

POSTER



Past
Exhibition

HOUSE

Freak Power

March 4–August 15, 2021

“I went to the Democratic Convention as a journalist and returned a raving beast.”

—Hunter S. Thompson

Intro

Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005) grew up in Louisville, Kentucky and began his career in journalism while serving in the Air Force in 1956–57. He then traveled the world, writing articles for numerous magazines while developing a wild, highly personal style of reporting that would become known as “Gonzo journalism.” The Gonzo style mixes fact and fantasy to paint a vivid picture of reality. Thompson wrote many successful books in this style, including *Hells Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (1967) and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1971).

In 1967, Thompson and his family moved to Woody Creek, Colorado to live a quiet life. This changed after he witnessed firsthand the violence at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Despite showing his press pass, he was tear-gassed and beaten along with peaceful protesters. He returned home to find similar forms of citizen oppression taking place in nearby Aspen. He decided then that he had to join the fight for civil rights and quickly became involved in local politics.

The Freak Power movement took shape in 1969, when Thompson met with novelist James Salter and journalist Peggy Clifford—whom Thompson called “the intellectual conscience of the town”—to discuss strategies. They recruited Joe Edwards, a local civil-rights activist and attorney, to run for mayor of Aspen, Colorado. Local artist Thomas W. Benton made many political posters and hosted meetings in his studio. Working together with other concerned citizens, they created a platform of ambitious ideas for preserving the future of the town and surrounding natural environment. Using posters, publications, talks, and public events, the Freak Power team quickly found support in the community as well as resistance from those in power.

March 5, 1970. The Aspen Times Page C1

Scurrilous Sheet Hits the Streets

A new way to open your eyes, fill your mind or line your waste basket was introduced to Aspen this week with publication of the first issue of The Aspen Wall Poster.

Designed as a bi-monthly output of graphics and opinion printed in a poster format, the new publication is the result of efforts by Tom Benton and Hunter S. Thompson to fill the editorial void created by the recent close of the Aspen Illustrated News.

The opening article by Thompson had been accepted by the News for publication before the abrupt end game of the paper. Looking for a forum that would be free of the financial and editorial limitations of a newspaper, Thompson created the Wall Poster with Benton.

Denying the idea that they are looking for a personal soapbox, Benton and Thompson said in a statement of intent in the first issue they will accept any "relevant, coherent, and even outrageous counterpoint to our clearly biased opinions."

"The only criteria for art and editorial content will be quality. Any Nazi greedhead with the money to hire a good ghostwriter is welcome to submit his screeds for publication."

When asked by an Aspen Times reporter in an exclusive newspaper interview (easy when you're the only paper in town), who would be their principal targets in the promised bi-monthly "heavy shot on local things," Thompson and Benton replied, "the greedheads, the land-rapers and the Nazis."

A quick perusal of their first number gives some indication exactly who they consider in those categories.

Much like Consumer Reports which promise to "call spades spades, name names, and let the chips fall where they may," the Wall Poster will hopefully provide a forum in which consumers of the much abused "quality of life" in Aspen can report.

The graphics on the first issue are a re-working of the Joe Edwards campaign poster and it is backed by a bit of prickly invective about city and county cracker barrel politics. But then it is the only way you can get a Benton poster for a dollar and if mounted with epoxy your children will never read the back.

Speaking of the format, Benton said that next time they would switch the invective and people would put the poster up against the wall. Thompson said that personally he would like to see the



Hunter S. Thompson, with elixir in hand, and Tom Benton, behind their convenient disguise, await public reaction to the first issue of the Aspen Wall Poster.

graphics get into the exotic. Nothing but dirty old logic, considering the way veritable mounds of Playboy are sold in Aspen.

The Wall Poster will also accept ads, but they must be interesting and will naturally be subject to editorial comment, Thompson remarked, that advertisers could buy equal time in the issues that blasted them.

Thompson, swaggering around the clandestine press room of the sheet in jack boots, Sam Browne belt and campaign metal denied rumors that he coveted the Pitkin County Sheriff's job, although he said he was growing a beard to better represent Aspen at law enforcement conferences.

He noted that pressure for a draft is strong among his east coast financial backers and a posse will be formed soon. Cowboy boots, sideburns, and Basalt residency will not be mandatory, but useful.

The only member of the shadow orga-

nization that seems to surround the new sheet with a title is Circulation Manager Gene Johnston. If warranted, he will make deliveries with a fierce dog in one hand, a large gun in the other and the posters flashing between.

Thompson said that "just because some of the writing may be a little heavy, it doesn't mean it's not serious."

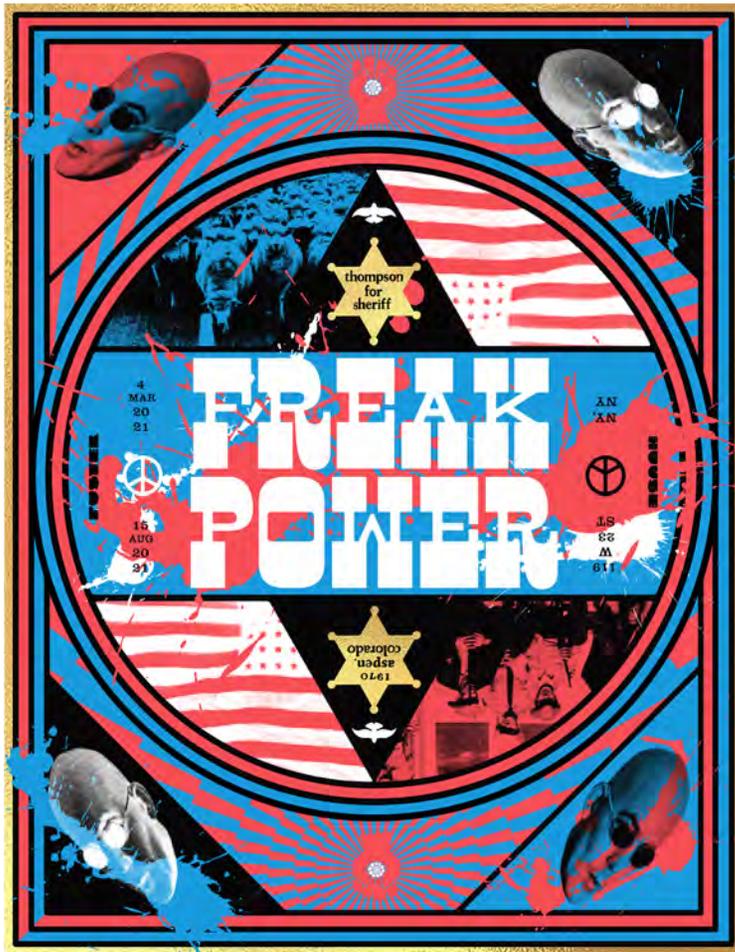
Remarking that the momentum for local reform had dropped since the election, the editors said that it was a mistake to only get excited two weeks out of the year. Valley exploiters count on just such apathy and it would be a shame to let them have the whole game the rest of the year. Although they claim to be entirely free of outside group influence, Benton noted that if you burn a candle under the poster, the word "revolution" appears. Thompson said that if you irritated on it, secret messages would come out in the margins, but he didn't recommend doing it when you were holding the candle underneath.

While Edwards did not win the mayoral election that year, he lost by only six votes, thanks to a larger number of new voter registrations and huge turnout at the polls. This shocked everyone and proved that the Freak Power platform was truly viable. The next year, Thompson ran for sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado; Ned Vare ran for county commissioner; and Bill Noonan ran for coroner—all on the Freak Power ticket. To this day, Colorado politicians continue to reference Freak Power ideas in their platforms. This homegrown movement changed the course of local politics in spite of fierce resistance. The innovative and provocative actions of the original Freak Power proponents have also inspired generations of concerned citizens in Aspen and beyond.

Key issues of the Freak Power platform in 1970—such as environmental protection, drug laws, and police reform—are now driving mainstream debate and legislation around the world.

Please be advised that this exhibition contains references to police brutality, strong language, drug use, and suicide.

Scurrilous Sheet Hits the Street
The Aspen Times, 1970



Curation

Daniel Joseph Watkins
Yuri Zupancic

Exhibition Design

Ola Baldych

Installation

John F. Lynch

CMYK Council

Antonio Alcalá
Mihoshi Fukushima Clark
David McCalla

Graphic Installation

Keith Immediato

Mural & Ink Splashes*

Ruth Hofheimer
*inspired by Ralph
Steadman

Printers

XDFour
T.E. Black Studio, Inc.
Top Notch Graphics
MC Squared NYC
The Standard Group

Exhibition Poster

Pablo Medina, 2021

Philosophy

“I’m not at all embarrassed by the use of the word freak. I think the way things are going in this country right now it’s a very honorable designation and I’m proud of it. To be abnormal, to deviate from the style of government that I deplore in America today, is not only wise but necessary.”

—Hunter S. Thompson

The Freak Power party felt that too many people were ignored by the government and fought to make politics more open-minded and inclusive. In every way, it looked dramatically different from other political parties.

And that was the point: to show that big changes were possible. Its candidates presented ambitious ideas that resonated with the cultural and social revolutions of the time. They advocated for causes like racial and gender equality, freedom of the press, sexual liberation, respect for nature, and freedom of thought, while speaking out against greed, oppression, and social conservatism.

In signature “Gonzo” style, Hunter S. Thompson and friends used humor and political theater to break social norms and challenge the status quo, giving creative perspectives to community issues. They invented fictional characters like Bill Greed, a caricature of a ruthless investor, and an imaginary lizard named Sal A. Mander who ran for several political offices, including those of mayor and district attorney. Thompson wore outlandish clothing during his campaign for sheriff to show that even a “freak” could run for office. He also made provocative statements and welcomed responses from those who disagreed.

The Freak Power movement also wanted to give its cause a deeper sense of intellectual and spiritual meaning. The influence of Eastern philosophies and transcendentalism is evident in the art of the so-called “Reverend” Thomas W. Benton, the “spiritual director” of the movement. His posters often incorporated calligraphic circles and other Zen symbols. Campaign mailers were addressed to “Enlightened Citizens of Aspen.” Freak Power materials frequently included inspirational quotes from such distinguished thinkers as Henry David Thoreau, T. S. Eliot, and Clarence Darrow.



**“There is common sense in the
apparent madness of my campaign.”**
—Hunter S. Thompson

Thompson for Sheriff Silkscreen, 1970
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

- This is an original silkscreen with a wooden frame used by Benton to print posters for Hunter S. Thompson’s campaign for sheriff.
- The small, circular icon used here by Benton as a signature also appears on other artworks, suggesting that he reused certain printing screens. This tiny symbol could have been masked or covered by tape when he was printing the *Thompson for Sheriff* posters.
- After the posters were printed, the silkscreen was cut in the middle—or “cancelled”— to prevent it from being used by anyone else to make new editions of the poster.
- For more information on the silkscreen process, please see the section on Thomas W. Benton & Political Art.



Thompson for Sheriff, 1970

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- This iconic fist image was the logo for Thompson’s campaign for sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado. It was subsequently adopted as the logo of the Freak Power party, of Gonzo journalism, and of Thompson himself.
- The fist has two thumbs, representing the hand of a mutant or “freak.” It is holding a peyote button, the part of the cactus containing the hallucinogenic substance mescaline.
- For the past century or so, the fist icon has been a symbol of solidarity and resistance against oppression. This tradition was started by The Industrial Workers of the World in 1917, and was later adopted by anti-fascist groups in France and England. Today, the fist logo is still used by many political movements among them Black Lives Matter.

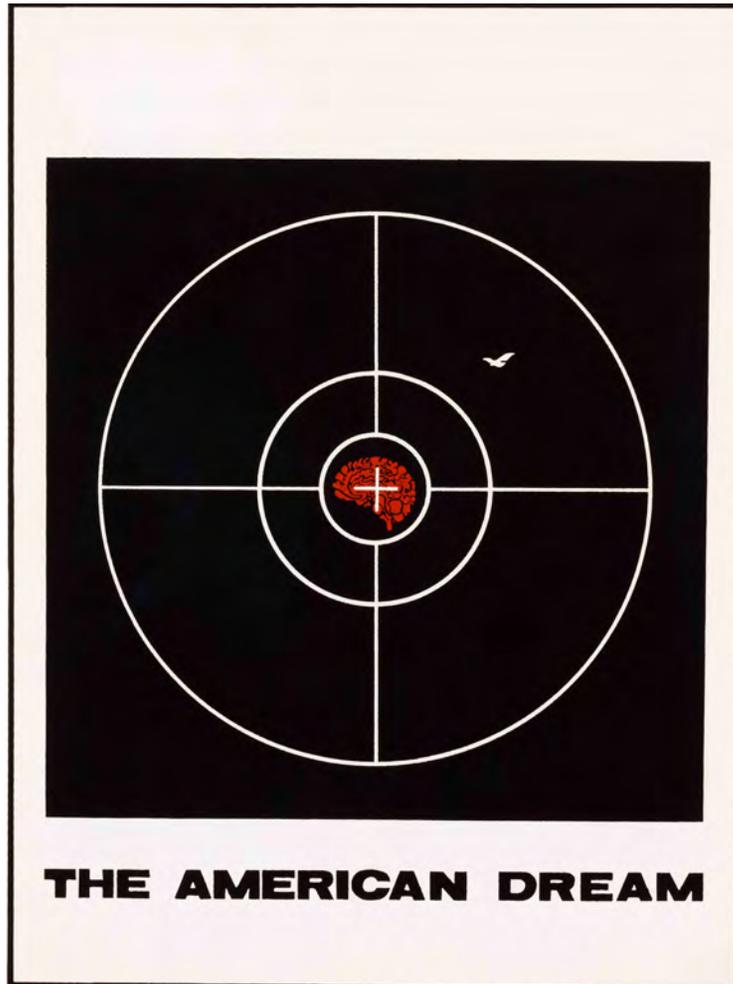


That All Men Are Created Equal, 1967

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- Known as the “long hot summer of 1967,” this period is best remembered as a time of extreme social unrest when 159 riots brought the country to its knees. The Kerner Commission, appointed by President Johnson, blamed “lack of economic opportunity, failed social service programs, police brutality, racism, and the white-oriented media” for causing the riots.
- The handprints in Benton’s work appear to reference the bloody handprint, a mark of German evil, in the famous 1917 American wartime propaganda poster for Liberty Bonds (shown below). Benton’s black-and-white handprints here visually signify the stated belief “That All Men Are Created Equal.”

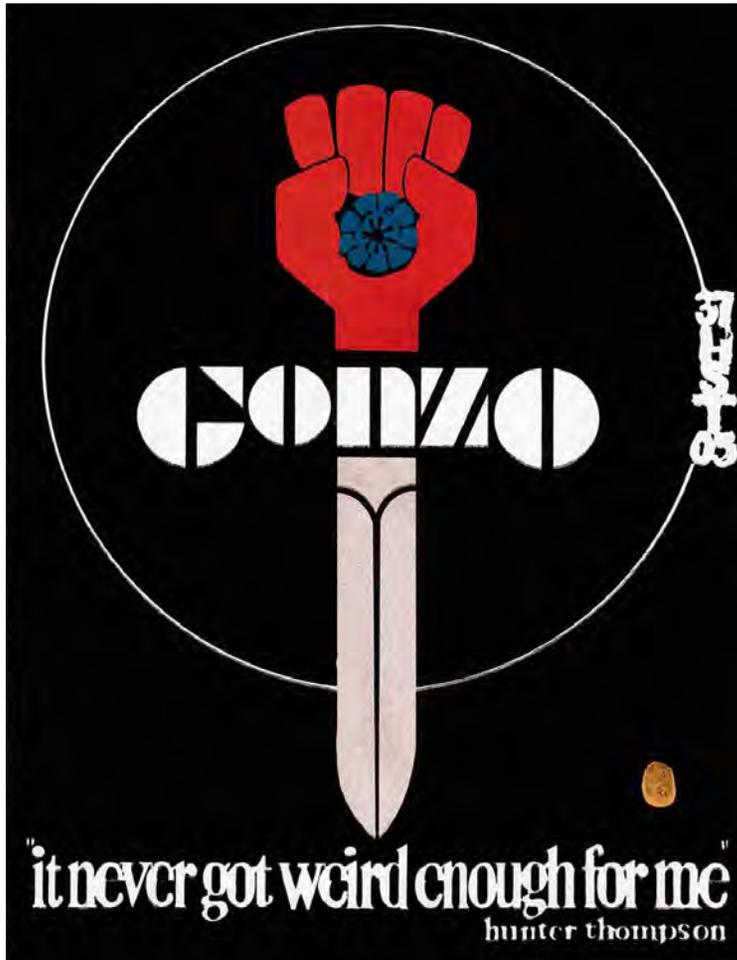


The American Dream, 1968

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- In shock and grief-stricken, Benton made this silkscreen on June 5, 1968, the night of Robert Kennedy's assassination, just two months after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- The image of a human brain in the crosshairs of a gun scope reflects the fear that freedom of thought was under attack in America.
- Benton and Thompson shared a fascination with the idea of the "American Dream" and what it represents. They were deeply anguished about the social, political, and ideological conflicts their country faced.



Gonzo—
It Never Got Weird Enough for Me, 2005
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper

- The Gonzo Sword logo was designed in the 1970s by artist Paul Pascarella at the request of Hunter S. Thompson.
- Benton produced this memorial poster, based on his 1971 design bearing the same quotation from Thompson, after Thompson's suicide in 2005.



John Denver, 1971

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- John Denver was a famous singer-songwriter who lived in Aspen from 1971 until his death in 1997.
- Denver was also an activist for humanitarian and environmental causes, and a founder of the World Hunger Project. He wrote many songs about his appreciation and concern for the Rocky Mountains, the oceans, and other natural resources.
- He was one of three musicians (along with Frank Zappa and Dee Snider) who tried to stop the Parents Music Restoration Center from requiring a “Parental Advisory” sticker on music.



Take Another Look, 2018

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print

- This work incorporates one of the drawings that Steadman mailed to Aspen in 1970 to support Hunter S. Thompson's campaign for sheriff.
- Hiser took a photograph of Steadman's original drawing at the Freak Power headquarters in 1970. In 2018, Steadman added ink splashes at his studio in Kent, England.
- In 1970, many Aspen residents were scared of the local police who carried guns everywhere although there was little violent crime in the area. The sheriff at the time seemed determined to intimidate people.

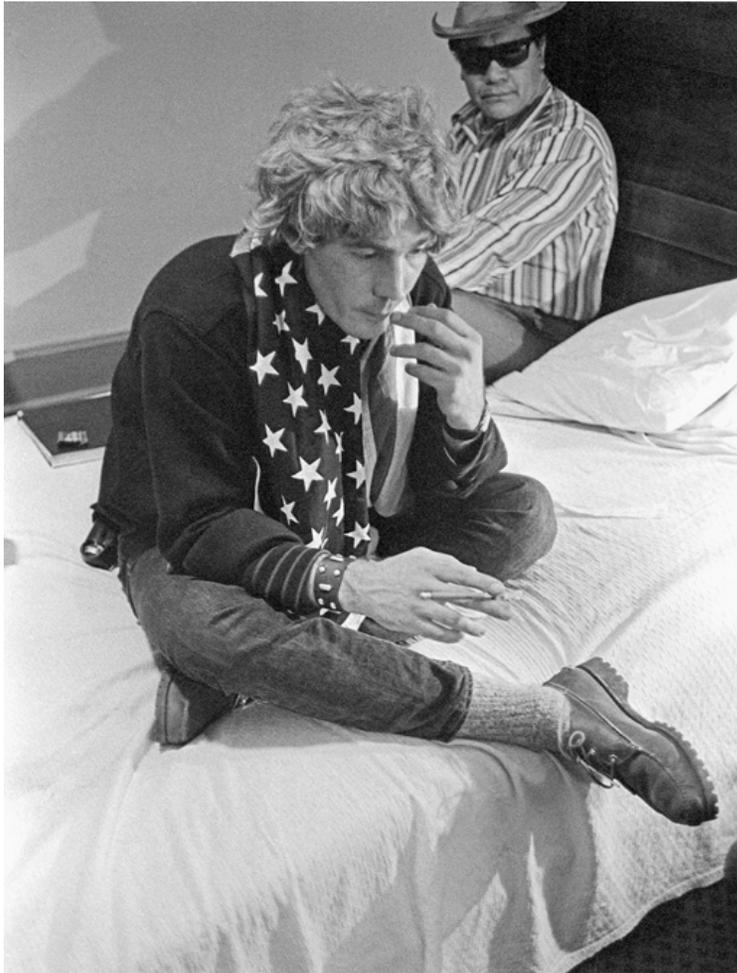


Gonzo—What the Fuck's Gonzo?, 2018

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print



Hunter and Oscar, 2018

Bob Krueger (b. 1946)

Archival pigment print

- Thompson is seen here on the night of the 1970 elections wearing an American flag and a wig.
- Also pictured is Oscar Zeta Acosta, the attorney, activist, and writer who ran for sheriff of Los Angeles in 1970 and received more than 100,000 votes. The poster for this campaign is reproduced on this label.
- A close friend, inspiration, and muse for Thompson, Acosta was represented as “Dr. Gonzo” in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Thomas W. Benton & Political Art

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007) was an artist from Oakland, California. He moved to Aspen in 1963, where he built his own home, studio, and gallery, and began working as an architect while making and selling paintings. Benton quickly became involved in local politics, and his gallery became the central meeting place for intellectuals, artists, and activists. Benton's love of poetry, philosophy, and design is evident in his work. In it, he typically combined carefully crafted and perfectly complementary symbols and texts.

Benton taught himself the art of silkscreen printmaking. A squeegee is used to push ink through a fine-mesh fabric (originally silk, hence the name, but now more commonly synthetic materials or stainless steel) stretched on a frame, onto paper or fabric, except in areas made impermeable to ink by a block stencil. Benton used several silkscreens for each poster, one for each color in the design. One of his screens is displayed at the entrance to this gallery. He created his first anti-war poster in 1965, and screenprinting remained his chief artistic medium for the rest of his career.

During the late 1960s, Thompson met Benton. Their subsequent friendship and collaboration spanned more than four decades, resulting in some of Benton's most recognized works, including the 1970 *Thompson for Sheriff* poster and his series of political *Aspen Wall Posters* that combined his designs with Thompson's writing. He went on to create campaign posters for more than 50 candidates, including George McGovern (D–SD), Gary Hart (D–CO), and Willie Brown (D–CA). Benton also designed numerous posters for local benefits, non-profit organizations, and charities whose causes he supported.



“The purpose of a poster is to graphically make a statement. Words and graphics must be directed to get across one idea universally. A poster should leave no doubt about what the artist means, and it should have the same interpretation by everyone.”

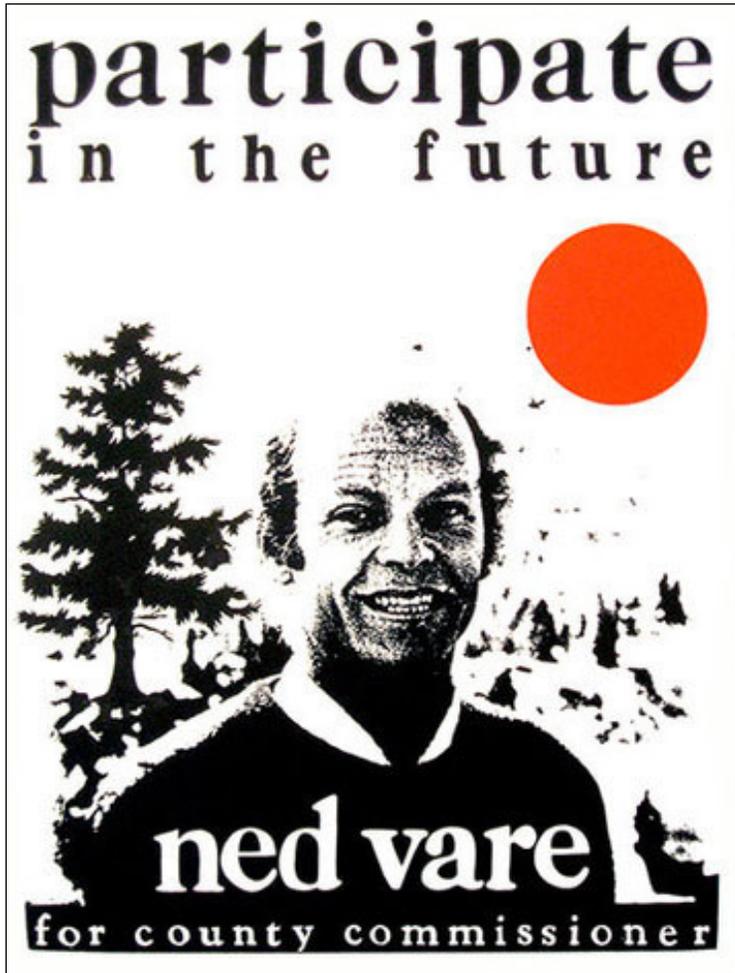
—Thomas W. Benton

Anon, 1970

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- Benton created this peace-sign icon in 1969 as the logo for the first Freak Power political campaign: Joe Edwards for mayor.
- As “anon” means “coming soon,” this poster is a declaration that world peace might be imminent.



Ned Vare—Red Moon, 1970

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- Much of Benton's work shows a Japanese influence. Both the minimalist color scheme and the red circle in this poster are traditional elements within Japanese art and design.
- Vare lost the election for county commissioner but was elected to the city council. In 1998, he was the Libertarian Party's candidate for Governor of Connecticut.
- An architect by profession, Vare also played professional golf on the PGA tour and wrote and illustrated three books on various subjects, including golf instruction and home-schooling.

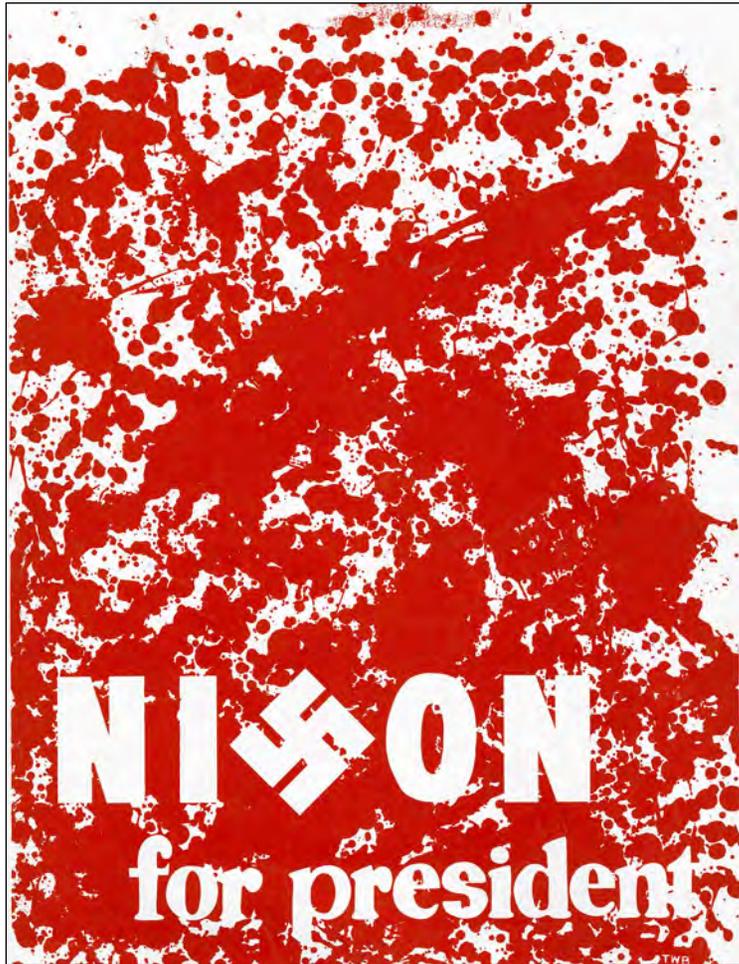


Re-Elect the President, 1972

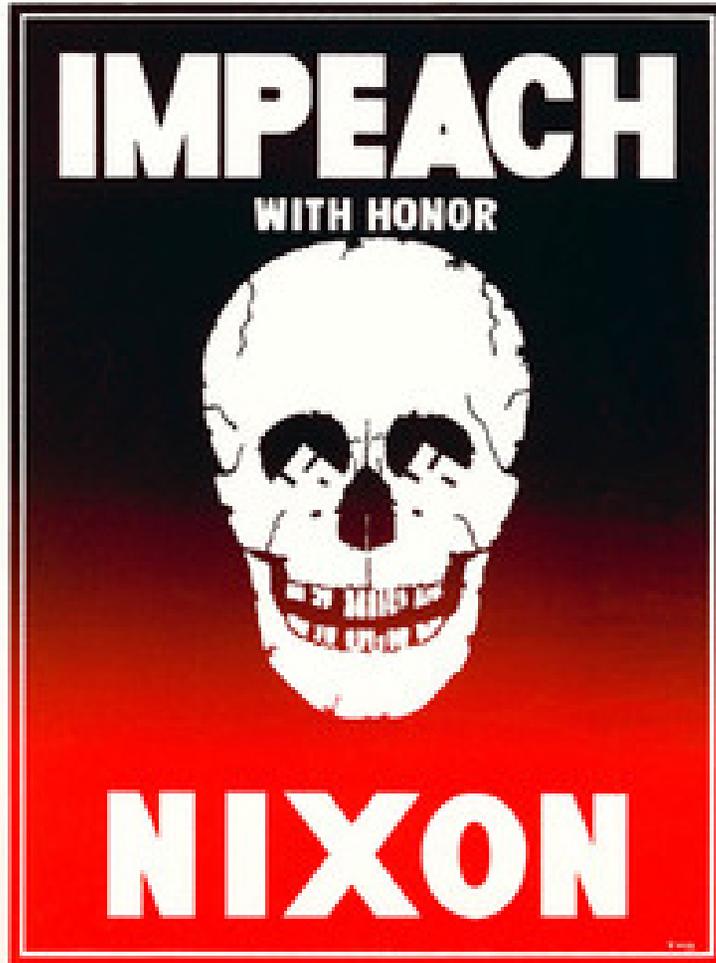
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- This was one of several posters bearing the same sarcastic slogan made by Benton during Richard Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign, and features a skull decorated in the stars and stripes of the American flag, with swastikas instead of eyes.
- This image was also used to illustrate the cover of *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail 1972*.



Nixon for President, 1968
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper



Impeach Nixon with Honor, 1973

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- In one of Benton’s most grim and macabre images, featuring the skull with swastika eyes that he also used in a colorful version in a 1972 election poster, he represents both a sense of Nixon’s danger to the country and an ironic disdain for the president’s self-righteous declarations of innocence.
- Benton incorporated the words “with honor” to reference Nixon’s call for “peace with honor” in a January, 1973 speech to end the war in Vietnam.
- Nixon was subject to impeachment proceedings later that year following the Watergate scandal, but resigned from office in 1974 to avoid going to trial.



Acirema—2, 1968

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- “Acirema” is “America” spelled backwards, and was perhaps intended to suggest that the country was confused and out of order.



Let Noonan Do It, 1970

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- This poster advertises Billy Noonan's campaign for Pitkin County coroner in 1970, showing Noonan with a shovel in a graveyard.
- The Freak Power party realized that the coroner played an important role in local government since he or she was required to make official rulings on causes of death. The party was afraid that the current coroner's political bias could result in cover-ups of wrongful deaths.



Bob Braudis, The Sheriff You Know, 2006

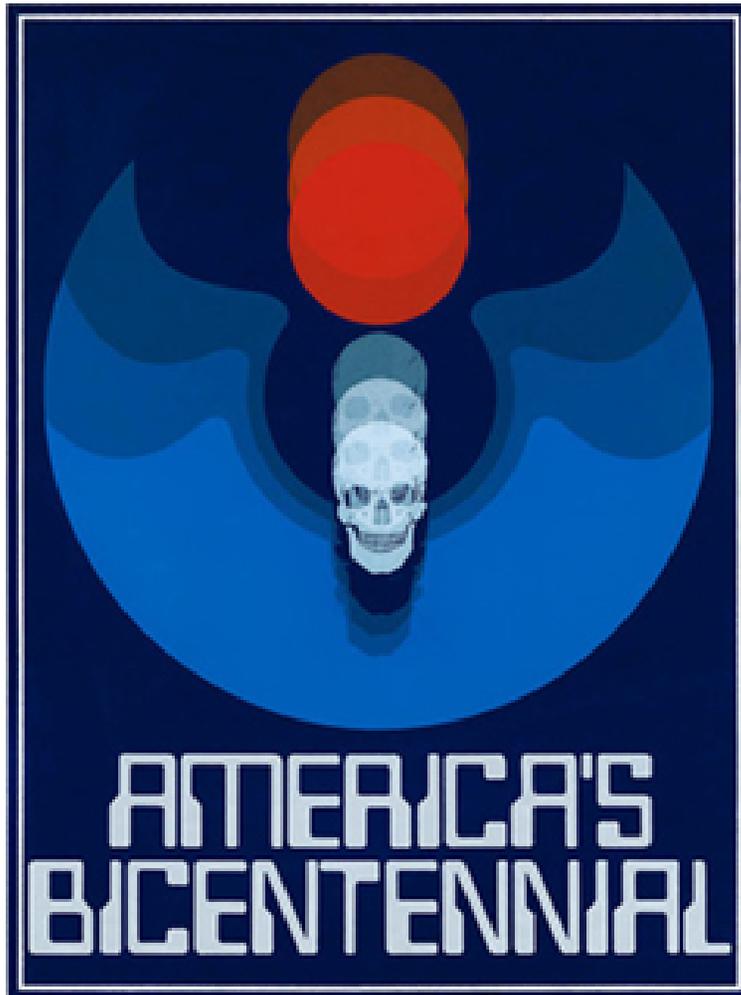
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

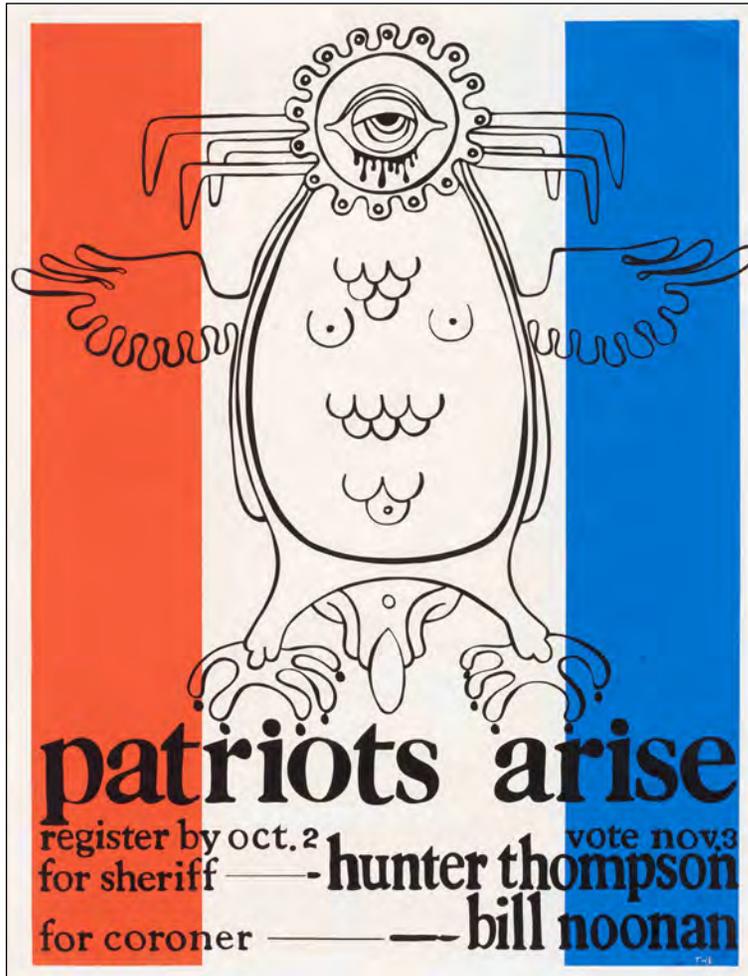
- Soon after he moved to Aspen in 1970, Bob Braudis began to volunteer for the original Freak Power campaigns.
- In 1978, Braudis became a sheriff's deputy, and in 1986 was elected sheriff, a position he held until 2010.
- Though retired, "Sheriff Bob" is still very active in civic affairs, regularly meeting with community leaders in Aspen.
- Braudis shared his experiences in the book *Freak Power* that inspired this exhibition, as well as in the film *Freak Power—The Ballot or the Bomb* that you can view excerpts from in the documentary screening outside this gallery.



**If You Don't Give a Damn—
Don't Register to Vote, 1969**
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper



America's Bicentennial, 1976
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper



Patriots Arise, 1970
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper



**Celebrate Man's Inhumanity to Man—
Re-Elect the President, 2004**
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper

Aspen Wall Posters

Thomas Benton and Hunter Thompson often collaborated and brainstormed for days at a time. Combining texts and images, the double-sided posters were an experiment in art, politics, and publishing. The concept was inspired by Chairman Mao's Communist posters and legal reporter Sidney Zion's exposés for *Ramparts Magazine* during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Benton and Thompson eventually made six wall posters that became popular in Aspen and across the country.

Protestors Against the Vietnam War in Aspen, Colorado, 1968

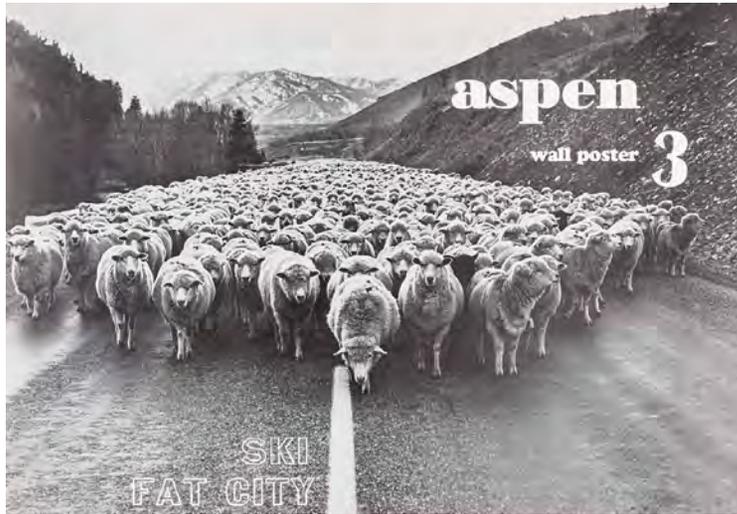
Bob Krueger (b. 1946)

Photograph

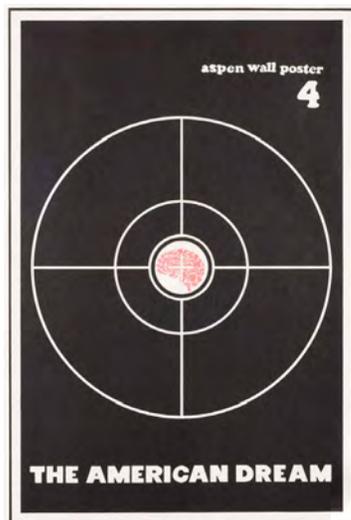




Aspen Wall Poster #1, 1970
 Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005)
 Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
 Offset lithograph



Aspen Wall Poster #3, 1970
Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005)
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Offset lithograph



Aspen Wall Poster #4, 1970
 Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005)
 Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
 Offset lithograph



Aspen Wall Poster #5, 1970
 Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005)
 Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
 Offset lithograph

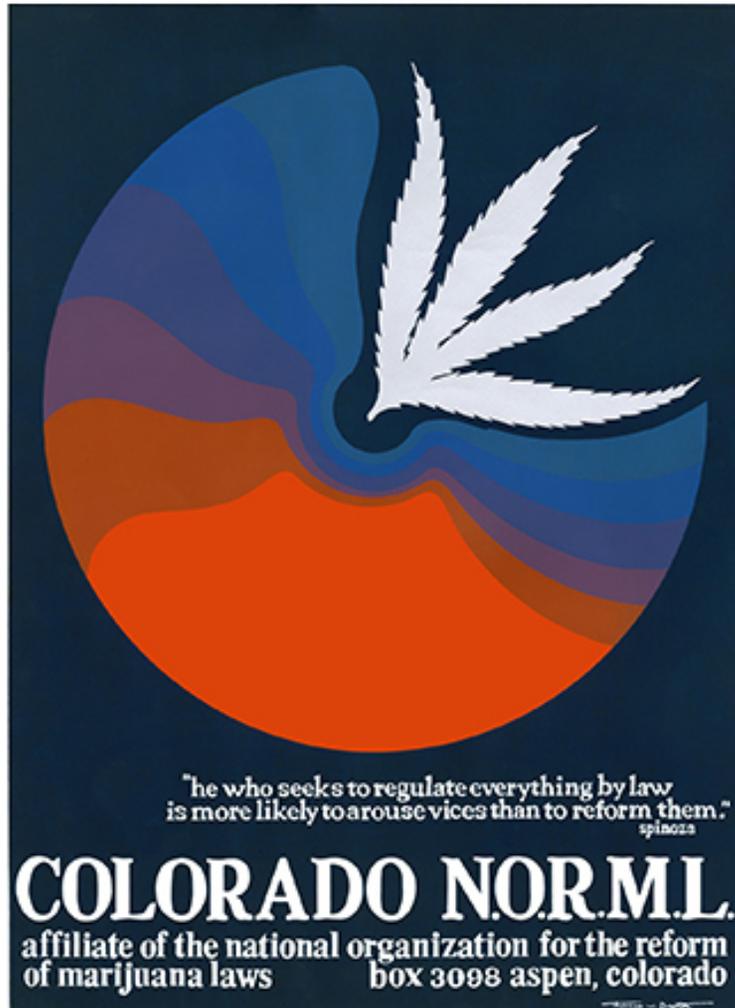
Drug Law Reform

One of the most controversial and lasting legacies of the Freak Power movement was its position on drugs. In general, its adherents believed that the government should not prosecute citizens for taking drugs but should offer treatment instead. Hunter S. Thompson wanted to create community-support networks to discourage opiate and speed addiction, but he adamantly supported the legalization of marijuana, and wrote many persuasive texts on the subject.

Drug use was a contentious issue during the campaign, and Thompson's honesty about his own intake of marijuana probably contributed to his loss of the election. However, beginning in 1976, the city of Aspen introduced increasingly liberal drug enforcement policies, and in 2012, recreational marijuana was legalized in Colorado by state ballot. Today, the city of Aspen continues to prioritize treatment over incarceration for drug offenses.

"Marijuana laws are one of the reasons that there's this lack of respect that cops complain about all over the country. When you get a whole generation who grow up as felons, and they know the law is ridiculous, and they're told all this gibberish about it: that it drives you crazy, it makes your brain soft, and your feet fall off. Even the police know it's a silly law! It's time that we either bridge that chasm with some kind of realistic law enforcement or I don't think it's going to be bridged in this country."

—Thomas W. Benton

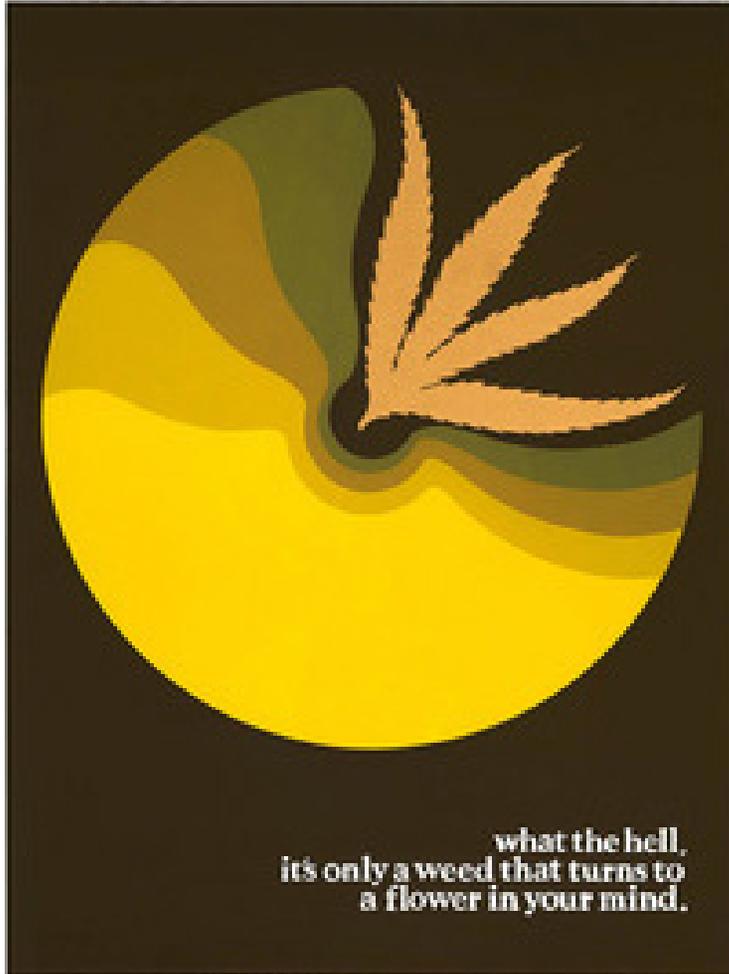


Colorado NORML, 1970

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- NORML stands for National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. It was founded in 1970, and Benton became involved right away, making posters and participating in its conferences for years in Colorado and California.

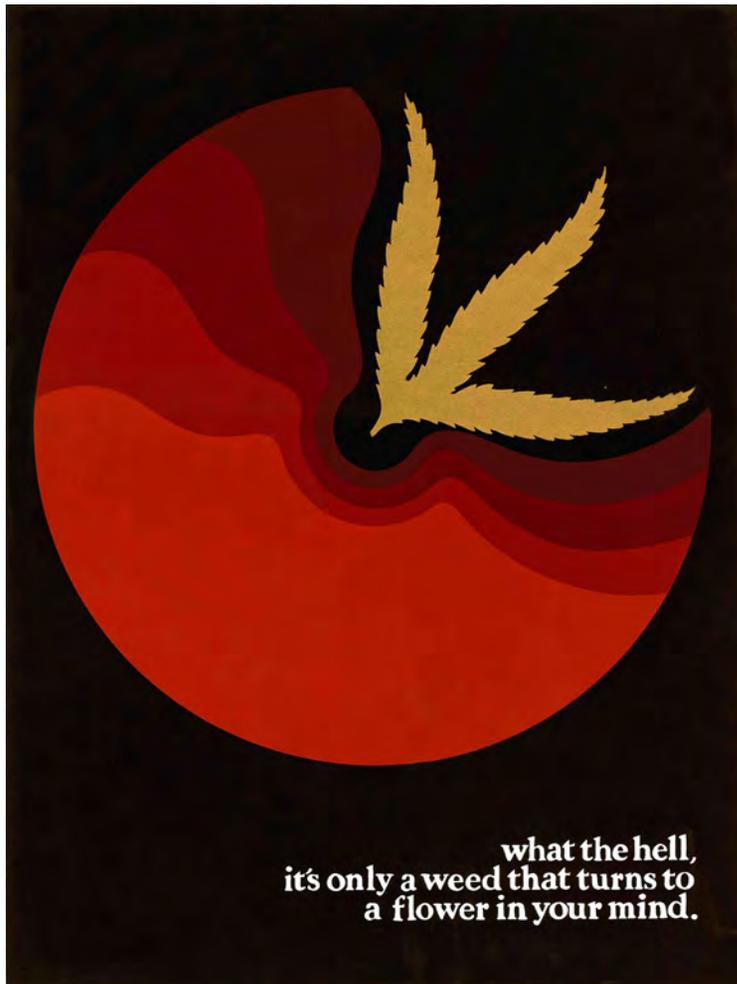


What the Hell, It's Only a Weed, 1970

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- The Freak Power movement pushed for the legalization and decriminalization of marijuana. Over the years, the Freaks and other activists succeeded in changing public policies in Aspen; these changes influenced the rest of Colorado, which became the first state to legalize marijuana in 2012. Many other states have followed its example, legalizing the drug for medical and/or recreational uses.



What the Hell, It's Only a Weed—Red, 1970
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper

Gentrification

Aspen was a sleepy mountain town for many decades after the end of the silver-mining boom in 1893. That all began to change in the 1950s, when the new ski resort attracted increasing numbers of tourists and investors. The cost of living steadily increased, as did economic disparities. Thompson wrote numerous editorial articles and participated in public debates about the impact and scope of large-scale development projects in the area. He collaborated with Thomas W. Benton and other artists and activists on posters, events, and publications demanding less gentrification and commodification of Aspen.

During his campaign for sheriff, Thompson stated that he wanted to “change the name of Aspen, by public referendum, to ‘Fat City’ in order to prevent greed-heads, land-rapers, and other human jackals from capitalizing on the name Aspen.” The referendum never happened, but anonymous street artists began to write “Fat City” in public places around town. Since then, Aspen has clearly been gentrified in many respects, but it has continued its affordable-housing program, halted most large-scale developments, and put strict limits on billboards and public advertising. Much of this can be related to the initiatives of the Freak Power movement during the 1970s.

“I didn’t come here for brighter lights and better hotdogs.”

—Hunter S. Thompson



**Sell Aspen or Save It—
Joe Edwards for Mayor, 1969**

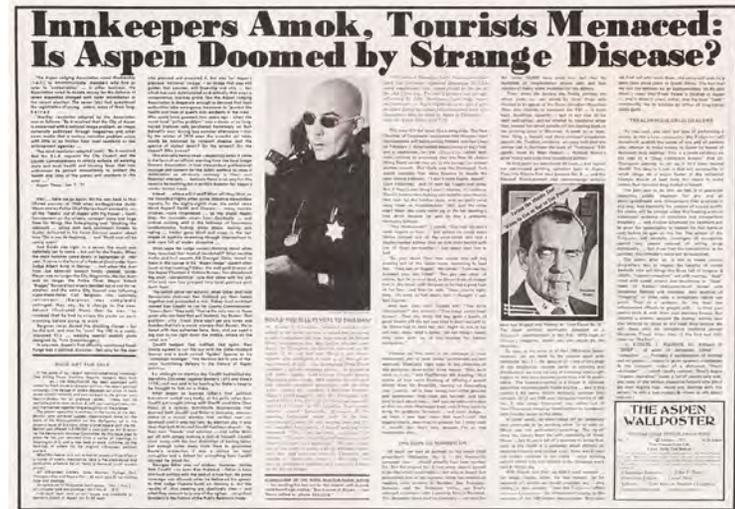
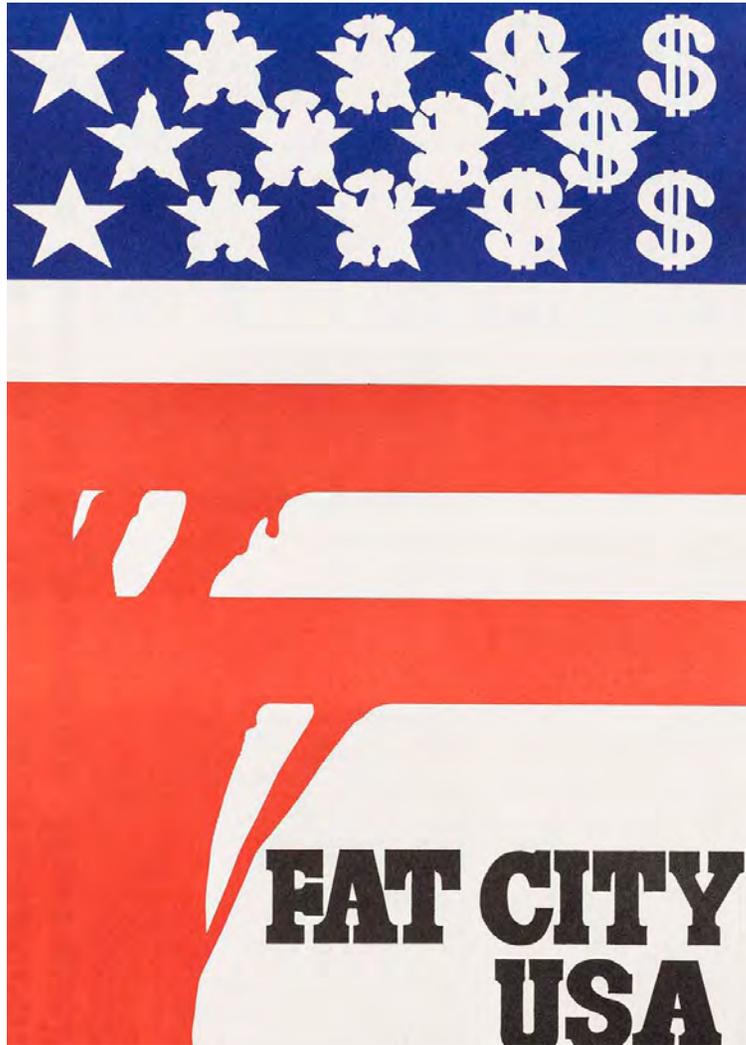
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- This slogan addressed the very serious choices Aspen residents faced at this election between financial development and preservation of the city's character and the surrounding natural areas.
- The Freak Power movement encouraged people to resist the temptations of overdevelopment and promoted responsible and restrained urban planning.



**Sell Aspen or Save It—
Joe Edwards for Mayor, 1969**
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper



Aspen Wall Poster #7, 1971
 Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005)
 Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
 Offset lithograph

Advertisement:

Dear Warren . . . Here's the *Wallposter* ad, along with a few space problems that I've hopefully solved, so wit!

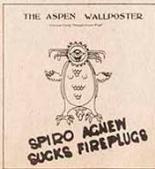
1) Drop the subscription box and run my copy in that space. Given the vicious subscription price, I think we'd be better off soliciting \$2 sample sheets . . . and that way we'll also have room to run the copy, which says a lot more than the box.

2) The other alternative is to do whatever you want with the fucker. Rearrange the whole goddamn ad, for all I care. And by way of explanation, this "Agnew Sucks Fireplugs" thing was the cover we had planned for WP #3—but the local printer refused to touch it.

All this whole thing proves to me is that I'm clearly not worth a shit as an advertiser—and particularly not as an advertiser cum politician cum publisher. So I leave the gutter in your hands, for good or ill. Since my last dreary letter, our finances have taken a fast turn for the better. We are now in the black, somehow, and that kind of laissez-faire makes us WP #3 in the works & this one will fuck us all. I have made a list of all our enemies—and many of our friends—involved in local land-rape enterprises, and we intend to savage them all. The list is massive—everybody from R. O. Anderson, president of Atlantic-Rehfield, to people who worked on the Joe Edwards campaign. And along with this list of greendeads & their transgressions, we will publish a *scoreboard*—showing that we have whipped, terrified & destroyed all these we have attacked thus far. . . .

—Hunter

[REJECTED LAYOUT]



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[AD COPY THAT DIDN'T FIT IN REJECTED LAYOUT]

Are you ready to drop out? Face the city! Screw off to the Rockies and seize a ripe chunk of the Good Life! If so, first do yourself a favor—read the *Aspen Wallposter* and be the first on your block to have your illusions come home in a tube.

The Rape of Aspen is a mainstreaming horror story, designed by experts to drive even the most zealous freak/liberal/would-be agrarian racist straight to his knees. What began in the 1950's as a chic seduction by ski-mongers and jet-setters soon became a frenzied gang-rape of the whole valley.

Aspen has been skillfully merchandised from coast to coast as a weird little ski-commune & culture-spa, full of happy refugees from the Nazi plastic nightmare of Urban America. And a lot of people in the valley believe that treacherous wall—most of it written by hired geeks in the pay of such monsters as Boise Cascade, American Cement, First National City Bank of New York, Texas International Petroleum, Mianze Pearl Chicken, Head Ski and Holiday Inn. The hype was compounded by greendeads like John Wayne, Leon Uris and Robert McNamara, who lent the dubious prestige of their names to some of the ugliest "development" schemes since the Florida real estate boom of the 1920's.

Meanwhile, all political power was centered in a Nazi-oriented cartel of local businessmen who instructed the cops to do whatever was "necessary" to protect the town's image—and their own foul investments—from desecration by freaks, hippies, dope-smokers & other strange weeds that were threatening, by the end of the '60s, to take permanent root in the merchants' profit-gardens.

Then, with no warning—in the fall of '69—Aspen's long-mouldering Underground suddenly flexed its political muscle and came within six (6) votes of electing a twenty-nine-year-old local lawyer & liberator as mayor. Joe Edwards lost by a hair—but the establishment lost three of its crucial City Council seats, and the mayor's tickle-acking voice is now all that keeps the greendeads in control of Aspen.

The *Wallposter* was created in the wake of that campaign, to maintain the energy & keep the scales off balance—a full-size poster, on heavy paper, with the *Brute* / *Color* graphics of Rev. Thomas Benton on one side, and the savage screeds of the Rev. Hunter S. Thompson on the other.

After only four issues the *Wallposter* has grown from an esoteric local handbill to a nationally distributed monster that drives the local cops & greendeads completely crazy each time it appears. The first issue blew the county attorney out of office; #2 introduced Jimson Weed & the sexual aspects of Sumo wrestling to local newsmen; #3 caused banks in New York & Boston to pull out of a huge land-rape project, which soon collapsed; and #4 destroyed the sheriff.

Issue #5 will very likely destroy the *Wallposter*, the Meat Possum Press and all those associated with it. But we are now whipping it together, for good or ill, and if our infrastructure survives this next one, #6 will carry the Reverend Thompson's declaration of candidacy for the office of county sheriff—along with his platform, now being hashed together with the help of Sgt. Sunshine & Wes Pottery, the main cop at Woodstock.

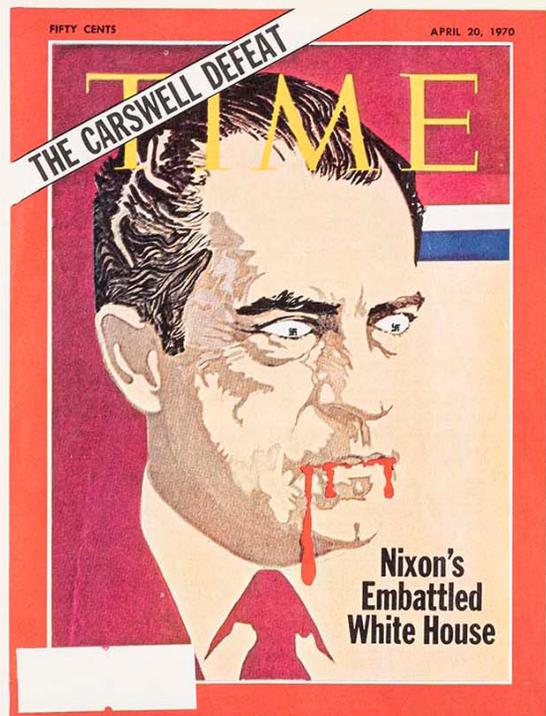
Further issues will detail the Rape of the Greendeads & the collapse of the local money/politics establishment. . . . and the implications of this battle plan extend far beyond Aspen. The question here is not How to Work Within the System, or How to Destroy It—but rather How to Suck It, how to drive the piss off the ship without sinking the ship itself & putting us all in life rafts. It is the simple assumption that political power in this country is stagnant & static, until the people learn how to use it.

Maybe not—but on the basis of last fall's experiment, we're ready for another run at the boards, and that time we plan to win. The *Wallposter* will be the main voice of this effort. It was conceived more as a political tool than either a newspaper or a poster—but it has evolved, very quickly, into a combination of all three. And on that basis we intend to run the bigger full bore for as long as there's room to run.

—The editors



(Introductory issues of the *Aspen Wallposter* are available for \$2.00 each, post-paid, from Box R-3, Aspen, Colorado, 81611. Each sample contains a subscription form & all details. A few complete sets of all four back issues are available at \$7.00 per set, which includes heavy mailing tube & vicious postage charges.)



Wallposter Graphic: Pervertson by Rev. Tom Benton

Aspen Wall Poster Advertisement, 1970

Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005)

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Scanlan's Monthly magazine advertisement

The Environment

“The greatest of all crimes [are] the crimes against our natural Earth and all it supports.”

—Hunter S. Thompson

The Freak Power party called for a major overhaul of environmental regulations, creating a manifesto called “The Crimes Against Our Environment” and lobbying for the introduction of an environmental-crime taskforce that would become part of the sheriff’s office. Many Aspen residents became interested in environmental activism in 1969, after a nuclear bomb was detonated underground in order to access shale gas in nearby Garfield County.

Thompson and his associates worked with local environmentalists to establish an “ecological resources inventory” of wildlife and other natural assets to serve as the legal basis for challenging large-scale developments. Another proposed policy was to ban hunting and fishing by non-residents unless they obtained a signed endorsement from a resident. This, according to Thompson, would put the responsibility of protecting the area’s wildlife into the hands of the local citizens.



Ned Vare for Commissioner, 1970
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper

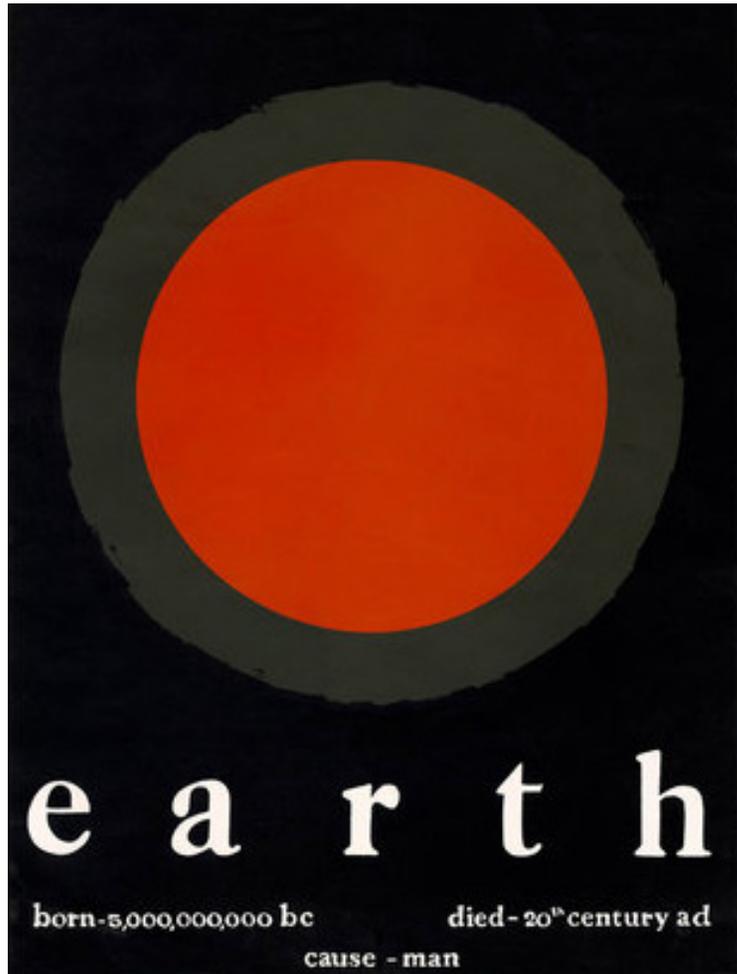


The Whole Earth—Let The Sunshine In, 1970

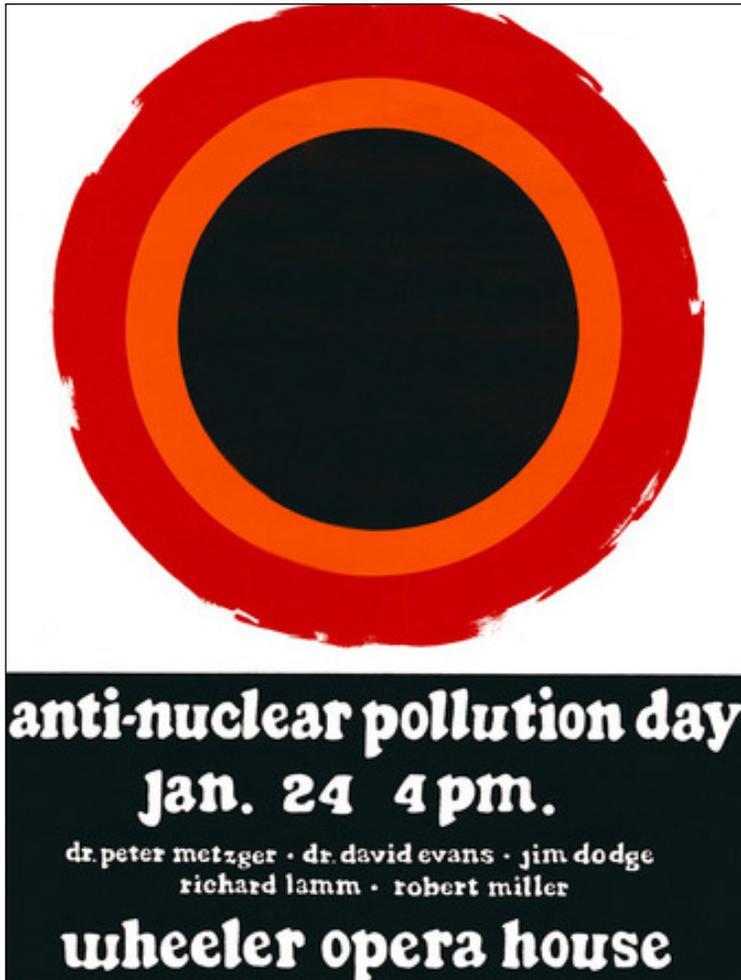
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- Created for the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, this poster is a great example of the “Flower Power” hippy aesthetic of the period. Notice the characteristic peace sign at the center of the flower.



Earth—Born and Died, 1970
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper



Anti-Nuclear Pollution Day, 1970

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- Benton was responding to Project Rulison, the detonation of a 40-kiloton nuclear bomb in Rulison, Colorado on September 10, 1969, in an effort to explore the feasibility of mining for natural gas. The Environmental Protection Agency continues to monitor radioactive contamination in this area and those in the state formerly associated with active uranium mining (banned in 2015), and nuclear-weapons production (Rocky Flats, 1952–1992).

Peace

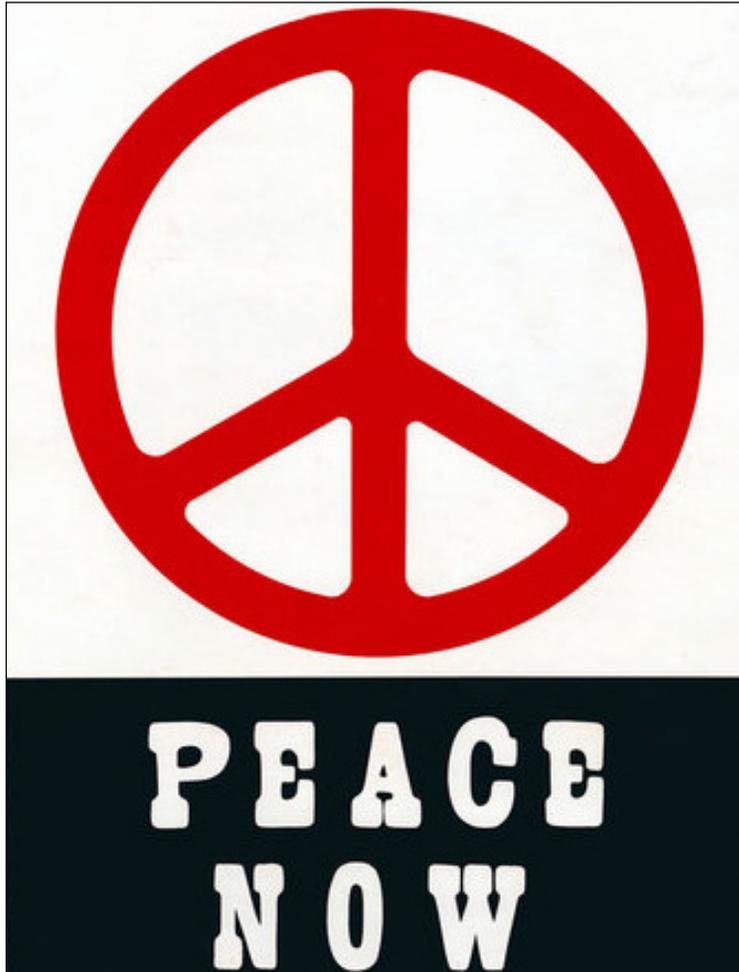
Freak Power was formed during the Cold War, in the middle of the nuclear arms race and the Vietnam War. This era was also marked by many incidents of racially motivated violence and cultural clashes. Both the nuclear proliferation and the war were of huge concern to Thompson, Benton, Ralph Steadman, and the “freaks” of Aspen. Nuclear disarmament was a particularly sensitive issue for them because atomic bomb testing was occurring in nearby Western Colorado. They organized demonstrations, direct action, and public debates about these issues and advocated peaceful solutions wherever possible.

“Anybody who thinks that it doesn’t matter who’s president has never been drafted and sent off to fight and die in a vicious, stupid war on the other side of the world.”

—Hunter S. Thompson

In 1967, Thomas W. Benton organized a memorable war protest and peace march to the Aspen area home of U. S. secretary of defense Robert McNamara. When McNamara, who was a major architect of the Vietnam War, attempted to walk out through the protest, Benton blocked the driveway with his body and barred the exit, proclaiming, “we don’t like your war, and just because this is a resort town, don’t think you can get away from it!” Benton was a dedicated peace activist and continued to make anti-war posters for the rest of his life.

Thompson also continued to speak out against unnecessary wars, proclaiming in 2001 that “every GOP administration since 1952 has let the Military-Industrial Complex loot the Treasury and plunge the nation into debt on the excuse of a wartime economic emergency.”

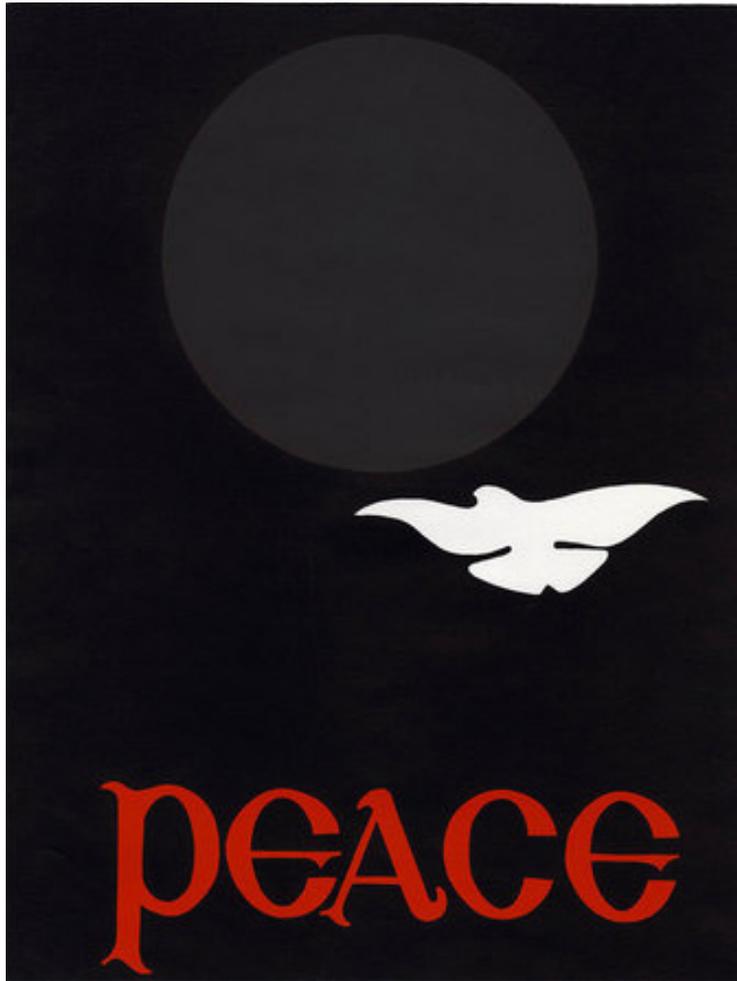


Peace Now, 1968

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- This iconic symbol was designed in 1958 by British artist Gerald Holton as part of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.



Peace—Black Moon, 1968
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper

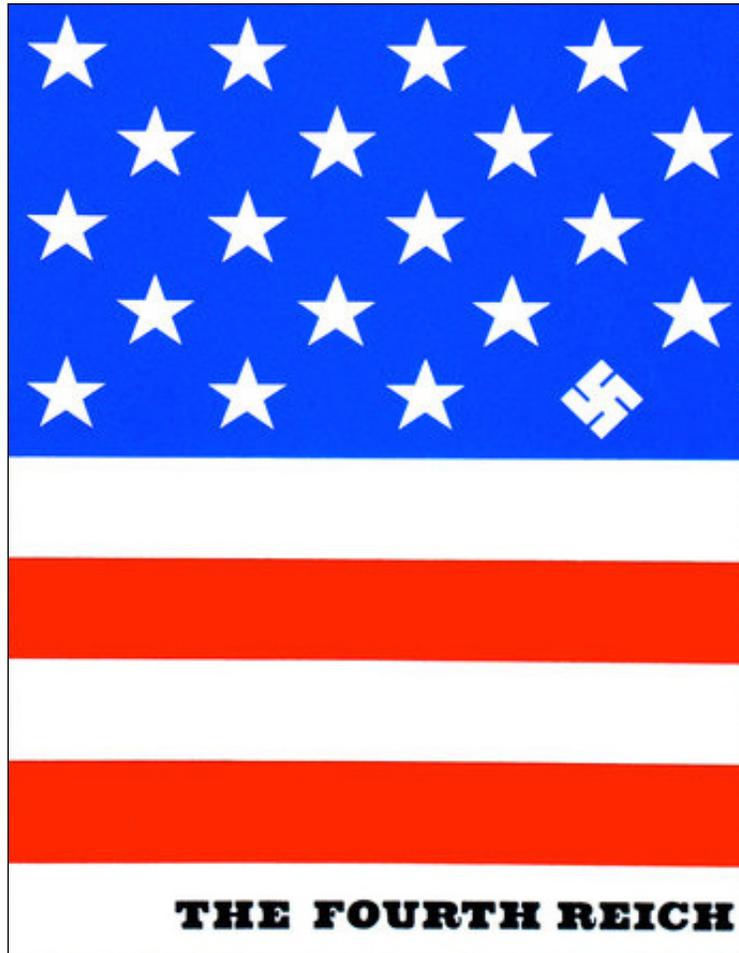


Stop the Atomic Blast, 1969

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- The red concentric circles suggest the successive layers of fallout from a nuclear blast.
- This poster was made to protest a planned detonation in nearby Rulison as well as the “the military-industrial complex,” a term used to describe the symbiotic relationship between military activity and the businesses that profit from it.



The Fourth Reich, 1969

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

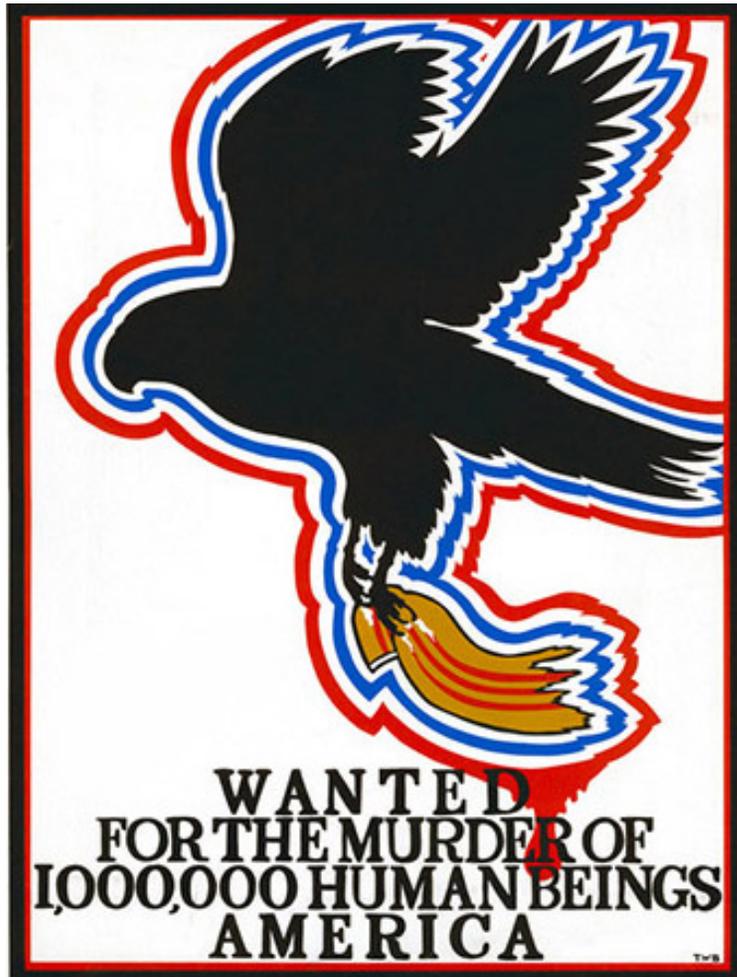
- Benton was so incensed by what he saw as the ill-judged brutality of American foreign policy during this period that he often incorporated Nazi symbols and allusions in his political posters. In this case, he specifically marks the Nixon administration as the successor to Hitler's infamous Third Reich. One of the stars in the flag is in the shape of a swastika.



We Are All Prisoners of War, 1972

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

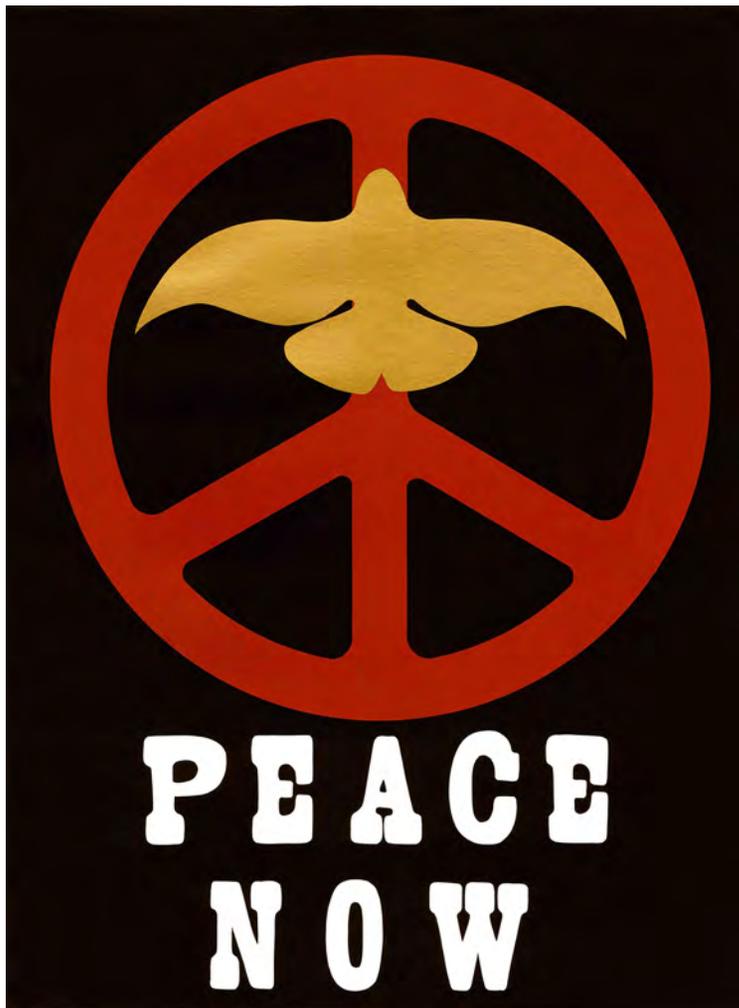
Silkscreen on paper



Wanted: America, c. 1970
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper



Korea Vietnam Iraq, 2006
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper



Peace Now, 1968
Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)
Silkscreen on paper

Ralph Steadman

**“America is ripe for lies and lethargy.
The pure mountain air is going and
gone. It is a huge burden and a
sadness for us all.”**

—Ralph Steadman

English artist and illustrator Ralph Steadman (b. 1936) met Hunter S. Thompson in May 1970, while on assignment for *Scanlan’s Monthly*. They were both at formative moments in their respective careers and found great inspiration in each other’s work. Abandoning the status quo in search of more powerful styles of expression, the two became great friends and corresponded regularly for decades. Steadman created the visual equivalent of Thompson’s “Gonzo” writing style when they collaborated on such works as Thompson’s June 1970 article for *Scanlan’s Monthly*, “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved” and his 1971 novel, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Steadman also vocally supported the Freak Power movement from London and, during the 1970 election season, shipped his original drawings to Aspen. The works *Take A Look at Your Sheriff and Vote Before he Shoots*, and *Vote Primæval Slime* (If That’s What You Want) were prominently placed at the Freak Power campaign headquarters in the Hotel Jerome. While continuing to make fine art and illustrations in his signature style, Steadman has made many politically inspired drawings during the subsequent decades. In 2018, he created a number of new drawings that incorporate original Freak Power materials.



**Ralph Steadman Drawings Arrive
at Freak Power Headquarters, 1970**

David Hiser (b. 1937)

- Steadman mailed original drawings to Aspen to help promote Hunter S. Thompson's campaign for sheriff. The Freak Power team was very excited to display them and said that Ralph's artistic contributions energized their 1970 campaigns.



Time I Found Another Artist!, 2018

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print



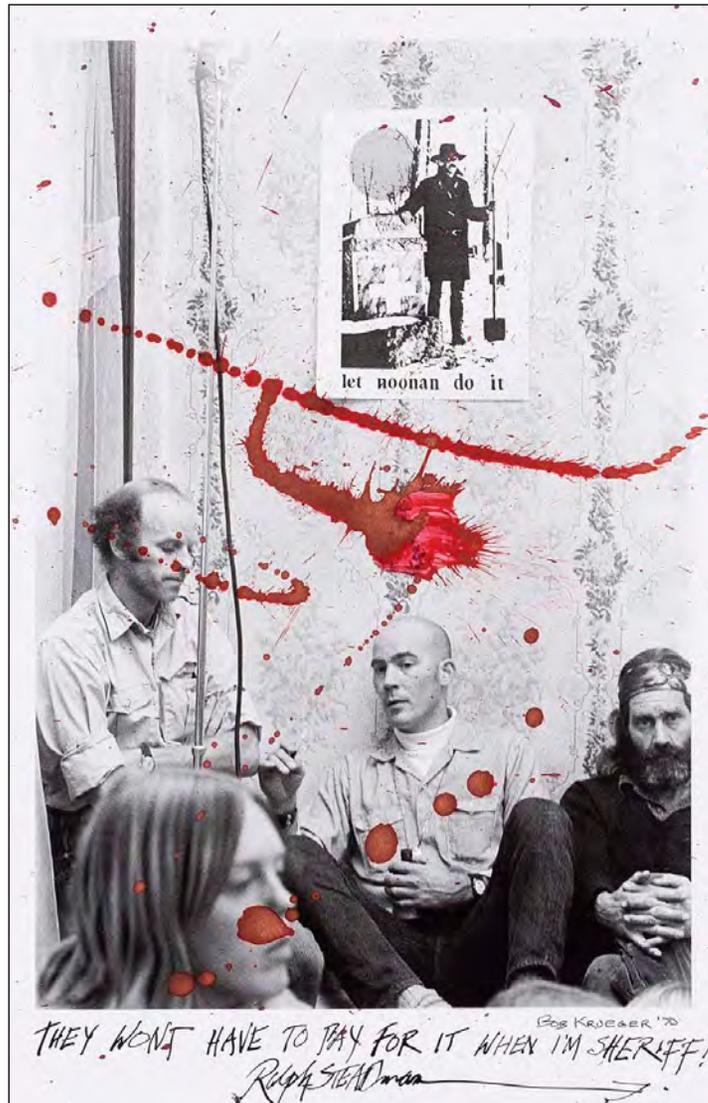
Deep Down I'm a Longhair!, 2018

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print

- In this photograph, Thompson is seen getting his head shaved in order to refer to his political rival, Sheriff Whitmire, as "my long-haired opponent." Whitmire had short hair and was openly discriminatory against hippies and others with long hair.



**They Won't Have to Pay For
It When I'm Sheriff!, 2018**

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print

- Candidates Thompson and Ned Vare are seen here discussing campaign strategy in Parlor B of the Hotel Jerome, the Freak Power campaign headquarters.



Freaks in Fat City, 2018

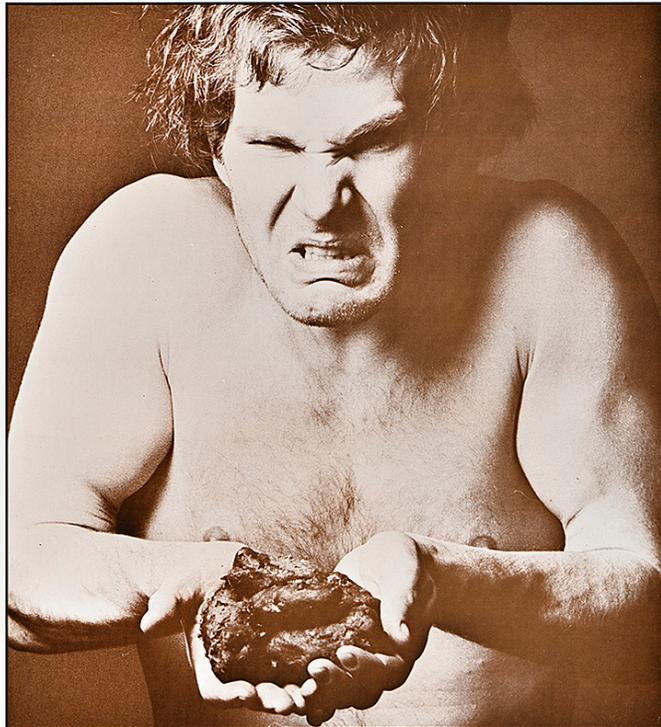
Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print

- Thompson is seen here next to a poster of FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, known for his ruthless pursuit of dissenters and activists. The FBI secretly investigated Thompson on Hoover's instruction.
- Thompson wanted to change the name of Aspen to "Fat City." This never happened, but to this day people use it as a nickname for the town.

TIRED OF THE SAME OLD SHIT?



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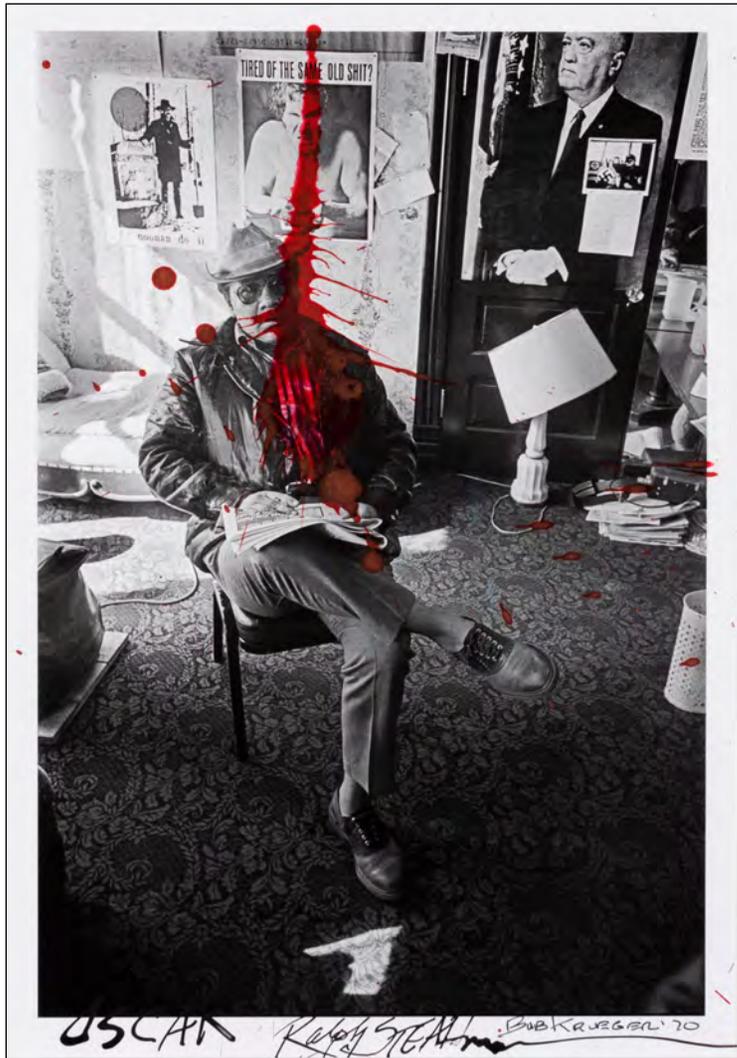
Tired of the Same Old Shit, c. 1968

J.C. Soares (1932–2013)

Bill English (20th Century)

Collection of Nicholas Lowry

- Located across the street from a doll hospital, The Different Drummer was a popular counterculture-clothing boutique located on Lexington Avenue in New York City.
- The man featured in this poster is Paul Sienlaub, the store's owner.
- This poster hung in Freak Power headquarters and appears in various photographs documenting the campaign. Notice that this version has the complete advertising copy at the bottom, whereas the one in the photographs is cut off, turning it into social commentary rather than a promotional poster.



Oscar!, 2018

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print

- Oscar Zeta Acosta was a major force for social change in Los Angeles, and once told Thompson, “You’re just a writer, I’m a revolutionary.” Acosta’s influence pushed Thompson’s political activism.
- Two posters in this exhibition—*Tired of the Same Old Shit* and *Let Noonan Do It*—are both visible in the background of this photograph.



Wow!! It's a Death Threat!! Great!!, 2018

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print

- Members of the Freak Power party received numerous death threats during its campaigns. A large quantity of dynamite was stolen in the area, and many feared that Thompson and others connected to the Freak Power movement might actually be attacked.

Election Results & Legacy

As the 1970 election grew closer, national film crews arrived in Aspen and the political tension in the town escalated. The Thompson camp undertook a last-minute media blitz at the local radio station, presenting advertisements written by Thompson set to jazz flutist Herbie Mann's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," from his 1969 album *Memphis Underground*. This fresh rendition of a patriotic song that has both strong Christian and abolitionist overtones was similar in audacity to Jimi Hendrix's version of the National Anthem at Woodstock. Hundreds of enthusiastic hippies, reveling at late-night parties and hallucinating on quantities of mescaline, created orgiastic scenes never witnessed before or since in the city of Aspen.

By the evening of election day on November 3, the mood was upbeat at the Freak Power headquarters as reports from precincts indicated an early lead for Thompson. Numbers for Aspen clearly favored the Freak Power campaign, but as vote tallies filtered in from other parts of Pitkin County, it became increasingly clear that the campaign did not have the support of conservative voters in the surrounding area.

Thompson ultimately lost the election by 468 votes, probably due to an illegal mailer sent to voters by the opposition the previous week, the media frenzy in Aspen, and some of Thompson's more bombastic rhetoric. His Freak Power running mates also lost in part because the Republicans and Democrats agreed to consolidate their vote to prevent the Freaks from taking power.

Young people remained mobilized in Aspen, however, and momentum shifted toward a more ethical and ecologically responsible local government. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, politicians aligned with the Freak Power platform were elected to many positions on the Pitkin County Board of Commissioners, Aspen City Council, and the police department, including three successive sheriffs who served from 1976 until today.



Official Campaign Portrait, 2018

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print

- As described on *Aspen Wall Poster #7*, Thompson is seen here “in full battle regalia: gold-rimmed greaser glasses, magnesium police badge, 69th infantry division lapel flag, wireless wristband transceiver... and his silver Aztec ‘eternal life’ pendant, a gift from Emiliano Zapata’s granddaughter, Jilly.”

November 5, 1970 The Aspen Times Page 1-A

ELECTION RESULTS

Precinct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Absentee	Total
County Clerk										
Peggy Miklich	156	136	140	195	284	290	20	69	235	1529
Ruth Slowinski	232	159	170	168	156	91	0	9	34	1019
Sheriff										
Glen Ricks	20	23	10	18	29	19	4	12	36	171
Carrol Whitmire	182	131	137	204	320	300	21	66	172	1533
Hunter Thompson	210	158	182	173	148	90	1	8	95	1065
Coroner										
Dr. Charles Williams	237	163	175	242	370	325	22	73	229	1836
William Noonan	176	148	151	151	122	85	1	8	68	910
Commissioner										
Dr. J. Baxter	148	132	118	190	278	285	23	58	160	1372
Sam Caudill	41	19	16	27	47	35	0	22	26	233
Ned Vare	224	164	196	180	174	114	2	7	114	1175
Highway Question										
Yes	169	141	128	172	253	285	17	47	148	1360
No	225	158	189	204	229	112	3	24	142	1286
County-wide Zoning										
Yes	331	219	244	317	403	227	6	49	231	2027
No	51	66	59	56	67	169	16	32	57	573
State Representative (Pitkin County only)										
Pete Mattivi	70	82	77	85	91	132	9	18	65	629
Michael Strang	323	201	220	229	382	277	16	71	220	2005

Official Pitkin County Election Results, 1970

Modern facsimile of *The Aspen Times*

- The 1970 Freak Power candidates Hunter S. Thompson, William Noonan, and Ned Vare all did very well in the more urban precincts 1, 2, and 3 but lost the elections due to limited support in the other, more rural, precincts.



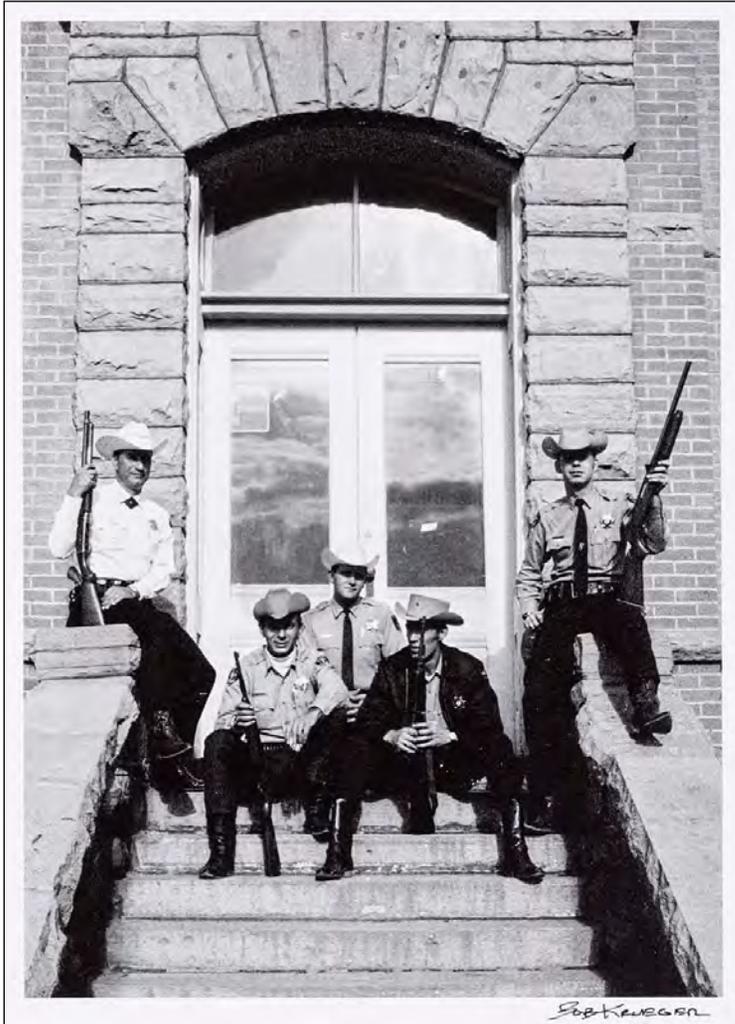
Election Night Hotel Jerome, 2018

Ralph Steadman (b. 1936)

David Hiser (b. 1937)

Ink on archival pigment print

- There was an incredibly charged atmosphere at the Freak Power campaign headquarters on election night 1970, and Krueger was there to document it with his camera. Steadman cheered them on from England. He recently drew on this photograph with brightly colored ink to evoke the intensity of the moment.



Sheriff Whitmire and His Posse, 1970

Bob Krueger (b. 1946)

Photograph

- Whitmire narrowly won his 1970 re-election campaign against Hunter S. Thompson, but was fired in 1976 for allegedly stealing public money.
- In this official photograph, members of Whitmire's police force show off their recently upgraded guns, absolutely unnecessary and very costly to the taxpayers of Aspen.

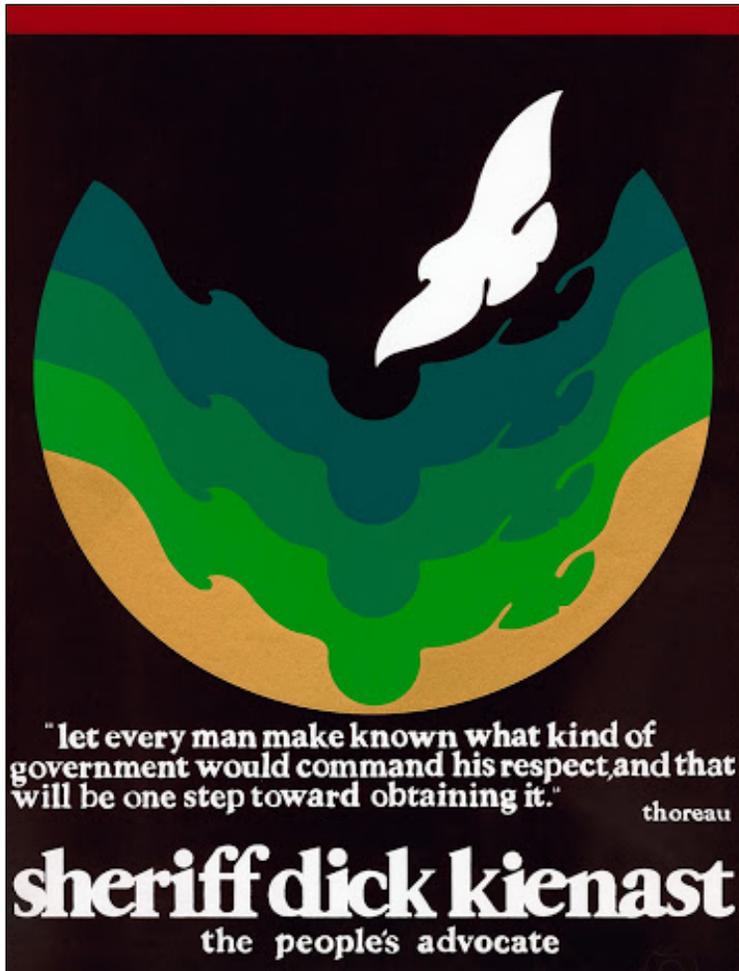


Dick Dove and His Deputies of Love, 1976

Bob Krueger (b. 1946)

Photograph

- Freak Power supporter Dick Kienast was elected sheriff in 1976 and quickly changed the whole structure and philosophy of the police department. It became known as “Dick Dove and his deputies of love” because of its supportive, non-threatening approach to law enforcement.
- Visible in this photograph is police department employee Bob Braudis who was elected after Kienast retired and went on to serve as sheriff of Aspen for 24 years.
- The current sheriff, Joe DiSalvo, worked with Braudis and continues to implement Freak Power concepts in Aspen’s law-enforcement policies.



Sheriff Dick Kienast, c. 1976

Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007)

Silkscreen on paper

- After his 1976 election, Dick Kienast successfully implemented many of the law enforcement reforms proposed by Thompson six years earlier.
- Kienast described himself as a “philosopher-sheriff” and had received a masters degree in philosophy from Duke University in 1963.
- He gained national attention in 1980 when *60 Minutes*, the CBS television show, aired a segment on his refusal to work with federal undercover drug agents.

The Documentary



Available on:

[Amazon](#)

[Itunes](#)

[Youtube](#)

A new documentary about Hunter S. Thompson and the Freak Power movement was released digitally in October, 2020. *Freak Power—The Ballot or the Bomb* features long-lost footage of the 1970 political campaigns in Aspen, Colorado and recent interviews with people who were involved. Directors Daniel Joseph Watkins and Ajax Phillips worked with renowned editor Angus Wall and producer Mimi Polk Gitlin to shed new light on this forgotten chapter of American history. The video shown here and audio samples heard in the gallery feature clips and exclusive outtakes from *Freak Power—The Ballot or the Bomb*. The entire film is available for purchase on online platforms including Amazon, iTunes, and Vimeo.

The film and this exhibition both got their start in the form of a book, written by Watkins and edited by Phillips. *Freak Power—Hunter S. Thompson's Campaign for Sheriff* was first published in 2015 and is now in its second printing. The foreword and afterword were written by longtime Sheriff of Pitkin County, Bob Braudis, who first got involved by volunteering for the 1970 Freak Power campaigns. This book, available in the Shop upstairs, contains a wealth of historical photos, articles, and documents about Hunter S. Thompson and the political movement he helped create.



Press Reviews

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