

Editor's Notes

The Future Is Unwritten

BESIDES BARACK OBAMA HIMSELF, there probably aren't many people who have done more to put our current president in the White House than artist-activist-provocateur Shepard Fairey. Fairey's *samizdat* "Hope" poster, plastered all over America on walls, T-shirts and computer screens, helped the country connect to this man who promised voters such an extraordinary change from politics as usual.

Seven months into his presidency, in the midst of the debate over health care, Obama is facing the tests that will likely define his term in the White House: Will he change Washington? Or be co-opted by it? With these questions hanging over the president, it seemed obvious and appropriate that we ask Fairey to compose his first new Obama portrait since the inauguration. We provided Fairey a photo of Obama in front of the presidential seal, and he took it from there. "I really like the expression on his face," Fairey says. "It reflects a lot of difficult things. He looks challenged but also thoughtful and concerned."

As he got to work, Fairey mixed in another reference: the unfinished portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart, which was also the basis for Washington's image on the dollar bill. "When I came up with that, I was thinking of something Joe Strummer said: 'The future is unwritten,'" Fairey says. "We still don't know where Obama is going to end up. It's too early to pass judgment on his presidency."

Before the "Hope" poster turned Fairey into one of the country's most recognizable image-makers, the 39-year-old former skateboarder was an underground



GUERRILLA ARTIST: Shepard Fairey in his Los Angeles home studio in 2008

superstar: In posters, stickers and graffiti, he used old political propaganda to pose sharp questions about materialism, politics and pop culture. As a result of his various guerrilla-art expeditions, Fairey has piled up the arrests. In February, he was snagged in Boston on outstanding tagging warrants while on his way to a gala event to promote his first solo museum show at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Though agitprop may be Fairey's medium, he's hardly a propagandist himself. His work is more about us, the citizens who want change, than about any specific candidate. "I get mad when people say Obama is not doing enough," he says. "In a lot of ways, the question on the cover isn't just a question for Obama. It's a question for the country: Will all the people who put Obama where he is now, the people who consider themselves progressives, continue to press for the changes they voted for?"

—WILL DANA, *Managing Editor*

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS



Eric Bates

Executive editor Eric Bates makes a rare byline appearance as the moderator of this issue's cover story, "Obama So Far." Bates, who came to

RS six years ago, runs our features department and oversees the magazine's National Affairs section, which means he's the guy who fields all the angry calls from the dittohead fringe. "Just today, one woman accused me of wanting to be raped by George Soros," says Bates. "She said Rush Limbaugh told her."



Jay Bulger

Bulger – who wrote this issue's Ginger Baker profile – is only 27, but he's had several careers: boxer, writer, director and model. "If I was gonna

be a journalist, I had to do something really out there," says Bulger. So he sold his car, went to South Africa and spent a month living with the rock icon. "He's the last of a dying breed," says Bulger, who is working on a documentary about the reclusive Cream drummer. "This is the holy grail of rock stories."

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