

Magnolia Editions Blog

News and photos from Magnolia Editions, a fine art studio in Oakland, CA.

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Artist interview: Rupert Garcia



Rupert Garcia - *Hoodwinked*, 2017
Pigmented acrylic inkjet on Rives BFK; image size: 29 x 25.75 in. Edition of 10

The following interview took place at Magnolia Editions on November 30, 2017 on the occasion of the publication of Rupert Garcia's new print edition Hoodwinked. The print will be shown as part of "Rolling Thunder," a show of prints and paintings exploring fifty years of American military involvement in conflicts from Vietnam to the Gulf War and beyond.

"Rolling Thunder" will be exhibited at Rena Bransten Gallery from January 6 through February 24, 2018, with an opening reception on January 6 from 5 - 7 pm; for more information, please visit the Rena Bransten Gallery website.

NS: The historical connection you draw in your 2010 print *Obama and Douglass* makes me think of another historical link, between today and the 1960s. The cliché exists of the 1960s as a period of political turbulence and upheaval — the political firestorm of the century. But it feels like we are in a place now that is actually more contentious and more polarized. As someone who not only lived through the 1960s but who served in the military during that time, I wonder how you would compare the current political climate to that of the '60s.

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

RG: They're similar in that they both employ deceit to persuade us — false truths, or lies, about why we should do this or that domestically, go here or there to invade or why we should globally do this and that. Much of the military activity is not based on the true need for self-defense but more often than not upon economic or political convenience, upon fabrication. I myself can say that I volunteered to go to Vietnam. But I learned later that the underlying reasons that made it possible for me to go to Vietnam — meaning, for example, the bombing of North Vietnam from '65 to '68, **LBJ**'s project called Operation Rolling Thunder — the reasons leading up it were fabricated. And there were many other lies: the Gulf of Tonkin... We can also go back in history to see how the U.S. has hoodwinked us in going to war, overthrowing, and invading countries or governments that they disagreed with or turned on. And now, not only are the things **Trump** is saying basically false truths, but his distorted constructs are based on what he thinks and feels and what he gets from his advisors. Look at the way important legislation that impacts the lives of Americans is rushed through by the Republicans without discussion; it's undemocratic, it's unjust. Or even going back to **Bush**'s administration and his argument for going to war in Iraq, which turned out eventually to be all based on fabrications, especially with regard to Iraq having weapons of mass destruction. The way **Bush** used -- or should I say abused -- Secretary of State **Colin Powell** to convince not only the U.N but the world that invading Iraq was necessary. All lies. It makes me angry to think of all the military men and women who died because of **Bush**'s deception; that's what some of the work in the current exhibition at the Rena Bransten Gallery is about. We're really right in the middle of "**Trump** world" and his administration intentionally lying, inciting hate, promoting sexual abuse, disuniting in our country and the world.



RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

Rupert Garcia - *¡Fuera del Golfo!*, 1991
Screen print; 30.25 x 23 in.
Edition of 124

What also is really unsettling is that his base seems to uncritically go along with him. What's further amazing is the degree to which the Republican Party and its members on Capitol Hill aren't out in droves pressing to have **Trump** held accountable. Why not? Well, for some of them, it's because they're interested in maintaining their voting base — who seem to fully support **Trump** no matter that he is working against their interests in support of the wealthy — to keep their jobs and continue receiving monetary support from the right wing billionaires and millionaires who want their agenda and **Trump's** to succeed. As a whole, the Republican Party doesn't want to rock the boat, because if they do, the big donors may stop their checks going to them and have their money go somewhere else. That's the only explanation I have for why the Republicans aren't doing more when it's obvious that they need to — it's political, party before country, so undemocratic. It's obvious what's going on, who's lying and why, and members of the same party as the president see it too — but they're acting overall as if it's not there. It's a falsehood to maintain a sense of security in America in a certain segment of our society.

NS: So you have this show at Rena Bransten Gallery coming up which is very clearly about war — about the Gulf War, about Panama, about Indochina, the invasion of Grenada; how did you arrive at this concept and the title for the show at this particular moment?

RG: For years I've been making works on paper and paintings dealing with war. I didn't set out to make a series on war. It's just what I was picturing at the time. On reflection, at a certain point in the late '80s or early '90s, I did take a general look at the production of my pictures and found that there is a wide-ranging presence of war, the arc of which goes back to World War II. From when I was a boy until right now, there has always been a war that the U.S. was actively involved in. I would hear about it on the radio or see it in the newspaper. And so I digested that; I don't know what I did with it, but I took it in.

RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY



Rupert Garcia - *N.E.W.S. to All*, 1993
Oil on canvas, 72 x 72 in.

At the same time, I was also aware of the war of racism -- or better said, white supremacy -- from childhood to this very day. That was a very strong influence on me and in particular, what really highlighted it were the Zoot Suit (Pachuco) Riots of the 1940s in L.A. and the murder of **Emmett Till** in the mid-'50s. Those historical events really affected me: I had family members and friends on the periphery of the so-called Pachucos, and because **Emmett Till** and me were the same age, as were my closest friends. I remember that vividly: I couldn't understand why these grown white men had so violently murdered this black teenager. And that has stuck with me to this very day. Meanwhile, my dad and his brothers and my mother's brother all served during WWII up to before the Vietnam War. My two brothers were in the Army and the Marines. So this was all there, always consciously or unconsciously a part of me. Then I go into the military.

So after I was released from the military, in '66, I went to San Francisco State College to study painting and start making pictures. My first pictures for a few years weren't about war yet — although I made an early etching in '67 about the war and children in Vietnam, which is in this show. Eventually I started to make images of war, though not as a conscious series or theme. Only years later when I looked at my work did I start to think: wow, our country has been involved in invasions for a long time, up to right now. And that was upsetting. Most of those invasions were not based upon necessity. They were — and are — politically or economically convenient. That realization was also upsetting.

About a year ago, **Trish Bransten**, a director of the Rena Bransten Gallery, and I had a discussion about doing a show concerning war. We thought this could be a very interesting show, to gather work from different points in my picture-making career, covering 1967 to 2017, and to select pictures that we thought would make a great visual statement — aesthetically, for

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

me, they'd be very exciting to look at — and intellectually probing, questioning, revealing, elegant, beautiful. I wanted the show to have a combination of concerns within the art of war.



Rupert Garcia - *Rolling Thunder*, 2017
Mixed media, 52 x 96 in.

So we undertook finding a title, and we threw a few titles around. And then we thought of the campaign that I was in, in Indochina, which was called Operation Rolling Thunder. So we decided to call the show "Rolling Thunder," without including Vietnam in the title by specifying that it was about bombing North Vietnam.

NS: Even though the show's title might refer to Operation Rolling Thunder, it's not called Operation Rolling Thunder; it's simply taking only that poetic piece.

RG: That's absolutely correct. Because each war is a rolling thunder of sorts. I thought, I rather like that. And I like not using Operation in the title of the exhibition, not just that it would be too specific, but to give the show, as you say, a poetic umbrella. And then I made a painting in 2017 titled *Rolling Thunder*; that's the first painting I've ever made that directly concerns my own involvement in the Vietnam War. I've made a bunch of other works on war, but that's the first one that's really specifically about me. In 1970 I made the poster called *Fuera de Indochina* for the Chicano War Moratorium in Los Angeles on August 29, 1970, or the 1967 etching *The War and Children* — they were about Vietnam generally, but they did not represent my direct involvement in a specific mission. The painting I did for the show, *Rolling Thunder*, is the first -- as is the self-portrait print called *Hoodwinked*.

NS: You have used this image in a piece at Magnolia —

RG: I did a painting [*1965, 1970, 2002, 2003 (Self-portrait)* from 2003], a sectioned work based on the "underpainting" of three different black and white photographs, but if you'll notice I've comparatively veiled these photographs with paint.

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GALLERY



Rupert Garcia - 1965, 1970, 2002, 2003 (*Self-portrait*), 2003
pigmented inkjet and acrylic on canvas,
37.5 x 74.25 in

NS: Right, it doesn't necessarily read as a photograph in that painting; it's obscured and there is a layer of color. Whereas in *Hoodwinked* it very much reads as a photograph, an institutional portrait. So this has much more of an autobiographical feeling to me.

RG: Yes. I overlaid my eyes with the armed forces ribbon from my Vietnam Service Medal. You get this medal and the ribbon to go with it if you served in the Vietnam war. The ribbon's tricolors represent South Vietnam. It's beautiful — I love the formal aspects of that ribbon: its colors, its shapes. While researching this picture, I went online and downloaded a large reproduction of it, and I liked it even more, formally. I imagined it simultaneously as a hard-edged painting and as the Vietnam service ribbon, and I liked that tension between the two. I thought of my going to Vietnam in part as being based on lies, hence the title *Hoodwinked*. And I thought, what can I do with this photograph taken of me in Indochina right outside of my base in 1965 and with this ribbon I was awarded in decades later. I made different sketches and compositions, trying to navigate an ambiguous yet sincere visual relationship between the two, the photograph and the ribbon. And this is what I came up with — the ribbon shrouding my eyes. And when I came up with the final idea, I thought, that's exactly how I feel. And I like the way it looks: the authenticity of the photograph and the authenticity of the Vietnam service ribbon put together add up to something more than the two. For me, it reaches the heights of a poetic experience — but based in history and in a personal history.

RENA BRANSTEN
GALLERY



Rupert Garcia - *Hoodwinked*, 2017
Pigmented acrylic inkjet on paper; image size: 29 x 25.75 in. Edition of 10

NS: The ribbon as a hard-edged painting reminds me of this device I see in many of your paintings where a photographic image is interrupted by— or has this rhythmic interplay with — these colorful fields of hard-edged abstraction, almost like panels of color. And the color has a significance; it's chosen for its specific meanings, historically and symbolically. So it's fascinating to see that again here, where you have the photographic image married to something more abstract which by virtue of its design and coloration refers to something quite specific. Do you remember where this photo was taken?

RG: It was taken in a town in Thailand called Ubon Ratchathani; it's a town that was near the Ubon air base where I was stationed. I went into town one day to a photographic studio with a friend of mine to have my picture taken, simple as that.

NS: What would you do with a photo like this, at that point?

RG: Well, I think there were two things that I had in mind. First, it was to be used as a memento of me, for me; but not in any kind of patriotic gesture — just a personal photograph. And second, I thought I might share it with my family when I got home.

NS: You were saying that you felt the reasons given for America's involvement in Vietnam were false, but you also said you felt your own reasons for being personally involved turned out to be false. Can you tell me more about that?

RG: Sure. Well, let me clarify first: the falsehoods I'm talking about in terms of the Vietnam war are specific to me volunteering to go there, not generally about the war. Specifically, the Gulf of Tonkin affair and the rationale for Operation Rolling Thunder, which **Daniel Ellsberg** helped to

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

fabricate. Those are the two elements that hoodwinked me. Later I was able to step back and see a larger string of fabrications about war in general. But now I'm talking specifically about me offering to go to Vietnam. As I mentioned earlier, my motivation was also based on the history of the many members of my family who were in the military. I'd never known a man in my family who hadn't gone into the military. My two brothers were in the military, one in the Marines, one in the Army. I joined the Air Force, not out of patriotism by the way, but as a working class kid in Stockton looking for a job. So what do you do? Well, I got a job in the Air Force. It was just a job.



Rupert Garcia - *Memorias de Honolulu*, 1987
Acrylic on paper, 30 x 120 in.

NS: Were you living near a base at the time?

RG: No, not at all.

NS: So you had to want it.

RG: Well, I wanted a job; I didn't want to be in the military, I wanted a job. And I went to different recruiters: the Marine corps, the Army and such. And the Air Force lied the best.

NS: (laughs) How so?

RG: Well, I joined, so they must have lied the best. They made it sound like I could become a general in a year. (laughs) "You're just what we need!"

NS: So you go to a series of recruiters, and the one that presents you with the shiniest-looking opportunity happens to be the U.S. Air Force. From there you go to basic training in Texas?

RG: Yes, at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. I went there for basic training for a couple of months or whatever it was. And the drill instructors really kicked your butt: they trained you and they shouted at you and they tried to deconstruct your ego and to give you another one, the one that they wanted you to have. But I saw through all that. I was 21 and probably the oldest airman in my platoon in basic training. There were kids that were young and just scared to death. And I saw through the drill instructors' methods of indoctrination. Then I started training in security: not as an air policeman as such, because there are different ways you

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

can be an air policeman, all kinds of different jobs. I ended up doing security and sometimes secret duty. So I wasn't a cop as such. There are APs and there are cops, but I wasn't a cop. By the way, before I arrived for basic training, my grandmother, who was born in El Paso, told me not to go into town because gringos don't like Mexicans. So I only left the base once.

NS: And how did you get from San Antonio to Indochina?

RG: Well, when I finished basic training, I received orders to report to an air base. And I got orders to serve at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, Montana. I spent three years there. I loved the landscape and I loved the sixty below zero weather. At first I didn't love it; I thought I was going to die! But I didn't want to stay there any longer. For me, it didn't feel good; it's a very racist town and area. I remember going to a bar and being asked: who are you, or what are you? So I said, I'm out of here. It just didn't feel right with the people in town. I went to school at Great Falls College, and I met some students there. I was taking a general science course. There were a handful of people I met that were decent human beings but I didn't want to spend all of my four years in the military there. So I had to figure out, how to get out of here? Well, there were two ways — I only knew of two. One was to join the special forces. And the other was to ask to be transferred to someplace in the world where nobody wanted to go. So first I signed up for special forces. I did all the paperwork with the sergeant and I was ready to go. But in the end I decided, I don't want to do this.



Rupert Garcia - *March 20, 2003, 2009*
Mixed media on two panels, 47.75 x 136.5 in.

NS: Do you remember why?

RG: The reason was pretty abstract for me at the time, but after thinking about it, it really didn't feel right. And I think the reason underneath that was that it might drastically change my values, how I see the world.

NS: So it's not just that it might go against your ethics but that it might corrupt your ethics...

RG: That's correct, my own ethics of how I think and feel about the world. I mean, I was excited about going into the special forces — I was ready to go.

NS: Not just to get out of Montana?

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

RG: Yes, just to get out of Montana. That was the main reason! So then I volunteered — I said I'm going to get out of here, I'm going to volunteer for Vietnam. That was the hot place: "you don't want to go there."

NS: Do you remember your impression of the Vietnam war at the time?

RG: Oh, it was simple. The good guys and the bad guys. We Americans are the good guys and the Communist Vietnamese are the bad guys.

NS: So it fit into the larger Cold War narrative — a black-and-white checkers game.

RG: Which I was totally brainwashed to believe in. Most Americans were conditioned to believe it as truth. As you put it, black and white. We're good, they're evil.

NS: You were trying to stem that rising tide of communism...

RG: Absolutely, **John Wayne** and all that. Absolutely. I mean, that's not why I went, but I'm sure that was there in my unconscious.

NS: It wasn't a motivator, but it was the way you made sense of what was going on.

RG: Absolutely.

NS: And when did the black and white become gray — when did your understanding become more nuanced?

RENA BRANSTEN
GALLERY



Rupert Garcia - *Night Cap*, 1993
Oil on linen, 72 x 72 in.

RG: When I came back to the United States in 1966. But I experienced disturbing circumstances while I was in Indochina. For example, somebody in the bunk next to mine attempted to commit suicide. And there were other security people on my team who were coming to work at night either high on drugs or drunk. We're out on the tarmac securing these jet fighter bombers that are at the ready to take off and do some harm, and these guys are unfit to perform their important security duties. They're supposed to be there for you, and you for them, to make sure that no intruders sabotage the planes -- so that was also a shock. And then there was a race incident on the base, where the black and white airmen had gotten into a brawl. So I'm thinking, wow, there are two warfronts: one back home, that continues here, and the other warfront of Vietnam. But there was another war front, the anti-war movement back home. I also said and promoted — after hearing about the beginning of the war protests in the United States — that the military should send us back home with our M-16s to show these protesters the truth. Because I bought the propaganda, I really believed it.

NS: So you came back and that propaganda started to seem a little empty..?

RG: I fly from Indochina into Travis Air Force Base in Sacramento. And that's where I was relieved of active duty. That was the end of my four years. So I left Travis not wearing my uniform...

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

NS: You didn't wear it on the plane?

RG: No, no — on the plane you are ordered to wear it. But it's called "mustering out" — that means you come to the air base and you spend a week or so signing papers and you're going to be released. My dear friend, **James Yee Young**, from high school picked me up; he was an ex-Marine. And I didn't feel right. And I didn't wear my uniform. I can't quite explain it. I just didn't feel right. And when I went to San Francisco State, starting as a junior in '66, there was a strong development of an anti-war discussion, an anti-war movement, on campus and off campus. A discussion about civil rights. Critical debates and activities are happening around the world. And I participate in this and I start to allow myself to be as open to this as I could. No one knows that I had ever served in the Vietnam War. I didn't tell anybody; I kept this close to my chest. So when I started to participate in critical discussions, reading leaflets that people were passing out, and studying philosophy and sociology and anthropology, taking special courses that were designed specifically around critical thinking and new theory about the commodification of everyday life — I began reading New Left theory and was exposed to the Black Panther Party and other Third World liberation thinking. And it began to make sense to me; it really made critical sense. I started to become aware of the historical reasons for certain wars that the U.S. was involved with and I began to understand how I got to be involved in the Vietnam war — still feeling ambiguous about it, but coming to understand it has been and continues to be helpful.



Rupert Garcia - *¡Fuera de Indochina!*, 1970
Screen print, 30.25 x 23 in. Edition of 50-75

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

And then I met a few vets — not many, it wasn't important to me to interact with fellow vets. But I met one who spent two years in Vietnam in pretty serious situations. That was **Oliver Stone**. We became friendly. Sometime in the 1980s, I was in L.A., I was supposed to participate in a summer art program for high school students at Loyola — was it Loyola? I forget. It was a college right near the L.A. airport. And my apartment was located right near where the jets take off. My first night there, I'm trying to go to sleep and the jets are taking off. I can't sleep, and I freak out. Because for four years in the military I was around jet fighter bombers, and one of those years in Indochina, where I was on a secret air base. So jets always surrounded me. And it became quite disturbing for me that night to hear these jets — I went through all kinds of emotional changes. So I called my wife and she says, take care of yourself, it'll be alright. I called **Oliver**, and I said, hey man, I'm really messed up. He said, come on over to the house; we're having dinner, just come on over. So I did. I walked in **Oliver's** home and he says: "**Rupert's** coming in and he's having an episode." He said it in a supportive way where it was no big thing, don't worry about it. It was just what I needed. And that was very important because it made me realize that yes: the disturbing years spent in the military are still with you, but it doesn't have to define who you are for the rest of your life. It may never leave you, but it shouldn't totally direct you. So that was a very important moment. So the next day I resigned my teaching position and went home, back to the Bay Area.

So I never got disillusioned about the Vietnam War until after I got back home in 1966. I was never disillusioned while I was in the military. There were things I didn't like, but it wasn't disillusionment about the whole military apparatus.

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY



Rupert Garcia - *The War and Children*, 1967/1995
Etching; image size 15.75 x 11.125 in.

NS: At the same time, it sounds like although you might have been drinking the Kool-aid as far as the reasoning behind American involvement in Vietnam while you were in the military, it doesn't sound like you were especially invested emotionally. For example, Hung Liu was in the Chinese military —

RG: I didn't know that!

NS: Yes, that's true. But she says even though she has very conflicted feelings about what happened and how she and her comrades were lied to by those in power — she gives the example of visiting bridges or other landmarks named for battles that took place there, only to find out after leaving China that those battles never happened — despite that disillusionment, she says that when she hears the "Internationale," her heart still beats faster. It's in her DNA. When she hears that song, it still awakens the spirit of a certain kind of patriotism. But it doesn't sound to me like the American flag or "The Star Spangled Banner" evoked the same kind of response for you.

RG: Not at all. Let's look at it this way: it was said that the flag and the national anthem represents this rosy, utopian world of freedom and equality; that meta-narrative — because I never saw it or felt it, I never totally embraced it. And then I realized that that narrative is a veil: it's used to deflect us from the exploitative and corrupt realities of our country and its culture and

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

politics — corporate America, government, politicians, lobbyists, and so on. This was after I started to study and read; all this critical thinking, it really changed and saved my life. I began to think critically for myself, well, that's just a screen. All the platitudes hide what's really happening underneath all that highfalutin' talk about freedom, et cetera.



Rupert Garcia - *Erupting Iranian Platform*, 1988
Mixed media with oil on canvas, 80 x 66 in.

NS: That brings me back to the Cold War; I'm curious about your take on Russia re-emerging as a cartoon villain in contemporary politics, and especially the meta-narrative that you're describing that pits America as a representative of freedom, democracy, and free markets versus the Communist state that holds all of its citizens in an iron grasp... When what you actually have now is two corporate oligarchies, the United States and Russia, both more or less owned and manipulated by the richest people in each country. And yet the way a lot of people talk about Putin sounds like the old narrative of the Cold War. How does all of this strike you?

RG: Let me say this right away, I don't think **Putin's** Russia is being portrayed as a cartoon villain, he *IS* a villain. Well, of course, I bought into the Cold War after World War II. When the wall came down in East Germany, I was subscribing less to it and even less so later on in my life. At times, it seems as though all nations, nation-states, leaders and their representatives are corrupt to one degree or another. Some are more or less corrupt than others; some have a more friendly and convincing line to put out, and some are more fierce than others. So I have an equal

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

amount of mistrust in **Putin** and Russia and a profound mistrust for **Trump**'s administration. Both governments are liars to one degree or another — they're not for democracy, equality, justice for their respective citizens. Russia, for sure, is not for the people. By comparison, the U.S. claims to be more for the people than not, but in fact, if you just look around the country you can see it's just not true: there's such poverty, racism, infrastructure dilapidation, and homelessness that you would think that would be the first thing on the agenda for our government to take care of its people!

NS: The inequality...

RG: Absolutely. Inequality at all levels. There is equality for the wealthy and corporate America but not for Americans in general. Don't get me wrong, I would rather live here than anywhere else, I'll tell you that. But that doesn't mean I'm not critical. To have a true democracy, you must have citizens that are critical of it, to make sure it's on the right path according to the Constitution and other just laws. All countries, leaders, and organizations are not all composed of good people doing all good things all the time. It's not that it's impossible to truly make America greater than it is. And the populist spin **Trump** gives to "Make America Great Again", it seems to me, does not represent not the real reasons. The real reasons are to make the rich richer, to exploit the working and middle classes, to cause domestic and international chaos to promote his right wing agenda. I make these critical observations as an optimist who is not easily convinced.

NS: I wanted to ask you about your parents and grandparents — where are they from?

RG: My parents were born in the United States. My mom's parents, **Ruperto** and **Guadalupe Atilano**, immigrated from Jalostotitlan, Jalisco, Mexico to California. My father's parents moved from Fresnillo, Zacatecas and El Paso, Texas to California.

NS: I ask about this because the current president, when he began his campaign, he started with a speech specifically condemning immigrants from Mexico. What do you make of that?

RG: Well, I think his racism and xenophobia are sincere. I mean, his latest example of this was his retweeting the suspicious anti-Islam video of the "Britain First" movement... It's there. When he said the vicious and condemnatory things about immigrants and then that the Mexican-American judge was incapable of being impartial — it's another example that he has a problem with people of color. He seems incapable of being a critical thinker; if he was, he'd be doing the right things.

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY



Rupert Garcia - 1492 +1775, 2001
Pigmented inkjet print, 28 x 44 in. Edition of 5

NS: As you're saying this, it strikes me that this show is not just about war — that the way you're approaching war serves as a direct rebuke to Trump, by way of example. What I mean is that you're engaging here, in the work, in active historical awareness and in critical thinking about a difficult subject that doesn't oversimplify it. And both of those things are almost antithetical to Trump and his ilk: historical awareness and critical thinking. So those are like an antidote, in a way.

RG: I guess one could extrapolate that from work you see in the exhibition, although that's not my intended motivation and this work does not represent the attitude of all my work.

NS: And that's why I say 'by example,' because you're doing it more so than you're saying it. You're not proselytizing — you've been doing it for forty or fifty years.

RG: Right; my work is dedicated to visually figuring out, in various visual modes, who I am in the times in which I live and have lived. Making pictures is a personal practice. I do not set out to make art to make people happy, discerning, to want to stay alive, to know who are the good guys and who are the bad guys, or to discover who they are. Even though I make pictures based on personal motivations and if others are touched by the work, that's a good thing.

NS: And to even have that kind of intellectual curiosity, to explore history that way, or to think about it critically in a way that allows for shades of gray — if you poured that water on Trump, it would be like the Wicked Witch of the West: "I'm melting, I'm melting." There is no room for that in the Trump mindset. So this is like an antidote, even if that was not the intention; it can serve as such for people who are wondering where to go from here. The emphasis you're placing in this work on being aware of history and thinking critically — those are things that people can do.

RG: Absolutely. It's very important. That's what I learned, coming from not having those attributes and then acquiring them, I can do this. But through all this, I have maintained and fought for a sense of wonderment at being alive. As a kid, I can remember experiencing how

RENA BRANSTEN

GALLERY

awesome it is to be alive; to look at the sky, the stars, it's unbelievable. I don't try to explain it, I'm just overwhelmed by it and trust it.

NS: And the sky is the source of thunder, too; thunder comes from the skies.

RG: Right. In some moments when I was securing the jet fighter bombers — I remember thinking: they're designed to kill. That's their mission, that's why they exist. And when they take off they have this incredible roar, this thunder, if you will. Unbelievable. When you're working pretty close to them, it's like, wow. I would look at these planes aesthetically and think: the way their body is formed, the way it's molded and shaped in metal was beautiful.

NS: Jeff Koons, eat your heart out.

RG: So I was moved by the aesthetics of this war machine. I found them beautiful. Even though I knew they were going off to kill people, burn things... I came away with this double experience of war, of these jet fighter bombers. That they were simultaneously beautiful and killers.



Rupert Garcia - *Goliath Over David, or The US Invasion of Grenada*, 1987
Mixed media on linen, 50 x 90 in.

NS: Sounds like a dual consciousness — you were conscious of their deadlines, but also their beauty.

RG: That's right. Later, I would say, I would still hold that but I would add to it that it was immoral.

NS: And you can't divorce something from its context and say it's just an aesthetic object. It has a context.

RG: Yes, and the context gives it meaning. So there is poetry and deadlines in these jet fighters.

NS: And that allows you to make this work that is about war; war represents death more than it represents life, in a way. But you're using color and figuration to animate the

RENA BRANSTEN

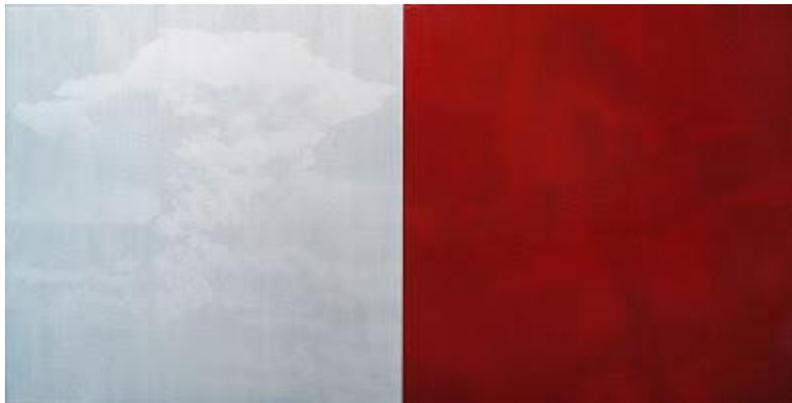
GALLERY

work...

RG: It's animated by figuration, abstraction, color and even the use of grisaille, the use of gray tones and sometimes chromatic neutrals. These gray tones are done in honor of **Jose Clemente Orozco**. I gave a lecture at Dartmouth about **Orozco** and myself using gray along with full color. I have always been awestruck by the way he accomplished this. So this is an homage to **Orozco**.

NS: He's in your creative DNA.

RG: The second time I went to Mexico, I went to visit our family in Jalostotitlan and Guadalajara. When I was in Guadalajara, my cousin took me to see **Orozco**'s studio and his murals. Wow! It was too much. He just blew me away. And when I saw his use of gray and color, it was astonishing. I've seen these murals in books and lectured about them but when you're actually in front of them — for me, it was an epiphany about color theory. I still use it to this day.



Rupert Garcia - *Hiroshima*, 2009
Mixed media on panel, 48 x 96.5 in.