

paradigm 1055



JACK LEAMY

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EQUIVOCAL SCRIMS

Paradigms are as comforting as they are cruel. Everyone is taken at some point, removed from their temporary state of being, such as childhood, and reluctantly marched towards worlds unveiled by either direct experience or inference. This happens intermittently throughout life with undetermined frequency, amplitude, or mercy.

I know from working with museum visitors for many years that we learn most fluently when we explore realms that are within reach of our current understanding, also known as proximal learning. If something is too far from what we know, too abstract, it stands little chance of influencing our psyche; it is discarded as both unfamiliar and unknown. But if what we experience is somehow familiar yet counter-intuitive, mysterious, or off-putting it holds our attention and forces a reconsideration of the world. We actively construct and define our sense of self and along with it our world view and state of being.

Our paradigms, then, represent our internal response to the world as we perceive it. As described by constructivist theory, people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences.

Leamy's juxtaposition of cultural icons, carefully distorted symbols, and identity laden compositions have the summative effect of eroding whatever bedrock paradigms you think you're standing on. The flags used throughout these compositions have been layered and subtly modified to muddy their purely nationalistic symbolism, morphing them into something more like a psychological backdrop that refuses to mirror any conventional sense of reality. Leamy's paintings are disturbing in that they disrupt our sense of self and other. These works are a ferocious challenge of paradigms that have often led towards horrible acts of violence and injustice. But mingled amongst the collection are symbols of hope and humanity, meditative transcendental qualities that offer a way out by acknowledging that we have all been culturally programmed into a false yet comforting paradigm.

These works force an internal discourse that is disquieting. In "Pitcher," the strength and elegance captured in the throwing of an object is unmistakable, but Leamy's youth does not proudly wear his name on a jersey, he hides his face behind a blood red scarf. Here, baseball's international game-space stretches to include America's complicity in the apartheid known best to Arab youths who have known little else. The layered flags hint at the reasons behind the youth's rage, framing him as both a hero and a victim of cultural circumstance.

Many of the works feature characters that stand in opposition to some form of their alternative selves. Look closely at the police officer as he gazes on his own distorted reflection. The flag is blackened with acrylic mixed with sand thrown with grit enough to force a reconsideration of the man's identity and the viewer's relationship to him as an individualized being. What overwhelming social paradigms and nationalistic backdrops molded his world views, his personal identity? Was he ever afforded the time or inclination to reflect on his internal self, or was he simply sculpted by a stream of comforting reassurances?

Lastly, I cannot help but consider for a moment the relationship of Leamy's title to Milton's "Paradise Lost." In the poem, fallen angels gather on the plains of hell contemplating the best way to destroy the newly created Eden. Avoiding an all-out war, Beelzebub suggests that they attempt to corrupt God's beloved new creation, humankind. Satan agrees, and volunteers to go himself. As he prepares to leave Hell, he is met at the gates by his children, Sin and Death, who follow him and build a bridge between Hell and Earth.

Paradigms are made and lost as we move between the corrupt and the divine, each step an evolution or devolution of our own humanity. Leamy's fearless examination of the cultural manifestations pushing us this way and that, forever on the bridge between heaven and hell, reinforces the notion that Eden is only at risk if we succumb to subtle, daily corruptions of our lives. Eden is only ever a moment away.

Shawn Lani May 2017



Slave Shack, 72x96 inches, acrylic, sand on nylon flag, 2017



Pitcher, 58x72 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



Palestinian Girl, 56x70 inches, acrylic, sand on quilted nylon flags, 2017



Peeking Madonna, 58x72 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



Seeing Stars, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Cop Shooting, 60x72 inches, acrylic, sand on nylon flag, 2017



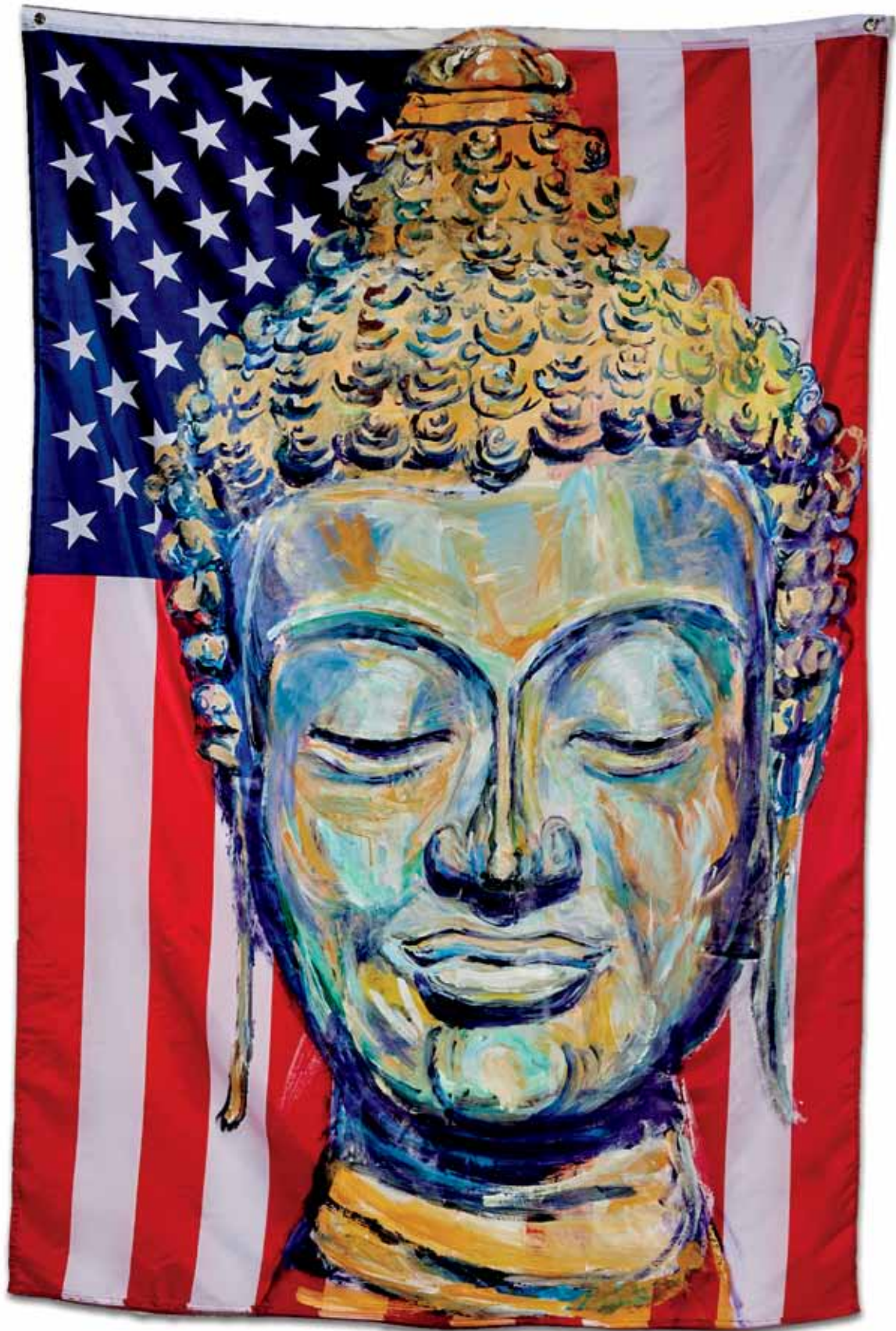
Doppelgangers, 60x72 inches, acrylic, sand on nylon flag, 2017



Jail-face, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Green Card, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Red, White and Buddha #1, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Red, White and Buddha #4, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Bad Hombre, 37x60 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Champion of the Wall, 58x72 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



Decapitation, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Crude, 72x 60 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



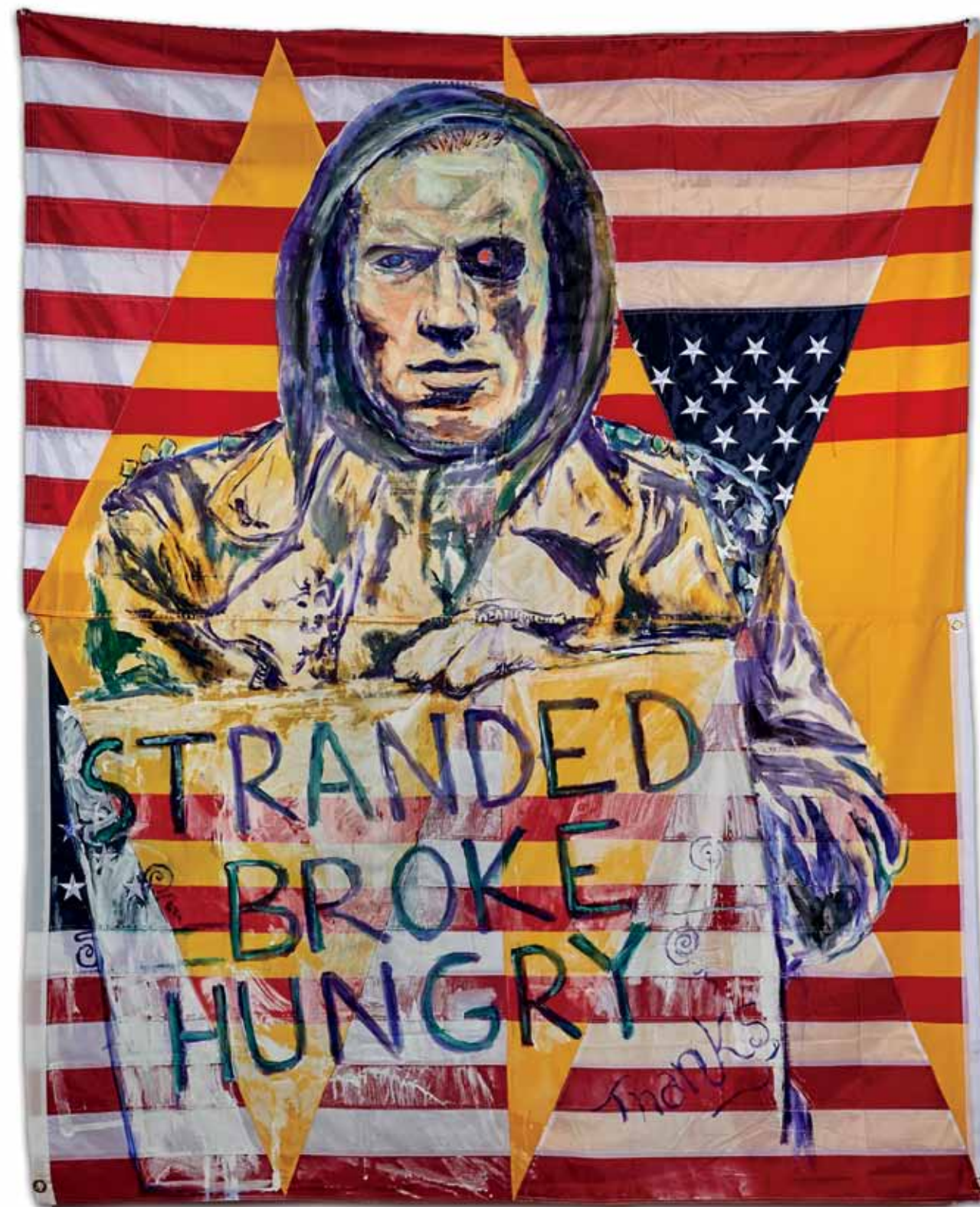
Consumer, Consumed, 72x48 inches, acrylic, sand on nylon flag, 2017



Red, White and Buddha #3, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Don't Look!, 72x58 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



Termination , 72x58 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



Red, White and Buddha #2, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Sisters, 72x58 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



Sundown, Line-up, 72x58 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



A Queue, 76x58 inches, acrylic on quilted nylon flags, 2017



Activist, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Hulk-America!, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



FU 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



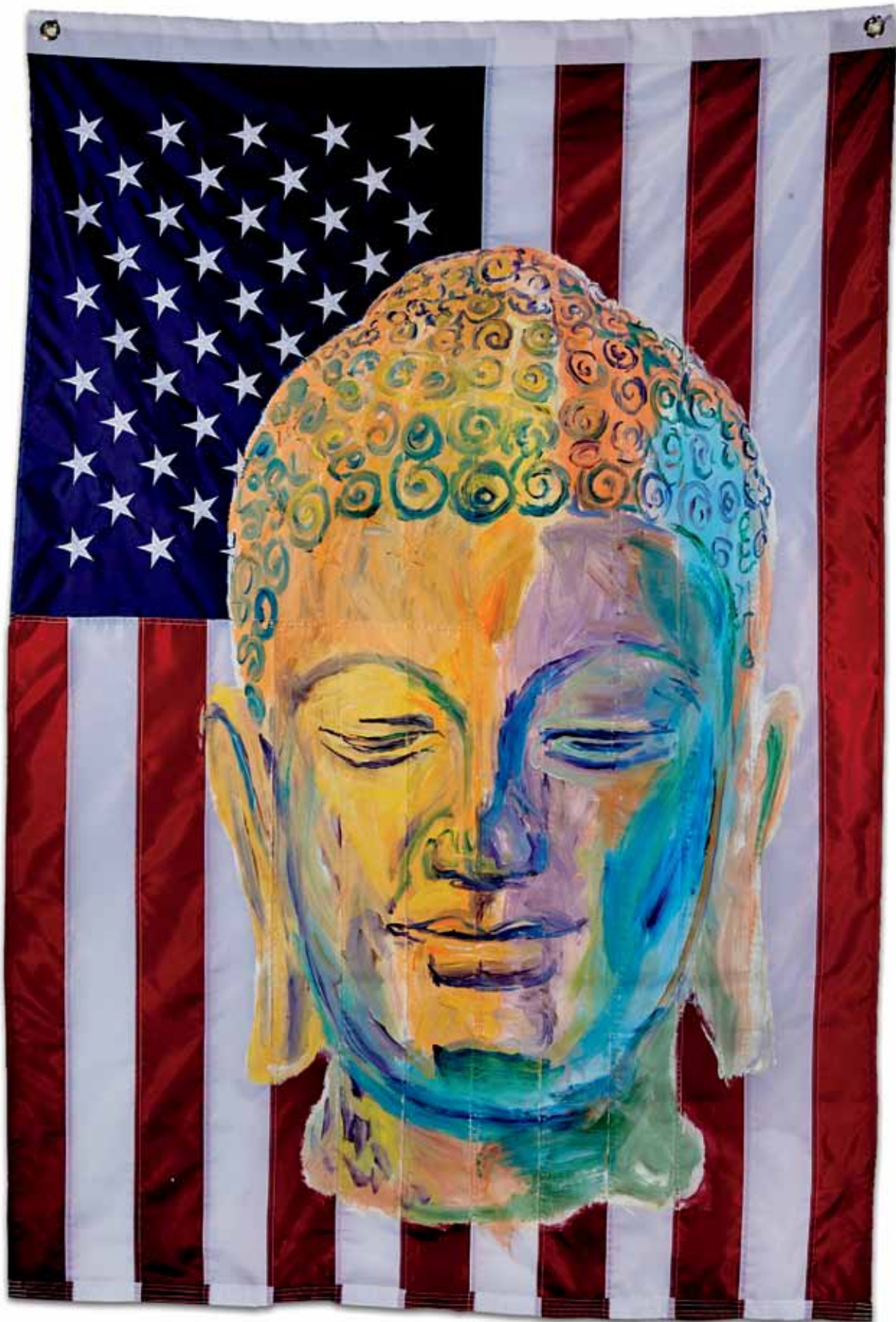
Star Gazer, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



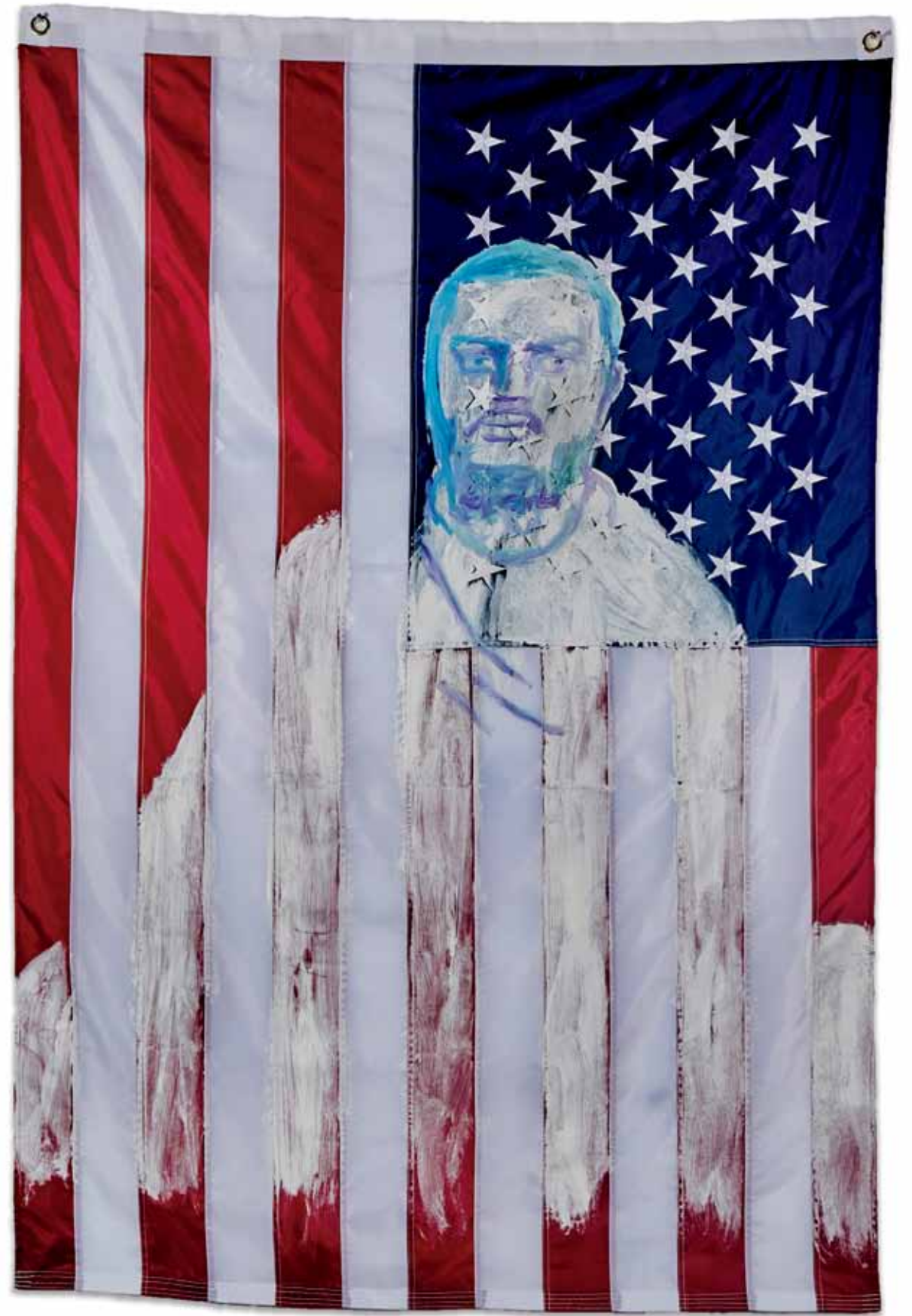
Alien, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Red, White and Buddha #5, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Red, White and Buddha #6, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Bars and Stripes, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Red, White and Buddha #7, 72x48 inches, acrylic on nylon flag, 2017



Pipeline, Installation, plaque, jumpsuit with acrylic, kindergarten chair, 2017

JACK'S FLAGS

They gathered in secret locations across the country, including the sidewalks facing the Trump Hotel in Manhattan. They carried incendiary materials stashed in their bags alongside American flags, ready to burn. Like all popular movements this decade, they had their own hashtag: #FlagBurningChallenge. (No ice buckets for this crew).

Just weeks into the resistance of President Donald Trump, they were responding to a November 15, 2016 from @realDonaldTrump tweet, banged out at 6:55 AM: “Nobody should be allowed to burn the American flag - if they do, there must be consequences - perhaps loss of citizenship or year in jail!”

Stripping citizenship. Threatening jailing. If the tweet was meant to turn our attention away from more serious problems, well, this worked for a few. This is, of course, a President who like so many other before him, distracts and distorts, using imagery and surprise to bend the days narrative to his favor. But on that morning, he chose to employ the powerful iconography of the American Flag. No sooner were flags burning than conservatives took to Twitter and YouTube threatening the flag burners themselves and denouncing their protest. To these true believers — on both sides — the days news was lost.

Trump’s tweet wasn’t out of the blue. Nor was it out of the ordinary for the Red, White and Blue. Going all the way back to 1995, since the Republican Party took control of the House, bills have been introduced year after year, prohibiting desecration of the flag. The proposals typically coincide with Flag Day or the Fourth of July and they usually go up in smoke after being sent to the Senate. But not always. And it’s not just the Republicans. In 2005 then-Senator Hillary Clinton sponsored a bill a that would have made flag burning a crime, punishable by a \$100,000 fine or up to a year in jail.

These efforts were no more serious than a Tweet, merely the resemblance of a legislative effort. They were, of course, another protest using the powerful iconography of the flag.

When the Supreme Court ruled that flag burning was a constitutionally protected form of expression in 1989, Justice William Brennan wrote for the majority saying: “If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the Government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.”

These are the very issues Jack Leamy raises in his work on the flag — literally on the flag. Is the object sacred? What might it represent? Can its meaning be bent by the painted images reflected against the ideals of the Stars and Stripes?

Leamy’s work evokes these ideals. And it amplifies their meaning. A Buddha on the flag — the first in the epoch — brings to mind images of war versus peace, patriotism opposing the idea of meditation and prayer. Or maybe that’s wrong. Maybe prayer and patriotism go together, and Leamy shows us that through the act of making this art.

And what of the Buddha without a face, the flag expressing his visage? Or does jingoism drown out the Buddhas’ power over us?

And Robert De Niro’s Travis Bickle — the fetishized stereotype of a deranged Vietnam Veteran covering the flag? Or is Bickle idealizing it, using it as a cover for his homicidal mania?

Then there is the green card holder and Dr. Spock — surely President Trump’s flag has no place for these aliens. And yet their aspirations personify the American dream.

Some of the Buddhas seem almost feminine and make me see the flag as a masculine object. Its it? Or are they working together? Or are they fighting each other for influence? Is it East versus West? The contrast is striking. In Silicon Valley they refer to companies like Apple and Google working together in search engines and against each other with iPhones vs. Android phones as “cooptation.” Perhaps the discomfort Leamy juxtaposes on the American flag is indeed that very idea of cooptation.

Ultimately the question is this: Desecration versus Celebration. Perhaps Leamy does both at once.

Justice John Paul Stevens, writing in descent of the 1989 Supreme Court ruling that legalized flag burning wrote that might as well stand to support the importance of Leamy’s work here: “The ideas of liberty and equality have been an irresistible force in motivating leaders like Patrick Henry, Susan B. Anthony, and Abraham Lincoln, schoolteachers like Nathan Hale and Booker T. Washington, the Philippine Scouts who fought at Bataan, and the soldiers who scaled the bluff at Omaha Beach. If those ideas are worth fighting for — and our history demonstrates that they are — it cannot be true that the flag that uniquely symbolizes their power is not itself worthy of protection.”

CORY JOHNSON, April 2017



Flag Stack, studio installation