

## Shepard Fairey

### **Style**

- Fairey uses simplified images, most often reproducing directly from a photographic source. Fairey makes use of mixed-media, combining materials more commonly associated with 'graffiti' art (spray paints, cut-out templates).
- Fairey builds up layers within much of his work, using paper, glues, spray-paints. He makes use of templates, which are used to effectively mask areas when using spray-paint.
- Fairey's work is often political: he makes comment on world leaders, world events, and our place/meaning in society. Examples of this are his 'Hope' poster, where he showed Barack Obama in an encouraging and trusting light; his 'Obey Giant' posters, where he questions our obedience to the State; 'Chinese Soldiers', depicting an alternative type of National Guard, where opposing or contrasting images are placed side by side (guns, and roses) to create an entirely alternative meaning.
- Fairey works on many large-scale images, often utilising the ends of buildings to display his messages. This technique advertises his work to a large audience, and he has become hugely popular in a short space of time. His posters tend to be produced in small quantities, or 'limited edition' runs, and have now become highly collectable. As well as small posters, Fairey creates flyers and stickers, so that very quickly his work is seen by a large audience.

### **Shape**

- Shape is of great importance in Fairey's images: he ensures that all features remain extremely sharp by using cut templates, over which he will apply his medium.
- Shapes are bold, and set apart from the surrounding image/background, which is usually less detailed.

### **Tone**

- This is usually bold, and simplified to flat tones, filling the shapes smoothly.
- The figures in Fairey's work are 'idolised', or given an air of importance through his use of tone: by using a simple posterization technique, they take on a statuesque appearance, looking almost sculptural. This technique therefore, is highly effective in drawing our attention immediately to the focus of his work.

## **Colour**

- Fairey makes use of only two or three colours in much of his work. This gives more weight to the template-style images, which are brought to the fore by having a simple background colour – usually contrasting.
- Colours used are taken from a related palette, and are usually closely linked on the colour wheel (for example, red and yellow-ochre colours, set against a highly contrasting background of black).

## **Symbols**

- Fairey frequently uses symbols within his work, whether political or more general, to add fuel to the message. Commonly used symbols are the dove of peace; flags of countries or religious symbols; simple shapes such as arrows, designed to enforce or point out the message.

## **Influences**

- Hugely influenced by the 'skater' scene in the U.S; graffiti and casual, laid-back clothing lending to the colour schemes he is known for using.
- His 'Obey Giant' campaign is created around the need to step back from the crowd – similar to the ideals of the skater scene – and to create what Fairey calls 'Phenomenology'. This can be described as the ability to create an extraordinary awareness of any given thing, simply by making and reproducing, often in large quantities ('Obey Giant' stickers) an image/ poster to which people will then react.
- The Russian Constructivist movement (early 20<sup>th</sup> century), which shows clear links with the style Fairey is known for (political statements, bold images, large typography, minimal colours).