

IN GOD I TRUST

Printed as a placard on United States currency and renown as a statement that reverberates through a country founded on Christendom, “In God We Trust” was enacted so as to “*relieve us from the ignominy of heathenism*” as written in a letter by Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase in November of 1861. These simple four words initially endorsed as a statement for the country to avoid the shame of the irreligious, have been subjected to exploitation by those now faithfully devoted. “God”, “We”, and “Trust” has transfigured into “God”, “Me”, and “Policy”.

Based on found imagery from the 60’s and 70’s as well as childhood memories of my Egyptian American upbringing, I attempt to explore the presence of God and my own Christianity in the context of current events from an individual experiential perspective. By including my early examination of Coptic Orthodox and Byzantine iconography and an investigation of themes that counterbalance the tension of violence and war, these images are at once heroic and confrontational. Using the motif of the subject looking out (from ancient iconography), and a majority of family and friends as models, the individuals in turn become real human beings feeling genuine emotions communicated unabashed, unembarrassed and honestly. The subject matter in a scene does not solely emphasize the action in the scene, but also captures a moment that might be otherwise ignored. This moment, frozen on a surface yet emotionally fluid, submerges the viewer into the work. Due to the size and context of the work, the viewer is thrust into a discourse of self-reflection and investigation of one’s own poignant and frail ephemeral mortality.

Joseph Paul Gerges

2007