

The Book of Controversies

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Abstract

This series consists of three watercolor paintings that reference three different pages of the illuminated manuscripts from a prayer book from the Middle Ages known as the Book of Hours. Jeff Bezos (CEO of Amazon), Mark Zuckerberg (CEO of Facebook), and Carl Daikeler (CEO of Beachbody) are three wealthy men that I have chosen to focus these paintings on in an attempt to call out the controversies revolving around their business models and ethics. I have also chosen to paint in their estimated net worths at the time, as these men are generally known to be wealthy, but not everyone knows just how wealthy they really are. By depicting them in the style of a religious illuminated manuscript, I am trying to allude to the idea that these men are revered as nearly God-like, as men who have achieved the prized “American Dream” people strive for. Overall, I hope to spark a conversation about the treatment and role of the wealthy in American society.

This series is highly inspired by the illuminated manuscripts from the *Book of Hours*, which I chose specifically due to the *Book of Hours* being a religious devotional book from the Middle Ages that contained prayers amongst other attributes for the owner (Stein, 2017). Next, I picked three people to depict in this style, those people being Jeff Bezos who is the CEO of Amazon, Mark Zuckerberg who is the CEO of Facebook, and Carl Daikeler who is the CEO of Beachbody, along with their estimated net worths at the time of creating the paintings. I set out with the goal of putting the wrongdoings of these men at the top, whether it be how they treat their

employees, controversies, or their business model as a whole.

To start each of these paintings, I researched the illuminated manuscripts and found one I think relates to what I wanted to depict, such as a page from the Book of Hours of Marguerite d’Orléans. I followed the same format of the manuscripts I would reference, using them as a map, such as having a white border and solid background color, and would section off a portion for text using a ruler and a very light pencil. Once this was done, I would start working on the illustration, painting in the symbols and decorative features and borders. I would paint the portraits and letters last. Each painting is unique in formatting and

illustration, but they all share the net worths I could find at the time.

Jeff Bezos is the CEO of Amazon and my goal with this particular painting was to bring forth the controversies I had heard about the Amazon warehouses. In the circles that were lining the manuscript, I alternated painting water bottles and crutches representing the controversies like Amazon workers needing to urinate in water bottles and Amazon having a high workplace injury rate. Letters scatter the page, but they join together to create common search phrases from the COVID-19 pandemic such as “gloves” and “masks”.

Mark Zuckerberg is the CEO of Facebook, and I approached this painting a little differently than the one before. The two main controversies are actually written as text, that being Carol’s Journey and Cambridge Analytica. I decided to use the symbols to depict the user’s experience with his product, that being Facebook. At first glance, the garden looks serene, but you need to look into it a little more to see that it is not. I used rabbits to depict the rabbit hole and thorns to depict how it can become more and more dangerous the deeper you go. I painted two snails who are armed with a shield, club and a notification bell to reference the discourse that occurs on the website.

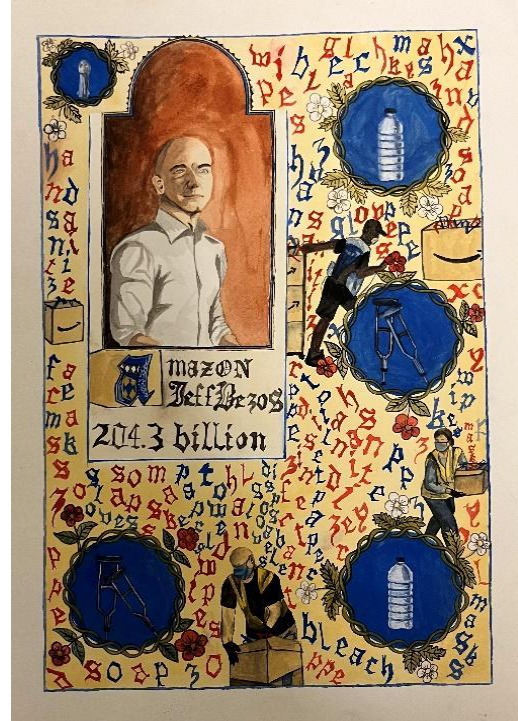


Figure 1: Jeff Bezos, c. 2022, Watercolor



Figure 2: Mark Zuckerberg, 2022, Watercolor

Carl Daikeler is the co-founder of Beachbody. For the last one, I wanted to focus on a diet business and Beachbody was the first to come to mind. I used skeletons to depict the customers and they are engaging in various forms of exercise and body checking. Two skeletons are climbing stairs that are meant to reference a pyramid, a reference to the multi-level marketing business structure Beachbody uses.

Overall, my goal with this series was to bring forth how these relatively known upper class men have done misdeeds to their employees and consumers, which helped them get to the point they are currently at. By painting these I hope to strike a conversation about the idolization of these men in American society and whether or not their treatment is warranted based on the actions they take with their companies.

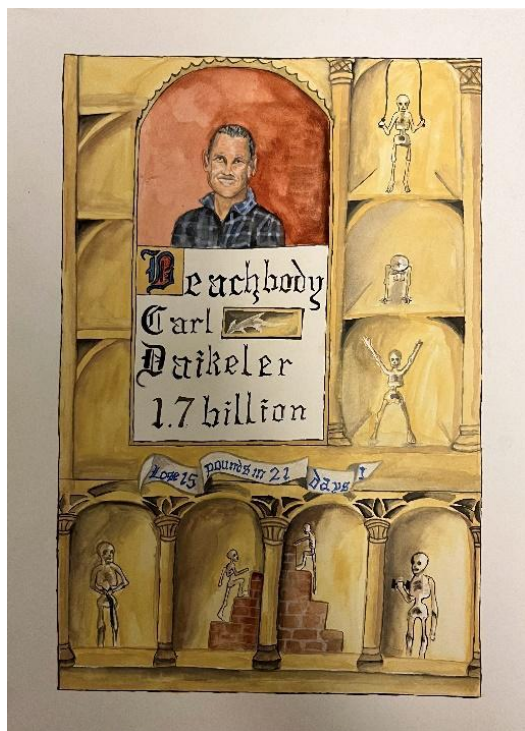


Figure 3, Carl Daikeler, c. 2022, Watercolor

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Unknown, 1426, *Book of Hours of Marguerite d'Orléans*.

Unknown, 1470s-1480s, *Book of Hours of Engelbert of Nassau*.

Unknown, 1500, *Historiated initial 'D' depicting two shepherds looking up to the glory of sun-rays from a Book of Hours*, Flemish.

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