

# OUR AMERICAN CONSTITUTION, VANITIZED!



Photo by: HANUNMAN, courtesy Flickr.

Mike Wilkins proved that vanity plates are pop culture icons. Using 51 actual vanity plates – one from each state, and one from D.C. – Wilkins recited the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution [“We the people...”], to celebrate its bicentennial, in 1987.

Nissan Motor Co. donated “Preamble” to the Smithsonian American Art Museum, where it is one of the most popular artworks on display.

Wilkins persuaded officials from every American DMV to issue actual “pretend” vanity plates for “Preamble,” which he attached to an 8-foot square vinyl, dashboard-like canvas. “Actual [vanity] plates added authenticity, and

part of the conceptual part of the work is having to convince 51 separate [DMVs] ...that it is a good idea,” Wilkins said.

Every American auto and oil company Wilkins approached rejected his proposal to purchase “Preamble” and donate it to the Smithsonian, whose curators wanted the work. Finally, with help from a friend at Nissan’s ad agency, Wilkins approached the Japanese car company, whose officials presciently recognized that vanity plates are American cultural icons. Today, Nissan is pioneering the development of zero emission electric motor vehicles.

As Wilkins intended, the vanity plates in “Preamble” make people think; it’s the only artwork he ever created. He is an author (with Doug Kirby and Ken Smith) of *Roadside America*, ([www.roadsideamerica.com](http://www.roadsideamerica.com)) a book and web site that catalog “offbeat tourist attractions.” He hasn’t found any vanity plate museums...yet.