'Touching the Great Again' with Arne Roosman



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By Nate Smelle

The following story contains graphic details, which may not be suitable for all readers.
With Canada's neighbour to the south gearing up for the presidential election this fall, artist/author/lithographer Arne Roosman is paying close attention. From the rise of U.S. President Donald Trump during the 2016 campaign to the controversial commander-in-chief's recent impeachment, Roosman has been compiling and expressing his observations in a new book he calls Touching the Great Again: Visiting a Nursery.
With one eye focused on the past and another keenly tuned in to the present, he sees a dangerous drama playing out that he has seen far too many times before. Roosman's new book sheds light on this oppressive pattern with a question posed and answered by the Athenian philosopher Plato.
Asking ?How does tyranny arise?? Plato answers ?That it comes out of democracy is fairly clear. Does the change take place in the same sort of way as the change from oligarchy to democracy? Oligarchy was established by men with a certain aim in life: the good they sought was wealth, and it was the insatiable appetite for money-making to the neglect of everything else that proved its undoing. Is democracy likewise ruined by greed for what it conceives to be the supreme good??

Describing Touching the Great Again: Visiting a Nursery as a satirical political commentary, Roosman's words and drawings tell the story of a greedy and infantile narcissist recklessly ruining lives and the planet for the sake of his tyrannical aspirations. As this character stumbles through the pages, trampling anyone in his path, he encounters other wannabe tyrants striving at all costs to achieve the same ?God-like? status.

?There is one thing about history that we all know,? said Roosman.

?We keep quoting about it, but we also ignore it. That is the fact that history is constantly repeating itself.?

As a sharp yet gentle tool for chiseling away at the foundation of tyranny, Roosman sees formidable value in satire. Roosman said he identifies tyranny with what he thinks is fascist and racist rhetoric of politicians today such as U.S. President Donald Trump, creating the book as a reminder that history is still repeating itself. By exposing their destructive greed and corruption through the use of satire, he wants to hit them where it hurts: their ego.

?Satire is very important because you can use it to take these guys ? shake them, hurt them, and make them [into a] painful [part of] history that we would rather forget,? Roosman said.

?I have scar tissue here and there and that scar tissue reminds me of the pain. But, that pain is gone and that's where it should be. Satire is the best kind of medicine for correcting that kind of sentiment that enters, that these tyrants and bad people use to try and glorify themselves. It is like they all want to be a God.?

Revealing the origin of his disdain for dictators, Roosman shared his experiences of growing up as a refugee in Europe during and after the Second World War. When the Russians occupied his homeland of Estonia in 1940, Roosman said his family travelled across the Baltic Sea in search of sanctuary. In January of 1941, he said they wound up living as refugees in Schwerin, Germany where they spent the next nine years.

Recalling some the horrific images etched in his mind from the war and its aftermath, Roosman remembers the sound of the bombs falling and seeing corpses floating in the river. Reminiscing on his ?fascinating but ruined childhood,? Roosman said ?When Hitler committed suicide three months before he turned 50, this woman screamed ?Hurray! The führer is dead!' Right away a bunch of young guys, soldiers, Nazi party guys in uniforms grab her and hung her up. Where they got the rope so quickly I don't know, but in no time they had her hanging from the lamppost ? That's how we grew up.?

He continued: ?Imagine what I could have learned of Latin, medicine, literature, anything instead of that crap. That's what these guys did to me. I never forgave them, and that is why I'm so hungry for this guy with satire.?

Roosman said if he could have the reader take away one thing from his book, it would be for them to pay attention to it from front to back and contemplate why he chose certain quotes from important people in history. Touching the Great Again: Visiting a Nursery is the latest edition in a series of libelli created by Roosman in response to the world he is a part of. This series also features titles such as A Touch of Arsenic, A Touch of Ragnarök, and Touching the Moon. While the book is still in the process of being printed, Roosman said he expects it to be released in the next two weeks.