

'**Gold Hands for Democracy**' is a recreation of the interactive project, 'Hands to Heal, Not to Kill,' which was a response to the US invading Iraq in 2003, by the Austrian-American Visual Artist, Nicola Ginzel. Spanning the course of six weeks, about 700 handprints were gathered, some accompanied by name, nationality, year of birth, or perhaps a desired quote or thought. There are handprints (and even hand drawings) from all nationalities and all walks of life—from a Vietnamese who was part of Operation Baby Lift in 1975, an Iraqi Princess, to an armed US National Guardsman making his rounds in New York's Port Authority on 42nd Street. That project's intention, just like this new initiative, is to illuminate the positive traits of humanity by using the symbol of a hand as a catalyst.

As the first expression of mankind—what binds us together as one species—petroglyphs of handprints date back to prehistoric caves in Sulawesi, Indonesia, and El Castillo, Spain. According to the Bradshaw Foundation working in collaboration with UNESCO, the National Geographical Society and others, handprints are the most common elements of rock art and may vary in meaning. Hand images with spirals in them possibly depict healing energy, channeling through the hands like those found at La Cienega in America's Southwest. According to the US Department of Interior, these date back anywhere between the 13th and 17th centuries.

One of the underlying concepts of this project originated when teaching kids, who were directly affected by 911 in NYC. Parallels between Jewish and Islamic Culture were highlighted by using ancient artifacts like the Hamsa and the Hand of Fatima. These talismans are interchangeable and convey essentially the same thing—Good Will and God be with you. Supposedly the use of Hand for talismanic representation dates back to 800 BC with a late Roman bronze 'Mano Panthea,' (Hand of Power) in the British Museum.

In the past years, the Three-Finger Salute was adopted by pro-democracy protest movements in Southeast Asia, mainly in Myanmar and Hong Kong, and it was even made illegal in Thailand. The three fingers stand for the French Revolutionary ideal of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

With all of these in mind, this interactive project, '**Gold Hands for Democracy**' is an Austrian initiative supported by the Austrian Cultural Forum New York. It seeks to blur the line between nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, and gender as each participator leaves his or her handprint in gold on a sheet of 14" x 11" vellum. The color gold was chosen for its reference of divinity, truth, and higher consciousness. Nicola Ginzel will be setting up in different areas of NYC in March and April.