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a daily reckoning, a refusal of normalcy, a bulwark against forgetting, a work of art
that creates an unrelenting record of Trump's ignominious four years in office

“IT IS WHAT IT IS”

ALL THE CARDS ISSUED TO DONALD TRUMP

JANUARY 2017 - JANUARY 2021

by Richard Kraft

KICKSTARTER CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES: **OCTOBER 1, 2021**

4 VOLUME SET | PB | each 5 x 8, 250-300 pages each: over 1000 pages total, all full color | artist's books +politics

This four-volume set of artist's books—one for each year of Donald Trump's presidency—presents thousands of cards for Trump's words and actions. It is a daily reckoning, a refusal of normalcy, a bulwark against forgetting, a work of art that creates an unrelenting record of Trump's ignominious four years in office, while also transforming it—in the crucible of dark humor—into something quite beautiful.

Susan Glasser recently wrote in *The New Yorker*: “Throughout the past four years, I felt that it was important to maintain the ability to be shocked or surprised or at least deeply concerned when Trump violated this or that previously uncrossable line, when he shredded a law or a norm observed by previous Presidents of both parties—even if it was utterly predictable and consistent with what we already knew of him... The list has grown too long: Trump has diverged so far from any of our past Presidents in his conduct, in what he says and does, in exposing the public to consequences that are reckless and even deadly. We are fully exhausted and fully on notice. I have depleted my reserves of shock and awe. I fear there is no more outrage left to summon. But I have not changed my view in one vital respect: We have to keep writing it down. Every last word of it.” **Artist Richard Kraft has.**

When Trump was inaugurated on January 20, 2017, Kraft felt this same urgency to keep a close watch on his presidency. *Every single day since then*, Kraft has been scouring the news and Trump's Twitter feed, assigning—like a referee in a soccer match—colored cards associated with transgressing rules and codes of conduct.

In soccer, yellow signifies a warning. Red is for more serious offenses—ones for which a player should be dismissed. (The futility and absurdity of assigning these cards to Trump is part of the point: What power does a referee hold when norms, fairness, and justice have been eviscerated and a player refuses to leave the field? And yet, the referee persists...)

Quite soon after the inauguration, Kraft began adding more colors for a variety of infractions: magenta for especially egregious transgressions, orange for days Trump spent at his golf courses, pink for those who played golf with him, and dark blue when someone in the administration was fired or resigned (Kraft calls these “fuck you as you go” cards—he took great delight in assigning them to Steve Bannon, Jeff Sessions, and finally, Kellyanne Conway). On April 23, 2020, when Trump suggested curing COVID-19 by injecting bleach into the body, Kraft added a purple card for Trump's most shocking moments, and there have been so many of those since then. There are also teal cards throughout, honoring acts of resistance.

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Each book—one for each year of Trump’s presidency—opens with that year’s cards, organized weekly (green cards mark the start of a new week, and the rhythms that emerge are fascinating); then it ends with a textual log of the transgressions to which each card is assigned. The texts are succinct and as neutral as possible (researched from sources such as *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *Politifact*, *Govtrack.us* and the *New York Times*). To date there are over 8000 cards and more than 300,000 words. Together, the books will exceed 1000 pages.

When asked about COVID-19’s staggering daily death toll by journalist Jonathan Swan in a September 3 interview, Trump replied: “It is what it is.” This project takes its title from that callous dismissal. **“It Is What It Is”: All the Cards Issued to Donald Trump, January 2017 - January 2021** asks readers to confront the erasure that results from the daily assault by the Trump administration: What do we remember? What have become inured to? What shocks us out of our complacency, our fatigue? How does memory shape our experience of what seemed impossible almost four years ago? “It Is What It Is” is as much a confrontation with the facts and phenomenon of a Trump presidency as it is a monumental, informational graphic work, an artifact of these dark days, and a truly durational work of art. It marries futility with vigilance, outrage with humor, transforming toxicity into beauty.

Kraft has also been working on a parallel body of work in the form of daily “drawings” for the last three and half years: each day’s cards (1.5” x 3”) are hand-painted and mounted on museum board with the date stamped in the corner. These drawings create a very particular way to assess Trump’s presidency visually, statistically, and almost emotionally. The accumulated abstraction—particularly if hung on the wall in a grid—yield multiple readings as the cards become language, music, time. There are two sets: One—with 1460 drawings, one for each day of four years—will be kept intact to be exhibited in the future. The other set will be broken by day, week, or month, and given as rewards to thank supporters on Kickstarter.

This is Siglio’s first Kickstarter campaign. Given the economy and the difficulties in predicting trade sales when bookstores are suffering, Siglio is asking supporters to help with a significant downpayment on production costs and determine the appropriate print run so that Siglio—a tiny, one-person operation—is not overextended and can continue to publish other books in 2021 (Siglio generally publishes 3-5 titles a year). It also serves to demonstrate that citizen-artists like Richard Kraft, along with journalists, activists, and others, have devoted themselves to attempting to hold President Trump to account. However futile that may seem, the publisher and artist behind “It Is What It Is” hope that this project also contributes to an awareness and action on the part of voters in this existential election.

About Richard Kraft

Richard Kraft is an artist whose multidisciplinary works often use public spaces (library aisles, sides of buses, city streets, cow pastures, abandoned airforce bases) as well as converse with the literary (many of his works use language, book pages, and appropriated narratives as material). He has had numerous group and solo gallery shows, including at Charlie James Gallery, LA Louver, and Rosamund Felsen, as well as at museum, university and non-profit art spaces, including the Portland Art Museum, the Laguna Art Museum, Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, the Ruffin Gallery at the University of Virginia, and Printed Matter, among others. “100 Walkers, West Hollywood,” commissioned by The City of West Hollywood for its thirtieth year celebrations, won a Year in Review Award from Americans for the Arts/Public Art Network. Books include *The Afterlife of Paper*, a collaborative book with poet Peter Gizzi, (Catalpa) and the artist’s book *Here Comes Kitty: A Comic Opera* (Siglio). Other publications include *BOMB*, *Bookforum*, and *Carousel*, among other journals, and in 2016 his work was featured in *The New Collage Book*, a comprehensive survey published by Gestalten. He has co-edited three books for Siglio—John Cage’s *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matter Worse)*, *Marcel Broodthaers: My Ogre Book*, *Shadow Theater*, *Midnight*, and, out this fall, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Photostats*. Kraft was born and raised in London, England and now lives in Los Angeles and New York. More information about his work is at richardkraft.net.

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