

THE AMERICA, AMERICAS SERIES

For many people around the world the American flag is a symbol of freedom and opportunity; It represents the ideals of democracy, equality, and justice. It is a reminder that anyone can achieve their dreams in the United States, regardless of their national origin, race, or faith. But I think it's also important to remember that the American flag is a symbol, and like all symbols, can be interpreted in different ways. For some people, the flag may represent a history of oppression and discrimination. For others, it may represent a beacon of hope and opportunity. Ultimately, what the American flag means is predicated on our individual personally lived experiences.

Beginning with Jasper Johns' "*FLAG 1954-1955*", the American flag has been interpreted by artists of all disciplines for the last six decades, to the point it's almost become a cliché. As a Latino abstract artist, I too am embracing it and by doing so, I hope to create a more nuanced understanding of this complex symbol. In my studio painting, I was struck by the American flag as a powerful form of abstract art: lines, shapes, symbols - even the colors of the flag evoke different emotions. Red, white, and blue are often used in abstract art to evoke different emotions or concepts. Red can represent passion, anger, or danger. White can represent purity, peace, or cleanliness. Blue can represent calm, tranquility, or loyalty.

My body of artwork was created in hopes that we reconcile the different emotions that the American flag may bring. By appreciating the often ambiguous perspectives of the flag, the lived experiences of different groups of people, the divergent "americas" within one America, and the challenges that the country still faces, we can transcend our human frailties and national failures.

I have an overwhelming sense of pride and patriotism, as I was born in the United States, a country that I believe in and am grateful to call home. Growing up in in 1960/1970s East Los Angeles, I have also experienced loss and trauma, and have heard the stories of my father and older brothers who fought in wars, and the hardships they faced at home. I am deeply aware of the injustices and ways in which minorities have been disproportionately affected by war, racism, poverty, violence, and other social problems.

"I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her..."

(James Baldwin, 1924-1987)

And yet I am always brought back to a sense of hope and resilience, as I see the American flag as a symbol of the nation's ability to overcome challenges, move forward, to progress in pursuit of its highest ideals. I believe it's important to acknowledge the paradox of emotions that the American flag can evoke. It is not always a symbol of pride and unity - it can also be a symbol of pain and injustice. But above all else, I believe it to be a symbol of hope, resilience, conviction, and the American people's commitment to making the country, in pursuit of its highest ideals, a better place for everyone.

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