



## Artist picked by Cameron to make a gift for G8 leaders reveals how civil servants insisted on censoring work to avoid a diplomatic incident

- Phil Shaw hand-picked by Downing Street to create one-off work
- But his 'bookshelf' print was vetted constantly throughout the process
- His artistic meaning related to the theme 'Group of Eight'
- Titles of the books relate to themes of politics and the countries in the G8

By VALERIE ELLIOTT

PUBLISHED: 01:45, 23 June 2013 | UPDATED: 07:56, 24 June 2013

Share Tweet +1 Share | **26** shares

**13** View comments

An artist commissioned by David Cameron to create a gift for the world's most powerful leaders has described the 'nightmare' of having his work vetted by civil servants who feared it might spark a diplomatic incident.

Phil Shaw, 63, a printmaker from Yorkshire, was hand-picked by Downing Street to create a one-off work to be given to Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel and the rest of the G8 leaders who met in Northern Ireland last week.

Dr Shaw is known for his £1,200 'bookshelf' prints, which depict rows of related volumes with the titles often including jokes or hidden meanings.



The Group of Eight Presented by Prime Minister David Cameron on the occasion of the G8 Summit - Lochinvar, UK, 17-18 June 2013 Enlarge +

**Read all about it: The 'Group of Eight' artwork by Phil Shaw**

But his bespoke 'Group of Eight' work was only cleared by Whitehall officials following weeks of scrutiny and several changes made to avoid causing offence.

'It really got very stressful and at one point I thought I would not be able to do it by the deadline,' the artist confessed.

He was approached last month to create the computer-generated print for a limited edition of ten - one for each G8 leader plus the presidents of the European Council and Commission.

Initially he was asked to choose one of three themes - 'Ireland,' 'Leaders,' or 'the work of the Group of Eight economic nations'.

He chose the Group of Eight and spent hours researching various library collections for suitable books about the economy, mysteries of tax havens and actress Angelina Jolie's campaign against rape of women in war zones, all items on the Lough Erne summit agenda.

The government approved his idea to choose books with a hidden message. The first word of each title completes a saying from 18th century economist and moral philosopher, Adam Smith - 'What can be added to the Happiness of a Man who is in health, out of debt and has a clear conscience.'

The artist then attempted to find suitable books written by authors with the same names as the G8 leaders. He found plenty of titles by David Cameron and other leaders, but was forced to scrap the plan when the only other work by someone called Barack Obama was a Japanese book entitled: 'I am a Naughty Boy.'

'I really couldn't use that, so I decided to look for titles for every country at the summit.'

This opened up an arcane and complex world of government protocol. Officials scrutinised each title and ruled out any book that could cause embarrassment or upset.

'I got very polite emails but they didn't like some books. One was 'Man and Woman, War and Peace - A Strategist's Companion' by Anthony Wilden. I don't know why, maybe they did not want a reference to war. I managed to replace it with a citizenship textbook 'Man The Citizen.' the artist said.

'They also objected to 'A Guide for the Perplexed' by E.F. Schumacher. He was a Nobel Prize-winning economist who worked for the National Coal Board and coined the phrase 'Small is Beautiful.' They didn't tell me why they didn't like it, maybe he worked for a Labour administration or something. Perhaps they didn't like perplexed, But because of that I lost my only German reference in the bookshelf. I replaced it with 'A Treatise on Government' by Aristotle, so I did manage to get a Greek in there.

'But the one I was most worried about was 'Of Cabbages and Kings' I have no idea what's wrong with that, it's a cookery book, but maybe there's a problem with cabbages. I was really worried about this, there aren't many titles beginning with 'Of.' But I found a textbook about tax called 'Of Rule and Revenue.' I don't know who checked the titles, but it went through two or three people so nobody would be upset.'



**Under the cosh: Artist Phil Shaw has spoke of how he thought he might miss the deadline for his work of art due to stringent checks**



© Reuters

**G8 plus two: (L-R) European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister David Cameron, U.S. President Barack Obama, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, France's President Francois Hollande, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Italy's Prime Minister Enrico Letta and European Council President Herman Van Rompuy**

And it wasn't just the titles frowned on by the mandarins. Dr Shaw had hoped to use the colours of each nation's flag to make a bright picture. 'But there was a problem with the different widths of the book. They were worried that one country might be offended if their flag colours were on a smaller book than another. I then got an email asking me to use blue because that is the colour of the Northern Ireland Assembly.'

The final result which took 160 hours to complete is a stunning horizontal 29ins by 14ins print.

A Number 10 spokeswoman declined to give details about the vetting process for the leaders' gift but said: 'We commissioned Phil Shaw to produce something for the G8 and then worked with him to make sure the piece fitted our requirements. Phil gave us lots of options on books, colours etc. Everyone was delighted with the piece, especially the hidden phrase.'



**Read all about it: 'Conscience', 'Debt' and 'Health and Wealth' are all suited to current political debate**

She did not know where Mr Cameron intended to hang the picture.

Dr Shaw was chosen for the task after a Cabinet Office official spotted his work at an exhibition. His prints of the London underground were then purchased by the Government Art Collection and displayed in the main G8 summit room. He is represented by the Rebecca Hossack Galleries in London and New York.

The G8 nations are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the USA and UK.