



*Commandment 5, George Washington, 2019*

***Canadian-Israeli artist DINA GOLDSTEIN has released her most controversial series yet, 10 COMMANDMENTS.***

Its grounding piece, *Lincoln*, depicts the 16th and most popular President in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. His towering figure barely fits in the otherwise empty school corridor littered with children's clothes, glass shards, bullet shells and blood stains. Yet the sense of mourning and loss emanating from the scene renders him small and defeated. By extension, the imagery renders small the constitutional principles on which The United States were founded. Coupled with the 6th Commandment "Thou shalt not kill", the piece evokes the President's own public assassination and further underlines the country's ongoing issues of gun violence and gun policy.

Using her established cinematic methodology, Goldstein blocks the *Lincoln* scene meticulously, each segment, each prop strategic and symbolic, coming together after a months-long pre-production process. All the while capturing in the singular still image a hint of the storyline that forms the greater narrative sequence of the series.

That narrative seeks to examine the socio-political makeup of America through its political icons - the presidential figures that mark the most notable and controversial chapters in American history. Each

tableau features a President portrayed through the prism of their politics, popularity and/or notoriety, further contextualized by a contemporary backdrop, and assigned one of the moral and ethical postulates of the Ten Commandments.

These, often humorous, narrative juxtapositions deconstruct the layers of political deceit, exposing latent hypocrisies and challenging the integrity of a system that is supposed to be a model of democracy and social progress. In the context of the series, Lincoln reaffirms the gravitas that lightness and humour in other pieces may inadvertently obscure.

-Sonja Baksa

1: "...You shall have no other gods before Me."



*Trump 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

Money and Celebrity is God in today's America, as the culture of commercialism and narcissism is highly valued and cultivated. In a surreal reality Donald Trump, the businessman and former reality TV star was elected the 45th President of the United States. Propaganda and Fake news denigrated the free press, boosted by the ideology of populism, underpinned Trump's 2016 election campaign. He took on the world stage with his hubristic and childish tweets, largely spreading disinformation and distrust. Many of his most-liked tweets contained falsehoods, while the topic he posted about most frequently, "fake news" was a weapon for undermining information. Terms such as 'fake news' and 'witch hunt' created the illusion of popularity for ideas that actually have no basis in reality. This created a bandwagon effect for supporting false or misleading things, attacking institutions, health care, science, education, the government, and the media.

Themes: Greed, Desire, Temptation, Power

Location: White House private residency

**President: Donald Trump Term 2016-2020**



2: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth..."



*Reagan 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

This is the era of the SELFIE. Access to social communication and the mobile phone camera has opened up a new genre of self-identity. How do Americans portray themselves on social media? It's all wrapped up in a desire to document while living, and to appear happy every moment.

Themes: Ego, Immortality, Persona, Heroic Individualism

Location: 9/11 Memorial NYC

**President: Ronald Reagan Term: 1981-1989**

3: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain..."



*Nixon 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

The concept of an omnipotent power can now be attributed to large corporations that monopolize and monetize personal information. Google, and the other big tech giants have amassed too much influence over our economy and daily lives. Google's anti-competitive actions have protected its general search monopolies and excluded rivals, depriving consumers of the benefits of competitive choices, forestalling innovation, and undermining new entry or expansion.

While Nixon was running for re-election in 1972, operatives associated with his campaign broke into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C. Several members of Nixon's administration had knowledge of the burglary and while Nixon denied any involvement, secret tapes of White House conversations later revealed that the president had participated in efforts to cover up the criminal activity. Facing impeachment by Congress, Nixon resigned from office on August 9, 1974.

Themes: Data Collection, Privacy, Heroic Individualism  
Location: Google Headquarters

**President: Richard M. Nixon - Term: 1969-1974**



#### 4: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy..."



*Roosevelt 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

The weekend is when extravagant sports games are aired; activities are schedules, shopping, and virtually everything else but quiet and rest.

At the turn of the century there was much debate about the dangers of Football, at that time players wore little protective equipment, and sustained gruesome injuries. Newspaper editorials called on colleges and high schools to banish football outright. Roosevelt acknowledged that the sport required reforms and moved to facilitate legalization of the forward pass, abolished the dangerous mass formations, created a neutral zone between offense and defense and doubled the first-down distance to 10 yards, to be gained in three downs. These important changes reduced fatalities and became the foundation of the now beloved modern sport of American football.

Roosevelt was one of the most activist Presidents. His many accomplishments included the building of the Panama Canal, cracking down on business monopolies, and creating many national parks.  
Themes: Myth Of Progress, Lack of stillness

**President: Theodore Roosevelt Term: 1901-1909**

5: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."



*Washington 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

The value of 'the wise elder' archetype has diminished. We often see seniors abandoned in rest homes and left without proper care. Those affected by mental illness suffer the most.

George and his mother Mary Ball Washington infrequently exchanged letters and Washington's other correspondence contains very few references to her. While some historians present George Washington as a dutiful son who fulfilled societal expectations, others claim that he lacked the warmth and kindness of a loving son.

Themes: Respect, Isolation, Mortality, Meaninglessness  
Location: Urban senior Living Home

**President: George Washington Term: 1789–1797**



6: "You shall not murder."



*Lincoln 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

The second amendment to the constitution allows access to guns in America and has placed weapons into the hands of the disgruntled and mentally ill. Children and innocents are regularly targeted in mass shootings such as the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting in 2012. Lincoln led the Union into the Civil War to preserve the nation and end slavery. He was assassinated just five days after the Confederate armies surrendered.

Themes: Violence, Despair, Mental Illness

Location: Sandy Hook Elementary School

**President: Abraham Lincoln - Term: 1861-1865**



7: "You shall not commit adultery."



*Kennedy 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

The institution of marriage has been the cornerstone of the American middle class. Recently the Country opened itself up to same-sex marriage with some States rejecting the notion. Social and religious stigma rejects divorce and leaves couples frustrated within their marriage. The stray is common with those who follow their natural human desire. Throughout history, we find that even a President, sitting in the White House, could not abstain.

In 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union hovered on the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy eventually forced the Soviets to back down. He was assassinated in the third year of his term. Kennedy is the only Roman Catholic to become President.

Themes: Desire, Sexuality, Lust, Virtue  
Location: Home Palm Desert

**President: John F. Kennedy - Term: 1961-1963**

8: "You shall not steal."



*Obama 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

Theft comes in many forms. The pure greed displayed by Wall Street during the Great Recession 2008 was blatant and distressing. As people lost their homes and were left homeless, Wall Street was bailed out rejoiced.

Barack Obama is the first African American president of the United States. Under his Presidency not a single Wall Street billionaire was convicted for the sub prime housing scandal that cost millions of Americans their homes.

Themes: Greed, Ego, Power

Location: New York Stock exchange Balcony

**President: Barak Obama Term: 2009–2017**



9: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."



*Bush 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

President George W. Bush, like his father, George H.W. Bush led the United States into war against Iraq. The main premise for the war was that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and that these were at risk of falling into the hands of terrorists. In the end, however, there were no such weapons, and Saddam's links to al Qaeda were unproven.

Themes: Social Manipulation, Propaganda, Media Persuasion  
Location: Arlington Advertising

**President: George W. Bush Term: 2001-2009**

10: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant..."



*Truman 2019, Pigment on paper, photographic print*

The American Dream was once in the reach of the middle class. While "don't spend above your means" will always be sound advice, keeping up with the Jones's has become endemic within many households. This aspirational materialism, along with rapid growth of medical and housing costs, and dwarfing incomes, makes it challenging for many families to sustain a desired lifestyle without leaning on credit cards and loans.

Suburbia developed and blossomed towards the end of Harry S. Truman's Presidency. After the war ended the GI bill was introduced with subsidized low cost mortgages for returning soldiers. Purchasing a home away from the city was often more affordable than renting a city apartment.



As President it was Harry S. Truman's decision to drop the experimental atomic bomb on Japan, and although this action ended the war, the result was unprecedented devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Approximately 80,000 people were killed as a direct result of the blast, and another 35,000 were injured. 60,000 died, by the end of the year, from the effects of the atomic fallout.

Almost a third of the US presidents, including Harry Truman, have been Freemasons. Truman was Grand Master of Missouri, an enthusiastic Masonic ritualist, and Master of lodges while an active politician. He attended Masonic lodge meetings while campaigning, and while he was President of the U.S.

Themes: Materialism, Envy, Fraternity

Location: Suburban Americana Neighborhood

**President: Harry S. Truman Term: 1945-1953**

## Artist Statement

I created a series based on my observations of the sea changes roiling America since the election of Donald Trump in 2016. *10 Commandments* juxtaposes the tenets of the Ten Commandments with America's current political, social and cultural status. The Bible continues to play a large role in American public life, as politicians, candidates, and activists advert to it directly in support of a variety of positions, programs, and policies. By creating images, which include some of America's most famous presidents, within the context of the Ten Commandments, I intend for the visual shock and incongruity, to inspire discourse and insight into how American society has gone so astray, diverting away from the "American Dream."

Since 1788 the United States has elected 45 presidents, all have been uniquely challenged by the politics of their era. Most have been successful, with the US becoming synonymous with freedom and power. However, America today seems more divided than united. President Donald Trump, the businessman and former reality TV star, is demeaning the nation's status on the world stage with his hubristic and childish tweets, as well as his uninformed and often volatile decision-making. The propaganda that denigrates the free press is boosted by the ideology of populism, which underpinned Trump's 2016 election campaign. There are other issues challenging America today: protectionism, corruption and classism. Money is God, Wall Street is untouchable and virtually unaccountable. Healthcare is a product, not a basic right. Yet, Americans have the constitutional right to bear arms even after the shooting of children at places like Sandy Hook Elementary School. Class and race inequalities are prevalent in many parts of the country. LGBT rights are at risk along with the clawback of women's reproductive choices – leading to greater inequality in the economic and political spheres for females. Most significant is the battle of conservative principles and 'values' versus progressive ideals.

Americans governance is based on the Constitution and the Bill of



Rights, designed to limit government power, and the principles of rule of law. Alongside these venerated texts is The Ten Commandments; which have been foundational to modern Western justice, with its biblically rooted laws and ethics imported to North America by the Puritans that settled the country. *The Ten Commandments* still provide an enduring delineation between good and evil for most of society and specifically religious conservatives, who often apply their understanding of the teachings of the Bible to politics and to public policy. As a result, subjective and twisted interpretations of these ancient rules are undermining the American ideal of democracy, rights, liberty, opportunity and equality.

While I have always looked upon America as a nation to emulate, inspired by its work ethic and dedication to democratic principles, I find the dissolution of progressive principles gut-wrenching. As a Canadian, I feel that I have an insightful perspective and I am deeply concerned for my American friends. I know how fortunate I am to live in a country that takes care of the most vulnerable through healthcare and other social safety nets. A policy of multiculturalism respects ethnic diversity. In fact, the impact of Chinese culture on my hometown of Vancouver, British Columbia was the inspiration of my photography series, *Modern Girl*, 2016. Our nation, of course, has ongoing political and socioeconomic issues that include many of the problems similar to the US, from a consumer culture, with its pursuit of perfection based upon illusion, and health problems rooted in part upon fast-food diets. A smaller population, less strident gun culture and leftist government make such problems seem easier to grapple with.

-Dina Goldstein