writings of Cornel West, and among the works of other heroes portrayed in *May Day*. International Worker's Day celebrated in nearly 100 countries throughout the world, commemorates the 1886 Haymarket Massacre in Chicago when a peaceful rally supporting workers on strike was disrupted by a bomb, and then a barrage of police gunfire. Because of negative sentiment surrounding the incident, U.S. President Grover Cleveland decided it was best to avoid celebrating the day, but it is precisely such sentiment that Fairey believes must be voiced: "It's a day to express frustration with the powers that be, but also a day for activists to pursue ideals." In *May Day*, he does both, with images supporting free speech and bemoaning the U.S. two party political system, pushing for renewable energy and critiquing corporate propaganda.

In Fairey's mind, the persistence of difficulties across all of these arenas—political, environmental, economic, cultural—points to that third meaning of *May Day*: a distress signal. "By now we thought we would be in post-Bush utopia, but we're still having to call attention to these problems," he remarks. Like any mayday call, however, the sounding of the alarm also brings hope for help on the way. "If we stay silent, there's no hope," Fairey muses. "But if we make noise, if we put our ideas out there, then maybe we can make a change like the people in the portraits have done."

Shepard Fairey is the man behind OBEY GIANT, the graphics that have changed the way people see art and the urban landscape. Fairey's art reached a new level of recognition in 2008, when his "HOPE" portrait of Barack Obama became the iconic image of the presidential campaign and helped inspire an unprecedented political movement. As Shepard Fairey's body of work reached its 20-year mark in 2009, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston honored him with a full-scale solo retrospective, which drew a record number of visitors for the museum. Entitled *Supply and Demand*, the exhibition shares its name with Fairey's career-chronicling book, now in its second edition (Ginkgo Press). The exhibition traveled to the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh and will move to the Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati, on view through August 22nd, 2010.

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