

POST NO BILLS: Burhan Doğançay's Archive of Urban Protest

May 23–August 9th, 2020

Tombstones and Extended Labels

Faschismus

1997

Collage, acrylic, pencil, chalk, and sand on cardboard

Anonymous gift, 2005/2.64

In *Faschismus* Doğançay uses *décollage*—the cutting, tearing away, and removal of images—to simulate the look of posters eroding on a wall, preserving a moment in history. He includes news and magazine photographs of a collection of notable figures from the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as pop icons Madonna and Andy Warhol, and George H. W. Bush, who began the First Gulf War in 1990, with disastrous consequences. In the upper right corner, the former Gestapo chief Nikolaus “Klaus” Barbie looks out at the viewer. Known as the “Butcher of Lyon,” a city that was an important Jewish center and a base for the French Resistance during World War II, Barbie ran a campaign of torture and death and sent many people to the gas chambers at Auschwitz; at his death, in jail, in 1991, he was the last surviving German war criminal of rank to be tried by a tribunal of justice. There are also multiple references to crack cocaine—a cheap and potent street drug that was the subject of much sensationalist reporting in this period. The artist seems to have initially misspelled the word “*Faschismus*” (German for fascism) by leaving out the “c,” and has written a note next to the added letter saying “How about correct spelling dummy.”

Post No Eternels

1984

Collage, fumage, acrylic, thumbtacks, and gouache on paper

Anonymous gift, 2005/2.66

Doğançay turned to walls for both his content and his techniques. Here he experiments with the quintessential sign warning “POST NO BILLS,” taking the phrase—often a target of graffiti and other visual interventions—and inserting it into a playful new configuration of text and image. A portion of the original sign is framed in bright lime green and affixed with thumbtacks to a painting of a brick wall covered in scribbles and illegible handwriting. Over the central notice Doğançay spray-painted stenciled hearts and inserted the word “ETERNELS,” thereby transforming the phrase forbidding advertisements into “POST NO ETERNELS.” The altered phrase mocks the prohibition and hints at the futility of attempting to ban human expression in the public realm.

Marsmack

1998

Gouache and collage on paper

Anonymous gift, 2005/2.65

Tit Steaks

1995

Collage, balsa wood, acrylic on paper

Anonymous gift, 2005/2.63

In *Tit Steaks* Doğançay uses stains, markings, poster scraps, and other found materials to create an artwork that feels as though it is decaying. Strips of printed poster texts peeking out between eroding layers of fibrous paper pulp speak to the objectification of women with phrases like “Meat Pie,” in the lower left corner, and “Tit Steaks,” beneath a diagram of the milk ducts inside a woman’s breast. The artist evokes violence through the word “BITCH,” which seems to have been angrily graffitied beneath a drawing of a female face, and an “A” painted over another fragment of text to make the word “R A ID.” The abraded surface suggests a time lapse during which the natural elements and random passersby transformed the posted bills and contributed to the work. Produced as part of Doğançay’s *Detour* series of the 1990s, when the artist began introducing road sign texts and graphics into his work, the teal-colored “DETOUR” and arrow introduce a sense of movement, and possibly point to another way of thinking.

Spare Ribs

1973

Gouache and fumage on paper

Anonymous gift, 2005/2.67

A few years after Doğançay embarked on his explorations of public walls, he began creating bold graphic prints and paintings that distilled their layered colors, shapes, and textures into abstract compositions. *Spare Ribs* shows a curving ladder of thick red stripes ascending the painting. Scorched across the rib-like bands is a smoky black and fluorescent green streak that breaks through the flat composition, suggesting volume and depth beneath the paper. Doğançay infused *Spare Ribs* with smoke to create a combustion effect that brings echoes of the urban environment into the painting, while simultaneously recalling postwar surrealist art techniques that suggest there is more below the surface than meets the eye.

The Bright Side

1997

Collage and mixed media on canvas

Gift of Angela Doğançay, 2015/2.152

While Doğançay looked to public walls as an archive of urban expression, their dynamic character also informed his experiments with abstraction. When the New York City department store Alexander's closed in 1992, the storefront windows were boarded up. The shuttered exterior soon attracted street artists and pedestrian interventions that were subsequently covered in black paint and papering. As time went on, layers of graffiti, posters, and stickers began to poke through cracks and rips in the censored surface.

Such wear and tear suggested new compositional possibilities to Doğançay, who recalled the bright colors peeking through Alexander's walls "like flowers in a splendid garden." The lacerated posters visible through thick layers of black paint and paper in *The Bright Side* attest to the effects of the loss of urban department stores while simultaneously drawing on the techniques of *décollage* abstraction used in the French *nouveau réalisme* movement that Doğançay experienced in postwar Paris.

Carlos the Jackal

2008

Collage and mixed media on canvas

Gift of Angela Doğançay, 2015/2.153

In this large-scale collage work, Doğançay has attached a solid wooden frame to a chaotic assemblage of overlapping poster fragments, creating an orderly pictorial viewing space within the floating sea of materials that fill the canvas. The title *Carlos the Jackal* comes from the photograph of the notorious Venezuelan militant Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, nicknamed "Carlos the Jackal" by the British press. Sánchez joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1975, converted to Islam, and became a symbol of Cold War anti-imperialism; he was at one time the world's most famous fugitive. The lone photographic image of Sánchez stands out against an otherwise abstract collage that suggests the whirling media frenzy around the revolutionary militant's trials and convictions in 1997, 2011, and 2013 for several deadly international attacks during the 1970s and 1980s.

Give Peace a Chance

2009

Collage and mixed media on canvas

Gift of Angela Doğançay, 2015/2.151

Give Peace a Chance is filled with text, found objects, graphic symbols, and images related to Tibet and anti-war graffiti. Political slogans surround a photograph by the artist of a stenciled street portrait of the Dalai Lama, whose presence is also evoked in two smaller photographic images of him as a youth. To the upper left of the portraits is a photograph of actor Richard Gere, placed next to an anti-war protest poster. Gere was a leading public advocate for Tibet in the 1990s, when its sovereignty from the People's Republic of China was Hollywood's cause célèbre. Produced after the March 2008 protests in Tibet, this work reveals how the ebb and flood of political currents is documented in the vernacular languages of urban walls.