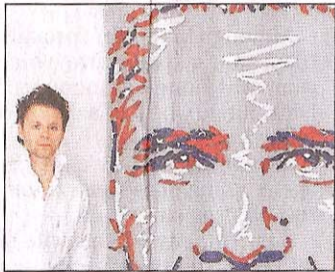


Tatty Stars and Stripes offers material for portrait in raw



Politically charged ... Benjamin Shine with his Obama portrait.

Alex McDonald

DESECRATING an American flag was a fruitful career move for Benjamin Shine.

The Canberra artist used the tattered Stars and Stripes to create a portrait of the US president-elect, Barack Obama, an image which is now appearing on thousands of mugs, T-shirts, posters and jigsaw puzzles in the stores of the US retailer Barnes

and Noble. "I liked the idea of using the fabric of America," he said. "Even though it's not conventionally the right thing to do - to rip up a flag - in the context of what I was trying to depict, it seemed like the right way to do it."

He found the flag in a New York junk shop when the election campaign was at its peak. Caught in a wave of Obama-mania, the 30-year-old felt com-

pelled to create his own tribute to the future president. "It was a combination of seeing how impressive he was ... and the amount of people across the spectrum who were excited by what he was doing," Shine said.

Shine uses the rawest materials he can find in his politically charged works. He once threaded silk chiffon through rusted iron to create an image of Margaret Thatcher.

The decision to reconstruct Obama's image from a worn-out flag was equally symbolic. "The biggest challenge in this piece is that there was only so much red, white and blue to use," he said.

"There is only a little bit of blue in the American flag and that was really tricky."

Shine's original portrait will go on display in the foyer of New York's Museum of Art and Design next Tuesday.