

CLAIRE OLIVER

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Lisa Alonzo: Cash is King

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The power of money has been recognized by governments both as a means to finance their efforts and as a source of propaganda. In *Cash is King*, Lisa Alonzo revitalizes a long standing tradition of depicting currency and its role in our visual culture. The Artist uses her signature satirical voice to pose questions on our current economic climate in a postmodern context.

During the latter part of the 19th century, rapidly advancing technological and economic progress and the advent of a modern capitalist economy, led artists including William Harnett and John Frederick Peto, to paint money as a social commentary on the country's changing fortunes. More recently, Andy Warhol created canvases of continuous grids of currency; the artist's 1981 sketchy, impromptu dollar signs series has become some of his most powerful and essential imagery. Artists have long understood the power of images; currency's portraiture plays a significant role in the formation of political authority, becoming indispensable to express wealth, sovereignty, or military might.

To create these works, Lisa Alonzo uses a pastry bag filled with acrylic paint with which she lays down a series of dots and dashes, fine crosshatched lines and scrollwork, mimicking the look of an engraver's printing plate. Intermingled with the leader's portraits are bits of now worthless banknotes cut into diamond shaped designs: monopoly money laced with devalued currencies from around the world are reduced to decoration. Displaying the famous and infamous side by side, without designation, we are left to wonder who will be the next to fail.

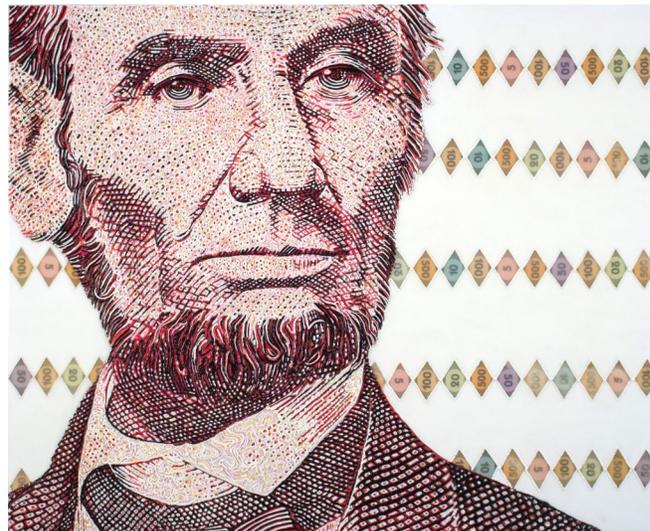
Lisa Alonzo's fascination with America's commodity culture and the significance of the contradictions of our chosen leaders is recontextualized in the current climate; what can an artist offer in the face of 24-hour news, ubiquitous cameraphones, infinite digital archives, and instant worldwide circulation? Politics takes place right inside that contemporary flood of images they can show how power is exercised through images, or compounded by images, or transformed by images, or obscured by images. Here are a few examples from Alonzo's exhibition:

I Call Bullshit (Abraham Lincoln, five dollar bill): To finance the Civil War, and to avoid the high interest loans available through money changers, Lincoln printed 450 million dollars' new currency stating, "The government should create, issue and circulate all the currency and credit needed to satisfy the spending power of the government and the buying power of consumers..... The privilege of creating and issuing money is not only the supreme prerogative of Government, but it is the Government's greatest creative opportunity".

Black Friday (Ulysses Grant, fifty dollar bill): Black Friday, also known as the Gold Panic, was one of several scandals that rocked Grant's presidency. On that day the U.S. financial sector descended into chaos after robber barons Jay Gould and Jim Fisk attempted to corner the nation's gold market by building a network of corruption that extended from Wall Street and New York City government all the way to the White House. The conspiracy finally unraveled 145 years ago on what became known as "Black Friday," but not before Gould and Fisk had dragged the entire U.S. economy to the brink of catastrophe.

Very Popular with Himself (Mao Zedong, yuan): Mao Tse-tung, a Chinese communist revolutionary, was the founding father of the People's Republic of China. Supporters credit him with driving imperialism out of China, and building the country into a world power. Critics consider Mao a dictator who severely damaged traditional Chinese culture, perpetrated systematic human rights abuses, and who is responsible for an estimated 40 to 70 million deaths through starvation, forced labor, and executions, ranking his tenure as the top incidence of democide in human history.

Cash is King is Ms. Alonzo's second solo exhibition with the gallery.



I Call Bullshit, 2015
Piped acrylic paint, printed matter and resin
36 x 44 x 3.5 inches | 91 x 112 x 8 cm