



Cover: Born in 1968, Ian Svenonius is an American musician, author, and former online talk show host based in Washington, DC. Over the past three decades, he has released more than 19 full-length albums and more than 20 singles and EPs. His first band was the incendiary Nation of Ulysses, who formed in 1988, becoming influential on the DC punk scene and beyond. He subsequently fronted a number of other bands, most visibly The Make-Up from 1995–2001, and latterly Chain and The Gang. In addition to *Censorship Now!!*, two other books of his writings have been published: *The Psychic Soviet* (Chicago: Drag City, 2006), and *Supernatural Strategies for Making a Rock 'n' Roll Group* (New York: Akashic Books, 2013). He was also the host of *Soft Focus*, an Internet TV series in which he conducted interviews with guests, including Genesis P-Orridge, Henry Rollins, Jello Biafra, and Mark E. Smith.

*Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial* is the title of a suite of eight paintings, each made of ink, acrylic, and oil paint on 104 × 79 inch canvases that together amount to a room-sized, hand-painted copy of the titular essay from Svenonius's collection *Censorship Now!!*, published by Akashic in 2015. This title should make clear that central to the work is the insertion of Ian Svenonius's voice into one of the most prestigious and prominent surveys of American Art, a voice that dares to ask point-blank: "How can the artist class not recognize the free reign extended to them as the ultimate put-down: the relegation of their work to sophomoric vanity?"

When the curators of the 2017 Whitney Biennial contacted me, my first thought was to decline the invitation. I was feeling more than usually disappointed with the state of art—and really the state of the world generally. But in our studio visit, during which I made my aforementioned disappointment abundantly clear, the notion of sincerity crept compellingly into the conversation. I had recently developed a habit of being recklessly sincere about things like the unsavory complicity of the artist class with the program of American empire, so I sensed the curators were eager for this kind of candor, or at least they saw a place for my disgruntlement with the status quo in their show. Even so, I doubted I could deliver on the scale I felt was necessary. Instead of declining outright, I told them that the seed of a potential contribution may lie in a series of talks I organized alongside my mid-career survey the previous year, and that I'd get back to them if something came into focus. That series of talks involved a loosely assembled group of defiant underdogs and sub-cultural icons from outside the realm of contemporary art practice; one of them was Ian Svenonius.

When he showed up for the event I organized, we were both so tangled up in our respective self-promotional responsibilities that I didn't even realize that his presentation coincided with the release of *Censorship Now!!* and inadvertently doubled as a book signing, and he hadn't scheduled time to see my exhibition.

A few months after Ian's book release at the Hammer Museum in LA, I was in DC to do a talk about my work. Ian was able to attend, and so I brought my copy of the book to finally be signed. He was receptive and seemed to \*get me,\* and it is precisely that experience of reciprocal recognition that I saw captured in his playful and hyperbolic inscription, "Frances, you're #1." Someone I respect and value from beyond the confines of my insular profession actually seemed to be saying, "I see you." Given all of my drawings in the past that spoke to the haptic and critically intimate relationship between the writer and reader, this inscription thrilled me. The icing on the cake was that given the fact Ian's handwritten signature is reproduced in the book, the inscribed "Sincerely" functions as an autograph. It hit

home, and it recalled the Whitney curators' respect for artists' capacity for sincerity. It begged to be portrayed.

"Censorship Now" raises the same fundamental questions I was grappling with myself—indeed, the very questions that had made me hesitant to respond to the Biennial curators' requests. I read the essay as a necessarily abrasive and hyperbolic call to action directed at a culture industry grown complacent, and had an immediate impulse to amplify, reinforce, and disseminate that message as widely as possible. Disseminating it via social media as an extension of my own opinion was certainly not the answer, and so with Ian's inscription I could easily envision the essay channeled via the Biennial. It would not be an act of simple appropriation, but the magnification of shared outrage and interdisciplinary kinship. Reasoning that large-scale stretched canvas was the format most amenable to the financial instrumentalization of contemporary art, which somehow seemed part of the point, I proposed to enlarge Ian's pages in paint, half-suspecting that the curators would refuse the offer. But they were enthusiastic and supportive.

It's worth noting that both Ian's original essay and my decision to turn it into a suite of paintings predate even the nominations of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton as their respective parties' 2016 candidates—not to mention the destabilizing and astonishing results of the subsequent presidential election. "Censorship Now" is clearly a provocation painted in exaggeratedly broad strokes—an angry, exasperated, and only-half-tongue-in-cheek amplification of the anger and frustration of the culturally disenfranchised.

Both Ian and his publisher gave me permission to use the essay and have been compensated accordingly. Akashic Books received a one-time rights fee, Anna Nasty got a fee for the book's cover design, and Ian receives 10% of the sale price of each painting sold. By blowing up the essay, I was equally interested in highlighting the absurd disparities in monetary value for the various "content providers" that fall under the big umbrella of capital-A Art. Take a moment to compare the monetary value of a single abstract painting by someone straight out of an expensive college to any lovingly labored intellection by someone who spent a decades-long career making public sense of the world: when you're finished crying, read on.

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Frances,  
you're #1

# **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

**BY IAN F. SVENONIUS**

SINCERELY,

I F SVENONIUS





**WE NEED CENSORSHIP.** Censorship to stop the radio from spewing its vomit nonstop. Censorship of the "free press," which creates a fantasy version of world events and the intellectual framework for mass murder. Censorship of the books that do likewise: hack, ghostwritten memoirs by political figures and celebrities who should be in jail rather than on the lecture circuit. Censorship of the film industry for churning out infantile, imperialist apologia and pro-torture pornography. Censorship of the arts, whose special status of immunity from culpability explains and excuses the degenerate ideology that makes all this "freedom" possible.

Indeed, of all these systems which require suppression and purging, we start with the arts.

Art is the linchpin. Seemingly inconsequential, "freedom of creative expression" is a red herring: a beard, a ploy, a false-flag operation. Upholding the inalienable right for art to be anything, say anything, do anything, is a

parlor trick, designed by the lords of capital, with extraordinary, insidious implications. It has made art—instead of being the shield, weapon, and broadside pamphlet of the otherwise disenfranchised, attainable to anyone—into a holy bit of fluff, the well-being of which must be protected at all costs by the muscle of the militarized state. Upheld by the superprivileged, championed by the cosmically degenerate, what point is there in defending this beast? And what has the beast, in such company, become? Art is not purely sensual, nor does it lack intent or effect. Art is in the trenches, fighting for this viewpoint or that, either overtly or covertly. Art, in fact, incites more violence than anything else.

When the state, like a rampaging mob boss, systematically destroys its opponents (MLK, Malcolm X, Mosdefgh, Lumumba, Salvador Allende, Che Guevara, Gaddafi, Fred Hampton, Orlando Letelier, Oscar Romero, nuns in El Salvador, untold numbers in Vietnam, Guatemala, Honduras, Laos, Cambodia, Palestine, Afghanistan, Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba, Angola, Iraq, et al), how are we to interpret their patronizing embrace of "the arts"? With the regime reacting to its foes with such virility, how can the artist class not recognize the free reign extended to them as the ultimate put-down: the relegation of their work to sophomoric vanity? If art can "change the world"—which of course it can and does—isn't the "freedom of expression" doctrine really just a way to demote it to a theoretical gulag of absolute impotence and irrelevance?



Dictators from time immemorial have had dicta about what art was acceptable or not acceptable. It was a sign of respect to the role of art and the artist; an acknowledgment that art had resonance, meaning, and power with regard to international consciousness and ideological systems. Art lives on, after ephemeral political leaders, after the circumstances of its moment. It crosses borders fluidly, without visas or permits. It acts as a rallying point for generations; a totem of meaning, bridging the nuances of opposed factions for the benefit of a greater unity. Art serves politics as the "woods" in lieu of the trees; it provides vision, clarity, and idealism when one is bogged down by detail.

This is why it's a dangerous substance which must be regulated at all costs. Yet, as dangerous as it is for humanity, so is it a source of hope. If we believe, for example, that rock 'n' roll demolished the USSR and communism, as is more and more fashionable to say, then don't we believe rock 'n' roll—or some such art form—could demolish capitalism, a system wrought by even more contradictions, global discontent, and insane inequality?

Art, and so-called expression, must be placed under threat of censorship, with the means and the will to enforce it. For art to regain any sense of its place in the world, it must live under the shadow of the cudgel and the blackout. And not the passive-aggressive "market" blackout which is imposed on almost all artists. This is just a cowardly disguise for the ideological proscriptions of the ruling class. They demur to making explicit condemna-

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tions. We *dare* them to declare their objections, biases, and official censure of the contents of our records, paintings, films, and essays, instead of passively-aggressively ignoring them, shunning them, relegating them to the waste bin of penniless purgatory. Art is in a lost state now. It's a mess, without any idea of why it exists, where it's going, who it's for, and where it comes from. Censorship would immediately grant it a compass, a meaning, a purpose, a direction, give it its power back. An artist who is "anti-censorship" is essentially waving a white flag; declaring their work to be inconsequential; a smudge, a scribble, a doodle, or polka dot.

The music on the radio — pop, rock, rap, and country songs which promote class war and celebrate idiocy, sociopathy, immoral wealth accumulation, discrimination, and stultifying social roles—is the thrown voice of Wall Street. All of the broker's values are exemplified in this music. Regardless of whatever charm the pop star stand-ins may have, they are on the radio only because they reify the debased values of the sadist power structure. The elite seek to program, dupe, hypnotize, control you—who they regard as their property, their "bitch"—through these proxy singers. Censor them!! Don't let them talk to you that way.

Let them crawl collectively into whatever stink-hole they came from. They can perform in secret for the Walmart buyers' convention or whatever loathsome cabal of slime-pimps elected them to be the incessant, vacuous voice of mind control. But they must be barred from the



airwaves, the record stores, the Internet, and public consumption. Censorship for the radio!!

The video games and films that the "entertainment industry" create must be censored. They are a virus unleashed into the minds of a nation; designed to cause violent, masturbatory passivity and to create absolutely obedient death machines. The liberal response to any contention that the stream of ultraviolence flowing from screen to eye to brain might be destructive is the following reductive equation:

"Shakespeare is good. Shakespeare's plays featured barbaric violence. Depictions of violence and barbarity of the most gratuitous sort are therefore not only edifying, but intrinsic to truly powerful art and part of a wonderful lineage which dates back to Shakespeare and the cradle of Western culture, the Greeks."

Or alternately: "Oedipus Rex was a disturbed individual who murdered his father, slept with his mother, and then blinded himself. Why is the *Call of Duty* video game, which trains its adolescent users to murder efficiently and indiscriminately, any different than a venerated Greek drama?"

Hacks in Hollywood, lacking the cleverness to write a decent story with poignant characters, churn out hyperbolic violence because of its sedative effect on the brain. The blood spills, the explosions explode, there is no gratuity left behind in the race to manufacture the vilest images and situations imaginable. The producers collude with representatives from the army, the navy, the DIA, the CIA; in short, the scum of the Earth.

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They collect millions . . . and millions . . . from these tax-robbing institutions to tell their stories for them. Censor Hollywood. Keep their filth from the screens and their sad gigolos from the red carpet. They can engage in whatever pathetic rituals they choose; coital casting homages to Louis Mayer or bitchy e-mail exchanges in tribute to archdude Judd Apatow. But they must be censored until they learn to make a film with compelling content instead of relying on a mixtape of old songs to trigger an emotional response. Censor film and video now. Censorship until reeducation!!

!!

Censor the news. Freedom of speech, freedom of press, and other media liberties have become a grotesque and deadly parody of their promise, with the "free market" ideology and financial interests determining their slant, their reporting, their "first draft" record of history. They explain the brutality of their insane system with a rationalized framework which at a distance would be revealed as absurd. But we haven't any distance. We are inundated, immersed, immolated day and night by the detritus that their free speech monopoly throws at us. A monopoly of power enjoyed by the most selfish, the most rich, and, therefore, the most grotesque and least compassionate. They have no restraints. They've gone mad. Censor them.

When the "newspaper of record" publishes a fantasy rationalization which explains the invasion of Iraq, an insane genocide, it goes unpunished. The press is "free" after all, free to spout lies and create war for its parent corporations and the ideological systems it serves. The seemingly



inevitable events then unfold, while the journalists look on ruefully, *faux-naïf*, never acknowledging their central role in propagating mass murder.

When TV, radio, press, and Internet news are clogged with financial manipulation, reaction, and bile, can we believe in freedom of any of these forms? No. We must create moral restrictions on what is allowed. Censor the press. Censor free speech. Censorship now.

Censor the politicians. Elected officials, who are completely corrupt and sold out to the most putrid business concerns, are in need of a muzzle. Censor them before they churn out some more condescending, kitsch homilies to the "working families" and the "folks" who put them there. All they care about are the developer cronies and the whore-purchasing lobbyists whose asses they smother with love, Censor them and throw them all in prison. !!

Censor the technology. Technological "innovations" determine much of what becomes art, media, communication, and therefore life. We must manacle these mediums for the sake of expression itself. Why is industry allowed to pollute the world with whatever they decide to make paradigmatic through their control of the market? Why aren't there limits on these transformative technologies when so many degrade the Earth and our experience of it? Flat-screen television transforms every room and space into an outhouse, with sports matches and beer ads pummeling the passerby. Music, once a communal experience which bonded the listeners in a sublime and extraordi-

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nary way, has—through the introduction of “earbuds” — become a pornographic mind-control experiment, with tiny speakers transmitting awful boasts of sociopathy like a scumbag Iago, in order to promulgate a world where the most selfish act is compulsory, the most deranged attitudes encouraged. The sentiments expressed would cause consternation if they were played aloud. Let the truth ring out; censor the earbuds—now!!

Censor the Internet. The Internet is an out-of-control chimera. A pervasive, sicko addiction—worse than meth or smack or crack—which has rendered the entire population passive, fascist, and absolutely brain-dead. We need Internet rehabilitation for the entire world. Censor the Internet now!

These ideas are controversial, not chic, and even, perhaps, upsetting to hear.

After all, the modern Westerner lives a philosophically carefree existence. Largely “apolitical,” he has few qualms about state violence and its use as a repressive force.

He ho-hums state sponsorship of terror, torture, air war, invasion, mass incarceration, and eco-S&M. Penetrations into time and space, as well as cosmic, cross-dimensional calamity are of no interest. Back-room deals by a syphilitic elite who sodomize the globe to quench their kinks are met with a shrug. *What, me worry?* would be their hue and cry if only they were literate enough to read *MAD* magazine.

Socially, topics like those above are in poor taste.



Off-limits both for discussion and private contemplation. Such esoterica is irrelevant to a life of Uber-ing to a Tinder date to share gelato with a prospective sex partner. Such metrosexual tomfoolery is never interrupted by political engagement except of the varieties which find play on social media: either outrage over the racist gaffes of political celebrities or semiotic delight on the implications of a hot cable miniseries.

This outrage, usually expressed online with an itchy index finger, is really a concern about social comportment. Designed to shame the vulgar or the gauche, its analysis doesn't extend to systemic critiques of institutionalized inequality or horror. It's just self-satisfaction with an "online community" about how "fucked" someone else is. Modern "social justice" politicking is, more often than not, Emily Post dressed up in some jargon *à la tour d'ivoire*.

Political engagement or activism is therefore rare but, when awoken, the West-person will spring to heroic action in defense of a few sacred values. There are certain "freedoms" which they cherish and see as indispensable to a fully realized civilization. One of these is a vociferous and wholehearted opposition to *censorship*.

For the Americans and their "First Amendment" — which guarantees freedom of speech absolutely—art must be free to say or do anything. This because the market teaches us that (apart from the possibility of fame and money) there is no meaning or consequence to art, music, or expression, except that it leads to more art and expres-

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sion. Under their capitalist ideology, after all, everything is equivocal. All culture, art, style, and thought are just data to be absorbed and regurgitated on the radio, on television, or on a tote at a mall boutique. Che Guevara's beret, Himmler's haircut, J. Edgar Hoover's nightie are all postideological, reduced to design elements in a "melting pot" of projected profits and consumer caprice.

Meanwhile, "freedom of speech" (what they call it) is regarded as sacrosanct and no barriers can be put around "art," "expression," and the "free flow of information."

In fact, there is no issue which ties the Westerner's panties in a knot quite so much as the idea that "freedom of expression" is being compromised. Where did he or she get this idea that people should be allowed to say whatever they want? Would they agree to a stranger with a PA at their dinner table spreading filth and bile uninterrupted? Would they permit them to insult friends and family with a bullhorn for their "freedom of expression"? If society is a kind of dinner table, then the radio, TV, media, news, politicians, art establishment, tech sector, condominium developers, neoliberal think tanks, armed forces, and professional sports leagues are the dark stranger: taunting, lying, harassing, and inciting violence over the basket of rolls.

They respond that it's a two-way street, that we too can join in the conversation, and that "anyone can do it." This is another lie. Art and expression must make its case on "the market" to be created on anything other than a microscale. If the "art" or music, book, newspaper, etc.,



can't hit the charts, then it wasn't really very good, or so the accepted wisdom goes. The market has spoken. End of story. But in fact, capital determines success; number one hits are purchased, blockbuster movies are purchased, and electoral offices are as well. TV stations, magazines, and newspapers are meanwhile the party organs of the superelite.

The fake "market" is a de facto censorship to be sure, but a censorship which we don't control. It ensures a racist, militarized, idiotic, imperialist, paternalistic message permeates art and society. We need a people's censorship, a grassroots censorship, an insurgent censorship—one which doesn't rely on the hypocrite goons of the militarized steroid state or the esoteric Owl Club who run it.

We need a guerrilla censorship. One that starts from the people. A seemingly impossible or out-of-scale ambition? Not so. An avant-garde always guides the masses. The people's degenerate taste—sick and twisted to be sure—is a product of their disaffection from art, top-down programming, and the power of commercial psyop mind control. They can be guided out of the toilet just as they were guided in. We start the censorship one thing at a time, with a little organization, and a little bit of guile. We can do it. Censorship until reeducation. Censorship now!

The people want censorship. Their sadistic trolling on the Internet, the hate speech which litters the mouths of the lowest morons, and the massive popularity of pornography of the vilest sorts are misplaced attempts at being censored, whipped into shape, made to skulk into the



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corner. In the existential void created by the money god, any sort of punishment seems preferable to the asinine free/not-free purgatory to which we are assigned.

Likewise art—most recently rock 'n' roll—is always searching for censorship, nipping at the ankles of what is allowed. Such ploys are characterized as marketing stunts or infantile gamesmanship, but in fact they represent a desperate attempt at substance. Rock 'n' roll resents its official role as paragon of nothingness, meaningless rebellion to rehabilitate capitalism's predations and fascistic total control. It's always dreamed it could be something more, that its rebel gestures could be real. But the market denies it any meaning by refusing to censor its perversions, its provocations, its politics, or its puerility. His rights defended by the state, the rocker is reduced to nothing.

In lieu of the censor, the musical groups have created proscriptions for themselves by hiding outlaw esoterica on their products. Hence the satanic symbols in the designs of record jackets, the backward concealed messages engraved in the grooves of vinyl, and the tantrums thrown by the stars of the stage, who expose themselves publicly, break FCC codes, and otherwise pester the authorities to forbid their "expression." All to no avail, because the market's only meaning is itself and its own singular supremacy, which it pretends is "natural law" as opposed to an ideological or legislated construct. Its yawn is deafening.

These artists are looking in the wrong place; we need a guerrilla censorship which uses all the cruel tools of a revolution. Pain, terror, absolute mercilessness; not to

placate some hypocrite Christian morality or idiotic social code but to stomp out the grotesque subliminal mind control and hate speech of modern culture, media, news, politics, and art.

The state can't be the censor. The state must be censored, along with its vile servants and its freakish masters. Censorship, termination, eradication, and liquidation.

Censorship until reeducation! Censor the state!

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Frances Stark, eight paintings (individual titles below), 2017, mixed media on canvas, each 79 × 104 in., courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

pp. 108–109: *Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Spread 1 of 8 (Sincerely)*

pp. 110–111: *Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Spread 2 of 8 (Censorship Now)*

pp. 112–113: *Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Spread 3 of 8 (pp. 16–17) (the state, like a rampaging mob boss)*

pp. 114–115: *Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Spread 4 of 8 (pp. 18–19) (the thrown voice of wall street)*

pp. 116–117: *Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Spread 5 of 8 (pp. 20–21) (their free speech monopoly)*

pp. 118–119: *Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Spread 6 of 8 (pp. 22–23) (pornographic mind control)*

pp. 120–121: *Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Spread 7 of 8 (pp. 24–25) (the market has spoken)*

pp. 122–123: *Ian F. Svenonius's "Censorship Now" for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Spread 8 of 8 (pp. 26–27) (the rocker is reduced to nothing)*