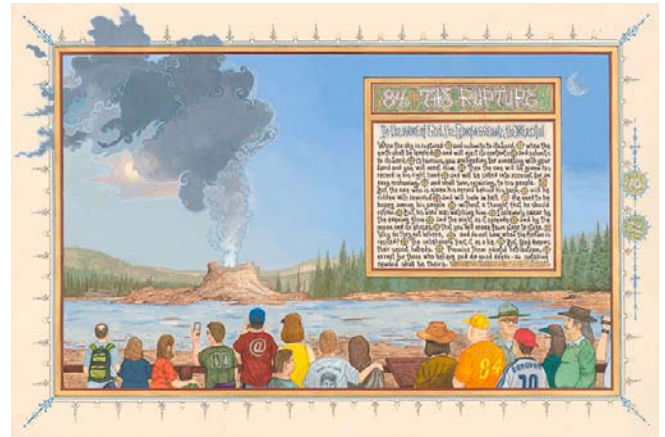


Sandow Birk American Qur'an

September 10 – October 9, 2010

Opening Reception: Friday, September 10, 6-8pm



P·P·O·W is pleased to present the next installation of Sandow Birk's *American Qur'an*. In this ambitious project, Birk has been transcribing the entire Qur'an into English along with illustrated narratives. The complexities of the relationship between Western and Middle Eastern societies have been heightened since the events of September 11th, and the lack of knowledge about Islam and the Qur'an, which is frequently cited in the media, is something Birk realized he and most Americans struggle with. Through the *American Qur'an* series, Birk presents a new version of this holy book that is more accessible and also shows how the teachings can be applied to the daily experiences of American life.

In this exhibition there will be seventeen suras (chapters) on view, each of which are on paper and measure 16 x 24 inches. Using stylized calligraphy, Birk transcribes translated text of the Qur'an and then illustrates a scene from everyday life to emphasize what is in the text. Scenes such as golfing, shoveling snow, Hurricane Katrina, and surveillance in city streets are all visual interpretations of the text which induce the reader to see how these teachings can be applied to familiar scenes. Birk's compositions mix the influences of Persian miniature painting and medieval manuscripts, as well as incorporate contemporary street stylizations and graffiti art.

Through this project Birk hopes to reflect how consistent the similarities are in the teachings of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. To bring this to light enables more understanding and compassion, versus fear of the unknown. The conversations and also the misunderstandings that are still occurring about what the Qur'an is and who Muslims are will benefit from this series and will allow others to join in these conversations with more knowledge.

This project reflects Birk's continued interest in understanding and bringing to a wider audience religious texts, as he did in his illustrated version of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and also social issues, as he did in his *The Depravities of War*, which was about the Iraq War. Birk will continue working on the American Qur'an project for another three years and, when completed, it will be 114 suras on over 300 pages. Birk's previous suras have been exhibited at Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco and Koplín del Río Gallery, Culver City.

Sandow Birk received his BFA from Otis Art Institute in 1988. He has been the recipient of numerous awards, fellowships, and grants, including: Guggenheim Fellowship, J. Paul Getty Fellowship, NEA grants, COLA fellowship in Visual Art, and Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship Award. He has had several solo museum exhibitions including: Katzen Art Center, San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, San Jose Museum of Art, the Laguna Art Museum, the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, and the Heidelberger Kunstverein in Heidelberg, Germany. His work is in numerous museum collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Harvard University Museum, the De Young Museum, The Getty Center, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Jose Museum of Art, the New York Historical Society, and the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art.

Read The New York Times feature article on Sandow Birk and his American Qur'an series, here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/30/arts/design/30fink.html>