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more importantly, gave me "cover" in the art world of today, where painting political subjects are avoided and even disdained.

J.Z.: "Torture Abu Ghraib," that is a difficult painting to look at.

M.G.: I know. A lot of people tell me that. Torture is a terrible thing, but it is just as bad when artists and cultural workers in general hide the truth, like was done in totalitarian countries, and I'm sorry to say it even happens too often in our country.

J.Z.: I'm wondering, in this highly documented world, what role your paintings, the realism, can play today. I can look at pictures of Abu Ghraib. I can see the images of the protests and of Occupy Wall Street. All of that's coming to me in the realism of photographs and film. What role does a painting play in chronicling all of this?

M.G.: I just think that painting, or art, plays a role. It plays a role of expressing the feelings of a particular time and place, from a personal point of view. This is the point of view of the artist who is living in that particular time and place. And I feel that this communication can be stronger in personal terms than when you take a photograph. But photographs are powerful and very important. Also, painting is just one of many forms of expression and should be free to express even the most inhuman conditions.

It's the subject matter, but also the expression or the realistic painting of the subject matter, that brings it closer to the public, and this is what has been denied, in my opinion. A woman stood in front of my "Torture Abu Ghraib" and she was crying. It really did affect her. She said, 'You just don't see this kind of work'. This is the kind of thing that communicates. And I don't think it's the subject matter alone.

J.Z.: Looking over the decades of your work, you can see it has changed, from being views and scenes to really being interpretive.

M.G.: It's interesting that you say that. I have paintings that are political. But if you've looked at some of the paintings I've done in 1968 or '69, I put in specific symbols to get specific points across more easily. There's one called the "Flag Vendor," a white guy with an army jacket selling flags. I thought of the war veteran, and this is all he can do; peddle something on the streets. The irony is that here he is, selling the flag, something he fought for: freedom. But it's all become so commercialized. He's not the hero on the battlefield, and I wanted to get that image across. My painting technique is crude here compared to my recent painting and perhaps is not as controversial. In general my work has also become more naturalistic.

J.Z.: When people look at your works, do you think they come away thinking differently about the politics you're projecting?

M.G.: I think people do. But most people will just be affected by the emotion that I'm getting across, and usually if they talk to me, they say they like what I'm painting. I had an exhibition at the Hospital Workers Union Gallery in 2008 and my "Torture Abu Ghraib" painting was there, even though it wasn't finished. Some union members who looked at it came over to me and said, "Are those American soldiers?" and I said yes. They said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You are un-American. How can you do that? Those boys are fighting for our freedom," and so on and so forth. So of course I said torture was un-American and we were in Iraq based on fictitious reasons, slaughtering people for oil and greed. And it became pretty much a yelling match and the guards had to come in to be sure it didn't get violent. But most people are supportive of the painting and especially of my right to express my feelings. And I might add that these people who disagree with me should express their ideas and not prevent me from exhibiting my work, as is our American constitutional right.

J.Z.: I imagine your audience is either already in your camp or it's not.

M.G.: Most people enjoy seeing my



"Peace March," above, 48" x 70" oil on canvas, 2007, shows an array of people, young and old, joining in a procession in New York City. The key for Ginsburg was their expression of determination. At right, "Torture Abu Ghraib," 46" x 32" oil on canvas, 2009, is reminiscent of the crucifixion of Christ in an effort to express Ginsburg's outrage at the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who supported the war and torture.

paintings, because of the artistic value. Very few raise objection to my subject matter even if they disagree with some of my ideas. Even many abstract artists seem to get a kick out of my work.

J.Z.: Your paintings get people talking about those things.

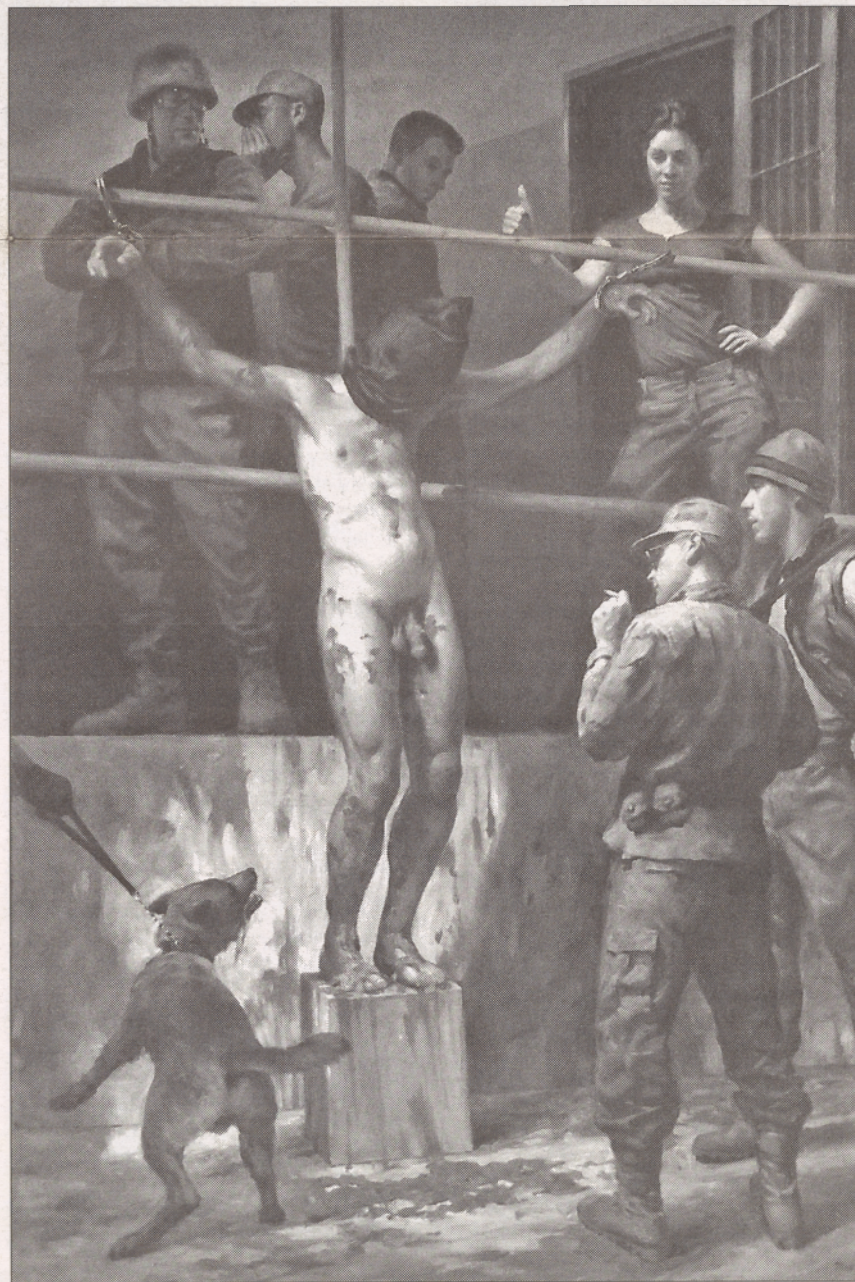
M.G.: I think so. I was mainly painting a slice of life. In every one of those paintings, I'm dealing with the social condition, and maybe most people just pass it by like you pass by life. So you see people of color taking care of rich kids who are usually white. And that's a social condition that exists, and people take it for granted. In my painting "Nannies and Kids" (2003) you see a black woman solid like a rock caring for two little kids who look like Bouguereau's angels. And all the nannies around also seem to be from some minority groups. Sometimes you see the reverse, but rarely. Poor people and slaves have been caring for rich people's kids for centuries. And you wonder sometimes who are the real parents.

In "Two Worlds," there are three guys sitting idle inside a basketball court, whereas on the other side, you have white guys walking around fast like they have things to do. These social relationships make the painting interesting in addition to the design and artistic qualities.

J.Z.: Having looked at all the decades of civil strife, and where we are today, as an observer of all this, what's your outlook?

M.G.: I tend to be an optimist. Nothing is ever perfect, the world or my art. But we are always striving for a more perfect world and a perfect painting.

As for the ills in the world, and as part of the 99 percent we have to fight against greed and corruption. At the moment, the Occupy Wall Street movement seems to be positive and encouraging. I think that greed and corruption are going to be around for a long time, and I think that as a human being and as an artist, I will feel like a better person if I'm part of the 99 percent who are opposing



it. And my art is a part of my expression.

Sure, it would be nice if there were more fairness around and so on, but I guess it's always going to be a battle, because there's always a certain amount of greed and hypocrisy going on.

J.Z.: I feel like you do, but I am energized by the Occupy Wall Street movement.

M.G.: Me too! But I was energized when the Allies defeated fascism. I was energized when Martin Luther King Jr. led the struggle

to end segregation and when unions enabled workers to enjoy a better standard of living. But then there were setbacks. The 1 percent took their factories overseas to become super wealthy, making thousands of workers unemployed, and the Supreme Court ruled corporations to be people and the so-called "middle class" is realizing they are really part of the poorer 1 percent. So it is energizing to see our Occupy Wall Street movement fighting back.