Historically vandalism has been understood as the deliberate and often malicious defacement or destruction of someone else's property. Vandals takes this definition as its conceptual starting point and presents the work of thirteen California artists whose works explore the interface between art and vandalism, censorship and first amendment rights. Themes address the motives for different types of vandalism, from war and political graffiti to violations of private property, the right to self-expression, violence towards women and people of color, ecoterrorism and identity theft. In response, the concept of defacing an object or work of art is also presented as a powerful form of artistic expression.

The Artists:

Juana Alicia’s bold imagery of the human condition advocates for universal human rights, particularly for women and children. The vertical progression of panels in La Mufleca (The Doll) graphically illustrate the prevalence of violence and sexual abuses of innocent youth in our society and the manner in which such crimes are so often masked from public view.

David Best offers a powerful commentary about the way that art is able to critique the oppressions of war through a highly nuanced expression of aesthetic beauty.

Prints by Patricia Rodriguez and Nadol Pak conceptualize vandalism as a threat to human rights by offering potent iconographic imagery of political struggle and death in the face of hate crimes. Their works confront the quest for first amendment rights and the painful legacies of racism and xenophobia that are embedded in American history and culture.

Seth Eisen’s Homo of Law is a richly textured art book first created for the San Francisco Public Library's 2004 exhibit entitled Reversing Vandalism. Eisen is one of many Bay Area artists who responded proactively to a vandal’s malicious destruction of hundreds of books from the Library’s collections dealing with themes around gender and sexuality.

Charles Anselmo, Richard Gilles, Joanna Horwood, and Joanna Walling all use photography to capture the aesthetic beauty of urban graffiti as a richly textured art form with historical roots. The human instinct to mark walls can be traced back to the time of prehistoric cave paintings, to marks found on ancient Roman architecture (sgraffito), to the work of contemporary taggers around the globe. All of these artists question the marginalization of our everyday interactions with modern markings by redefining them as art to very different formal effects.

The Installations:

Other artists encourage viewers to question the cycle of vandalism by altering, adding objects or graffiti to their works. Such invited acts prompt us to reflect upon our own beliefs and prejudices and to accept responsibility for thoughtful interaction with art objects in our society.

Fred Auda explores computer hacking and identity theft in an installation that comments on the public marketing of fear as a political tool of 21st-century popular culture.

Judy Auda also confronts the hypocrisies of vandalism and consumer capitalism. How many times a day are we encouraged to act, impulsively or violently, for the goal of capital gain?

Pamela Blotner, professor of sculpture at USF, created "What's Left," from the remains of her own vandalized or damaged works. In response she invites viewers to remove a piece from her work and then to contribute another. Jos Sances has created a witty and interactive altarpiece with movable doors and invites viewers to respond by adding graffiti. A range of imagery from popular culture including the American flag and screenprints after works by "Americana" artist Thomas Kinkead is layered with political and religious symbolism. Ultimately, we are asked to add to the piece by countering Sances's critique of the American media.

January 24 – February 27, 2005

Artworks addressing the interface between art and vandalism, censorship and first amendment rights.

Panel Discussion moderated by Fred Auda
Thursday, Jan. 27, 1:30 – 3 pm
Donohue Rare Book Room
3rd Floor, Gleeson Library

Artist Reception
Thursday, Jan. 27, 3 – 5 pm
Thacher Gallery

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