

# BOMB

## Selena Kimball Interviewed By Anton Ginzburg

*Using collage to rearrange historical narratives.*

September 20, 2023



Selena Kimball, *Untitled Times, sec. 06 (dome)*, 2023, unique hand-pulled CMYK silkscreen on panel, diptych, 63 x 76.5 inches. Photo by Paul Takeuchi. Courtesy of the artist and Ulterior Gallery, New York.

Selena Kimball has dedicated the last seven years to developing a new body of work, creating collages from fragments of the *New York Times* newspaper. Her [current exhibition](#) at Ulterior Gallery draws inspiration from the Jefferson Bible, which Kimball considers the earliest American cut-up. Kimball critically examines the daily news stream through her practice, unveiling a dialogue between the present and constructed historical narratives. Her process involves meticulous collages using newspaper, which are then transformed into silkscreen paintings on linen. We met to discuss her exhibition, examining her creative process, the use of collage, and the impact on her work of miracles and historical narratives. —Anton Ginzburg

### Anton Ginzburg

Back in April when I visited your studio, you shared some works in progress for your current exhibition. I understand that your exhibition is inspired by Thomas Jefferson's Bible, which he created by cutting and pasting what he regarded as rational and

plausible stories from the New Testament. I'm curious to know how Jefferson's cut-up technique continues to impact the American landscape today and how it has influenced your work.

### Selena Kimball

There are two images that have been in my head as I've been making this work. The first is what is called the Jefferson Bible, which many people don't know about; Jefferson himself kept it secret during his lifetime, just showing a few friends. I make collage, so I always keep an eye out for examples of these proto-collages or early cut-ups that have helped construct US history. As Americans, we tend to have this idea that everything "now" is new. And I think it's interesting to find examples of texts made entirely out of chopped-up pieces of even earlier texts. They make visible the way the idea of America is only ever assembled out of fragments from the past. In Jefferson's case, he cut out the weird, elliptical stories from the Bible and left a rational, chronological biography of the good stuff Jesus did. I mean, in the end Jesus doesn't even get to ascend to heaven! He just lies there dead.

### AG

It feels like a cinematic montage.

### SK

Yes, it does. Jefferson's version of the Bible is a succinct, linear extraction from the New Testament that moves plausibly forward in time even though the biblical source is made up of excerpts from different times and places. It wasn't published until 1904, when the Smithsonian librarian at the time, Cyrus Adler, accidentally stumbled upon it. Almost immediately, it was given to incoming members of Congress and became a text circulated in fairly important places.

To get back to your initial question about the shaping of the American landscape. Not many know that Jefferson made this secret Bible, but the other thing that we tend to forget about Jefferson is that he created the grid for great swaths of the American West. He cut up the west, codified in the Land Ordinance of 1784. So, Jefferson's cut and paste allowed for a version of settler colonialism. And my mind goes to Jefferson's source Bibles. There were eight Bibles that Jefferson used in four different languages, and I have this image of all these books lying open side by side on a table with square chunks cut out of them. And then this analogous image that when you are flying over the western United States, there laid out below you is the imprint of the grid, spooling out across the continent. I'm compelled by what has been cut out—of the books and the land.



Selena Kimball, *Untitled Times, sec. 10 (palm trees)*, 2023, hand-pulled CMYK silkscreen on linen, 63 x 38 inches. Photo by Paul Takeuchi. Courtesy of the artist and Ulterior Gallery, New York.

**AG**

What materials are cut out, and what happens to them?

**SK**

Exactly. What becomes marginal, and what's ignored in the formation of those squares and rectangles? There is a potency to the things that were cut out. I think the idea that a "founding father" would cut the miracles out of the Bible is an act of privilege rather than sacrilege. My mother's Catholic, French Canadian family—who came to the US to find work in Maine's shoe mills—would not have survived without believing in miracles. It's one thing if you've got money and you own property. And the terrible truth is that Jefferson's "property" included enslaved people whose very lives built and sustained America, which is a horror that far exceeds anything experienced by my own family. But in the case of my family, when you have little and you're not particularly welcome in your new home, there's something so sustaining and powerful about believing that things can exist beyond your circumstances and what you know and can see. How can you take that away? How can you think it's only about your rational mind and what you can physically grasp? The creative, insouciant energy I saw in my grandparents and great aunts and uncles comes from imaginations trained on miracles.

**AG**

So, does your work focus on the materials that didn't make it into Jefferson's dry, rational narrative?

**SK**

Yes, that is what I'm interested in putting back into a depiction of the American landscape. When I first started this work, I used the *New York Times* newspaper, and I started by cutting out the subject of the photograph and just using the surroundings, so I was collaging together a landscape made up of physical margins. I didn't stay conceptually pure to that because I didn't need to after a while, but this longing to recuperate what is left out, to picture experience that is not seen in these newspaper photographs, is at the heart of this work.



Selena Kimball, *The Scope of Rationality*, 2022, 18.25 x 18.25 inches, silkscreen, plaster, oil on mounted linen. Photo by Paul Takeuchi. Courtesy of the artist and Ulterior Gallery, New York.

**AG**

Why did you choose the *New York Times* as your primary source material?

**SK**

In a very practical way, it's my local paper, which is the material at hand. It is part of my everyday life and something I pick up and thumb through daily. For many years I worked with visual histories, mostly rare books from the nineteenth century, with an interest in how history is constructed through already seen images and reworking visual evidence. One morning, after spilling coffee on the paper, I realized I was flipping through primary documents that would be used to shape and validate future histories. So why not record my interpretation of "today" as it is happening while I still feel it?

**AG**

How do you conceptually and formally place your transformation from newspaper collages to CMYK silkscreen paintings? How do you go about the scale of the work and the printing process?

**SK**

I start with the physical newspaper; it has stains and signs of use. It's a physical remnant of everyday life. And that is important to me. The stories described in the paper are usually outside of my day-to-day experience. Still, newsprint is very much in my life as a material: a place to jot down the insurance company's phone number or as lining in the dog crate. I'm aware of this gap between mediation and experience, and somehow physically using and working with the paper brings mediation closer to experience through acts of my body. By cutting and pasting the newspaper and then pulling and stretching the silkscreens, I'm making a physical translation of the paper. The CMYK process that I'm doing with the silkscreens is also how the newspaper is printed, but I'm really slowing it down, going through and physically pulling each layer of the silkscreen images, which are scaled to the height of my body. I'm physically on top of the screen to print. Sometimes you can see my footprints in the final paintings. Even some of the lift marks are important for me to keep. Although a professional printer would think of them as mistakes, they too become a kind of artifact of the physical presence of the screen and the body.



Selena Kimball, *Untitled Times, sec. 05 (flock)*, 2023, hand-pulled CMYK silkscreen on linen, four panels, 63 x 168 inches. Photo by Paul Takeuchi. Courtesy of the artist and Ulterior Gallery, New York.

**AG**

Why is this translation from collage to silkscreen print important for you? What do you achieve with it?

**SK**

Well, the translation points back to the historical differences in scale between printed media and painting, essentially the difference between reading and viewing. The newspaper is scaled so that your eyes can read it when holding it eighteen inches

from your face. My work is printed large enough to confront my whole body when I'm in front of it, which becomes about viewing. And this scale creates a new relationship with the viewer's body. The exhibition will have one of the largest pieces I've ever made; it consists of four panels and is almost fifteen feet wide. What has been interesting is the idea of viewing people viewing them, seeing people's bodies pass in front of them, and the relationship between the viewer and the image.

Selena Kimball: Ghosts in is on view at Ulterior Gallery in New York City until October 21.

*Anton Ginzburg is a New York-based artist, researcher, and educator. He received an MFA from Bard College and a BFA from Parsons School of Design. His work has been shown at the 54th and 59th Venice Biennale, the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston, Palais de Tokyo in Paris, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, White Columns, and Wyoming Art Museum. His films have been screened at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, Rotterdam International Film Festival, Dallas Symphony Orchestra (Soluna), Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Les Rencontres internationales in Paris, and New York Film Festival/Projections, among others. In 2021, Ginzburg was a research fellow at the Schaufler Lab at the Technical University of Dresden on Artificial Intelligence, Technology, and Creative Labor.*