

## Andres Serrano

***America (Cheneke Nanaoxi, Mexican Migrant Worker)***

2002

Cibachrome print

Sheet: 152.4 x 125.7cm (60 x 49½)

Frame: 165.7 x 139.1cm (65¼ x 54¾)

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

***America (Firefighter John L. Thomasian)***

2002

Cibachrome print

Sheet: 152.4 x 125.7cm (60 x 49½)

Frame: 165.7 x 139.1cm (65¼ x 54¾)

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

***America (Gisela Glaser, Holocaust Survivor: Auschwitz 1945)***

2002

Cibachrome print

Sheet: 152.4 x 125.7cm (60 x 49½)

Frame: 165.7 x 139.1cm (65¼ x 54¾)

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

***America (Bello Nock, "America's Best Clown," Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus)***

2002

Cibachrome print

Sheet: 152.4 x 125.7cm (60 x 49½)

Frame: 165.7 x 139.1cm (65¼ x 54¾)

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

***America (Troy Rowen, Bull Rider)***

2002

Cibachrome print

Sheet: 152.4 x 125.7cm (60 x 49½)

Frame: 165.7 x 139.1cm (65¼ x 54¾)

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

***America (Wunmi Fadipe, Sales Assistant at Investment Bank)***

2002

Cibachrome print

Sheet: 101.6 x 82.6cm (40 x 32½")

Frame: 114.9 x 95.6cm (45¼ x 37<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>")

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

## Andres Serrano's *America Series*

(3:18 min)

America was inspired by the 11<sup>th</sup>. The day of the 11<sup>th</sup>, the *New York Times Magazine* asked me to go down. They said that they were doing a commemorative issue that would come out ten days after the 11<sup>th</sup> and already they were planning on it and that morning they asked me if I wanted to contribute something to it. I tried to go down to Ground Zero, but found it was impossible at that point. It was already in the afternoon and so, you know, I wound up doing something for them, a story of Muslims in the community, Arabs and how people perceive them now, post-11<sup>th</sup>.

That's what I wound up doing for them, but still I felt that it wasn't enough. I had wanted to make a statement concerning the 11<sup>th</sup> and so about a month after the 11<sup>th</sup>, I had the opportunity. I met two women from Gimpel Fils and Austrejaques Galleries who said

they had just come from my gallery in New York and had arranged for me to have a show with both galleries the following year. So I said “ok” and then the next day I decided I knew what I wanted to give these galleries as new work. I would give them a series of portraits and call it “America” because I felt America had been attacked during the 11<sup>th</sup> by people who, I felt, had no idea what America is or who America is. As an artist, and as an American artist, I felt that, you know, I knew a thing or two about America.

I started with what I felt were the most obvious choices to photograph for a statement about America, particularly at that time. And so I started with the firefighters, a boy scout, a postal worker, an FBI agent in a hazmat suit, and with a Muslim lady who was a convert to Islam. I started with all of the obvious symbols of the 11<sup>th</sup> and then from then on I got into portraits that were more indicative of professions: a doctor, nurse, priest, clown. Further on after that, I started getting into issues: someone with HIV, someone with AIDS, someone with, ah, some mother and child on welfare. And then, slowly but surely, toward the end I moved my way up to the celebrities. In the beginning I was photographing people as singular images. You know, I didn’t think they would be paired next to each other and then halfway through the series I realized that for practical reasons it made more sense to pair two images facing each other in a book form. The second half of the portraits are now consciously done in such a way that they’re meant to be diptychs.

By the end of three years, the last portraits that I did, including Anna Nicole Smith’s and Arthur Miller’s. You know the people are monumental. They’re way bigger than life because I’ve gone in so close on them. That was interesting for me how the idea of portraiture itself changed as well as my ideas on how I wanted to depict America.

All of my life, all of my career, I’ve used portraiture as a way of expressing myself, as a way of exploring ideas, as a way of looking at religion, politics, race, poverty. You know, except for the time when I did the series of bodily fluid pictures, which are intended to be very abstract, everything else in my work has used portraiture as a starting point.

**Andres Serrano’s *America* (Bello Nock, “America’s Best Clown,” Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus)**

(0:50 min)

When I finally got permission to go to the circus to photograph someone, or to choose someone, I thought I wanted a clown, but in watching the performance I felt like Bello Nock and the ringmaster were the people I that I was really interested in. I would say Bello was a...he’s a real pro. He explained to me that he comes from a long line of circus performers. He told me that *TIME* magazine had nicknamed him “America’s Best Clown,” and so I felt good and I put that in his title as well.

You know, I felt good that in cases like with Bello Nock or with the Boy Scout, that I was able to get almost like the archetype model for that role. I was always happy when the people I got, especially when I had never seen them before, turned out to be picture-perfect for me.

**Andres Serrano's *America (Firefighter John L. Thomasian)***  
(1:15 min)

I remember John Thomasian, and also Darrell Dunbar. They were two firefighters. John is Caucasian and Darrell is African-American. And I photographed them both and I thought that I was only getting one, but I got two instead. Taking both portraits I felt like I couldn't decide between one or the other. They were both great and so I used them both.

Sometimes details escape me in my own work until afterwards and one thing that escaped me was something that Paula Cooper commented to me when she saw the portraits of the firefighters. And she said how tired they looked and you know, it never occurred to me that they were tired. I thought they were just sad. I mean, I photographed them in probably October 2001. I thought they were just sad because it was a moment of sadness for all of us. But she commented how they looked tired and it made sense to me that they were probably very tired because they were working so hard, you know. And in fact, you see a lot of dust on their jackets and clothing if you look close. So that was something interesting for me that how it was something I didn't get at the moment but I felt she hit it right on the head when she said that.