

## Interview with Shepard Fairey: Still Obeying After all These Years

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*Before Shepard Fairey revived Andre the Giant's image, he was just a has-been wrestler, but fifteen years ago his scowling face became the symbol of youthful defiance. Against what, you ask? Doubtless against everything the previous generation held dear. Today he's a brand – a trademark of alienation – that has been copied by marketers, yet he is also the figurehead of street-artists and culture-jammers around the world. In this interview Fairey discusses why the image has resonance and what it says about the culture.*

**Heller: It has been fifteen years since Obey The Giant hit the radar screens and catapulted you into both design notoriety and entrepreneurial activity. Could you have imagined its impact when you began?**

**Fairey:** In 1989 when I first began the Obey Giant campaign, which was originally just a sticker that said “Andre the Giant has a Posse”, I thought it would only be a few weeks of mischief. At first I was only thinking about the response from my clique of art school and skateboard friends. The fact that a larger segment of the public would not only notice, but investigate, the unexplained appearance of the stickers was something I had not contemplated. When I started to see reactions and consider the sociological forces at work surrounding the use of public space and the insertion of a very eye-catching but ambiguous image, I began to think there was the potential to create a phenomenon. At the time I thought about all this in purely hypothetical terms because I did not think I had the resources to create the kind of image saturation it would require to make it a reality anywhere other than Providence, Rhode Island. I became obsessed with the idea of spreading the image further and was surprised by how many people were willing to spread the stickers to other cities based on the template established in Providence or an explanation of the concept. I think a lot of people liked the idea of “fucking with the program” in a society dominated by corporate imagery. The stickers were a rebellious wrench in the spokes, a disruption of the semiotics of consumption. Eventually, five years or so in, the stickers spread enough for national media to notice. I considered the coup successful at that point. Now that I make posters and t-shirts that are for sale some people consider the entire project invalidated. I don't think a lot of people consider that it costs a lot of money to produce posters and stickers that are sacrificed to the street.