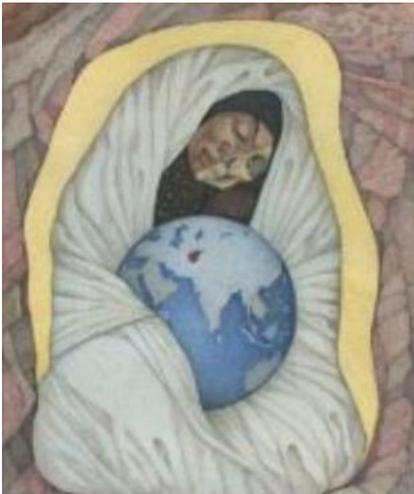


## Truth to Power: Anatol Zukerman's 'Responsible Art'

### WHY ZUKERMAN'S DRAWINGS ARE 'IMPORTANT'

Anatol Zukerman is like few other artists working in the United States today. His drawings are unabashedly and almost exclusively political, reflecting his openly “progressive” politics and belief that



art should serve “to better the human condition.” In drawings like “Afghan Madonna,” 2001, he warns us against the war we have pursued at great cost in Afghanistan. And in “National Rifle Assassination,” 2013, he points his finger directly at the gun lobby, refusing to bow to the fictitious legal arguments that have resulted in the United States becoming the most violent country in the developed world.

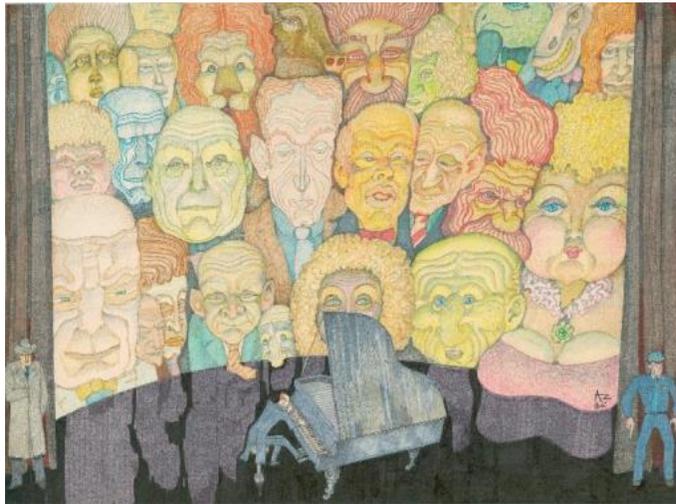
But perhaps what is most significant about Zukerman and this exhibit, the artist’s first one man show outside of Boston where he lives, is that he and his work may represent a turning point in the history of art, redefining our perception of what makes art “important” and the role artists play in society.

Zukerman rejects “art for art’s sake,” the underlying principle that guided artists throughout much of the 19th and 20th Centuries. His art is meant to “address the problems of humanity,” conveying “strong messages meant for all people” using “a graphic language they can understand and appreciate.”

Could it be that in the century ahead we will look to artists and their work for political guidance, as we currently do media commentators, helping us understand the actions and policies of governments that operate secretly to “protect” us from our enemies or to further the interests of the corporations and wealthy individuals who increasingly control them? Will artists follow Zukerman, taking on the role of commentators and investigative reporters, ferreting out information which becomes the basis for their art and the value we consign to it?

Born and trained as an artist and architect in Moscow, when it was still the capital of the Soviet Union, he came to the United States in 1973 as a political refugee from the anti-Semitic “workers’ paradise” he was raised in and gladly left behind. By 1975 he had completed a master’s degree in architecture at the Harvard Design School and his professional future seemed assured.

Ever the critic and contrarian, Zukerman’s extraordinary drawing, “Only the best people listen to Rachmaninoff,” 1986, clearly shows that, unlike many Soviet Jewish refugees, he never felt nostalgia for



the vast amounts of money Russia’s Soviet leaders poured into High Culture. In “Back to the USSR,” 2013, he makes clear that he’s not been fooled by Putin, and his effort to regain Russia’s stature as a world power, largely at the expense of the United States, either. But as unsparing as he is of Russia, over time he’s also become disillusioned with capitalism because of the unemployment, poverty and economic inequality he found here.

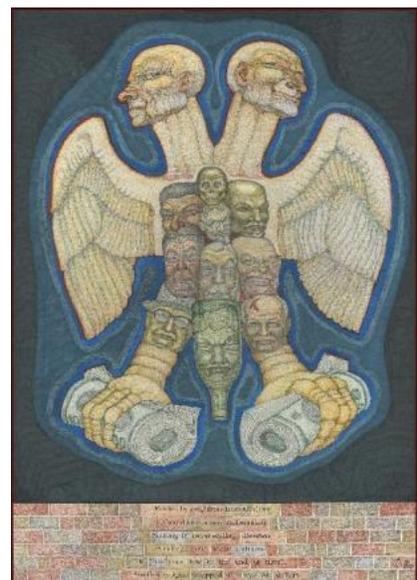
Drawings such as “Trickle Down,” “Globalization,” “Reagonomics” and “Citizens

United,” on display in the current exhibit, reflect the politics of a man who has seen the extremes, lived on both sides of the divide during the Cold War and concluded that there must be a better, more humane way for societies to function.

Quite apart from the political messages they convey, these drawings are also beautifully realized oil pastels that rise to the level of fine art because of Zukerman’s distinctive use of color, unusual composition and highly original style, which substitutes humor for pathos and combines his deep knowledge of international economics and foreign policy, and his gifts as a draughtsman, to skewer the institutions and policies with which he disagrees.

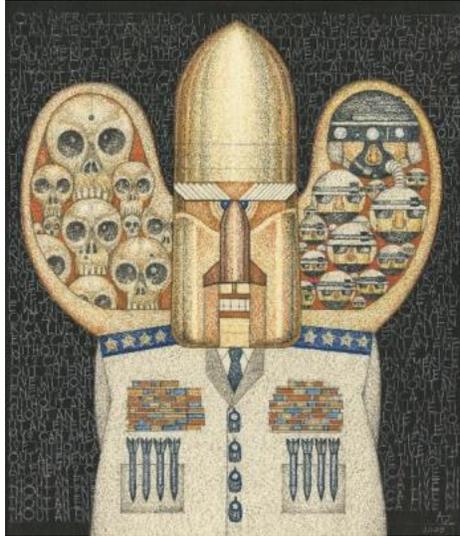
His disillusion with both Superpowers, their economic systems and ideologies, is most evident in his two largest drawings, “The Empire” and “Russia” from 1999 and 2000 respectively. He portrays the United States as a cross between an eagle and a vulture, its claws covering most of the globe it is trying to carry away to have all for itself. His talents as an artist are most clearly evident in “Russia,” with its tour de force of portraits of Soviet Russia’s leaders, from Lenin and Trotsky to its famously alcoholic Liberator, Yeltsin, in a bottle.

What better time than now, in the midst of the NSA/Edward Snowden imbroglio, to show the drawings of Anatol Zukerman? His highly cultivated ability to illustrate the foibles of our leaders and the unintended consequences of their policies seems perfectly suited to an Age when the United States is attempting to capture the NSA leaker, whose revelations suggest that Big Brother is indeed



watching, while Putin's Russia has neatly turned the tables on its "partner" by standing strong and tall in defense of Snowden's human rights.

"Military Intelligence," Zukerman's drawing of a U.S. military intelligence officer with big ears, asks a question that many Americans will find distasteful but that some Americans, and many outside the United States, see as our fatal flaw, "Can America Live Without an Enemy?" A new drawing, to be unveiled when he visits Washington at the end of July, will take up another Progressive cause, the Obama Administration's use (or misuse) of unmanned drones in the war on terrorism, both at home and outside the United States.



Zukerman's drawings should interest political activists in the United States because of the issues he chooses, his ability to illustrate those issues and the persuasive messages his drawings convey. Collectors with an interest in the Great Issues of our time should be impressed by Zukerman's skill as an artist and his determination to use his art to influence world opinion by creating a universal style that is highly original, refined, yet easily understood.

What should make Zukerman's work important from the perspective of art historians, museum curators and critics, on the other hand, has little or nothing to do with his style, which is distinctive and original but hardly innovative. They will also likely disregard particular brand of politics and his views on specific issues, with which many of them will strongly disagree. Instead, Zukerman's importance will rest on his open rejection of the largely apolitical role we have consigned to art and artists in the West throughout most of our history. Could Zukerman be the avant guard of a new 21st Century art actively engaged in the great political and social issues of our time?

Charles Krause

July 2013