

In 1990 I was invited to produce a print portfolio. At the time I was making “landscape” paintings to address the question: “What would a contemporary History painting look like?” I wanted to continue that exploration in the print edition, but, of course, the scale and material of paper presented a different set of visual challenges. As the project began at a time of great unrest throughout Eastern Europe, China, South Africa and the Middle East, it was natural to focus on images of political protest and social upheaval. I was drawn to images of large demonstrations not only as a means to conveniently depict the political landscape, but also out of a desire to explore the relationship between the group and the individual.

After much initial research done the old fashioned way, pre-internet, primarily by searching photo agency and news wire archives, the photos were edited down to nine images. I wanted the crowds to undulate as a group, meaning that I needed the scenes to vary in the distance between camera and crowd. Some scenes encompass thousands, having been photographed from a great distance. In this extreme point of view the individuals in the group are little more than blobs of color breaking down into near total abstraction. In the more close up views, one can actually see individual faces and the emotions conveyed in their expression.

Keeping with the logic of my paintings, which employ juxtaposition, I decided to insert a window within each crowd scene, depicting either an individual or a smaller scene. At the time I was working with the cartoonist David Coulson, whom I had art directed to create a character for an Absolut Vodka ad I had recently been commissioned to do. I worked with David to develop four cartoon characters. I also inserted five other scenes appropriated from the media: a crack baby hooked up to life support, a riot scene from a British football game, a group of politicians sitting at a dais, a man in jail peering out from his cell, and a Lufthansa ad with a boy clutching a toy airplane.

The crowd scenes were printed as mono print silkscreens. Each crowd had a color assigned with its own background color. The window inserts are printed as offset lithography and are four color process prints. Each print undergoes two entirely different printing processes. Again, this repeated the logic of the paintings I was doing at the time that utilized two processes within each painting.

The suite of nine prints is designed to hang in a specified grid, which is indicated on the colophon page. This collective arrangement of the individual crowds describes a still larger group. But keeping with the logic of crowds and individuals, they can go their separate ways and be hung separately.

The title: “Precariously close to 5 billion points of confusion” alludes to George H.W. Bush’s campaign rhetoric of “a thousand points of light” from his 1988 Republican National Convention acceptance speech, a reference that was quite obvious at the time the edition was created.