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# *Of the people*



## *Of the people*

Curated by Erin Donnelly

Exhibition Dates: June 17 – July 31, 2016

Opening Reception: Saturday, June 18, 5 – 8pm

Closing Reception and Events: Sunday, July 31, 3-6pm

Lauren Frances Adams, Daniel Bejar, Guy Ben-Ari, Brooklyn Hi-Art Machine  
(Mildred Beltre & Oasa DuVerney), Isabella Cruz-Chong, Peggy Diggs,  
Esteban del Valle, Nicholas Fraser, Emily Greenberg, Alicia Grullon\*, Jeremy D. Olson,  
Sheryl Oring, Ben Pinder, Brittany M. Powell, Kate Sopko,  
t.Rutt (Mary Mihelic & David Gleeson)\*, Martha Wilson\*, Leah Wolff

\*Public event artist

The exhibition *Of the people* curated by Erin Donnelly, opens at Smack Mellon on June 17 and will be on view through July 31, reflects of-the-moment political opinions shaping the 2016 presidential race in the United States. With video, drawing, photography, painting and sculpture as well as socially engaged projects and site-specific installation, the exhibition features artists selected through an open call who hail from California, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina and Ohio. Artworks included in the group show offer critical perspectives on the current electoral process while challenging notions of American democracy today.

Eliciting public reactions from the finger to the fist pump during its cross-country tour this year, the *T.RUMP Bus* by **t.Rutt (Mary Mihelic & David Gleeson)** will make a stop in Brooklyn, while in the gallery, **Alicia Grullon**'s endurance performance of *Filibuster*

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#2 strives to withstand the force of income inequality. Both will be presented on the opening weekend. Voter registration for the fall's general election will be conducted on the following days: **Opening Reception: Saturday, June 18, 5-8pm** and **Closing Reception: Sunday, July 31, 3-6pm**, which includes *Martha Wilson as Donald Trump – Politics and Performance Art Are One and the Same* and a panel discussion with select exhibition artists.

Exhibition artists have produced projects that create space for public participation in a broken election system. **Mildred Beltre & Oasa DuVerney** of **Brooklyn Hi-Art Machine** have designed radical posters about the 2016 election with their neighbors in Crown Heights, Brooklyn where they have led a community forum including collaborative art making since 2010. As part of her 12-year project *I Wish to Say*, **Sheryl Oring** has mailed thousands of letters addressed to sitting presidents and candidates running for office that are dictated and tapped out on a vintage typewriter thus giving voice to people to air their frustrations or freely express their hopes, dreams, and desires.

The back gallery of Smack Mellon has been converted into a *Campaign Office* by **Jeremy D. Olson** where would-be candidates can self-nominate for the highest executive position by recording a stump speech, generated from 2016 campaign announcement speeches, and filling out documents to be an official candidate for president. In a similar DIY fashion, **Leah Wolff**'s ongoing sculptural work reimagines curious objects sold through the mail order *Whole Earth Catalog* popular from 1968-1972 as election-ready accouterments such as political buttons printed with your own catchy slogan.

Other artworks reflect upon hot topics debated on the televised stage and during the long primary season leading up to the Republican and Democratic National Conventions this summer. Issues such as immigration are evident in **Isabella Cruz-Chong**'s sound installation *Line of Breath* that portrays the human dimension of the border between the United States and Mexico. **Daniel Bejar** brings forward Isabel Gonzalez who pioneered legislation to make all Puerto Ricans American citizens—his lenticular photographic work declares “Let’s Make America Great Again.”

You will hear **Emily Greenberg**'s *Public Privacy Hotline* phone ringing in the gallery, prompting you to pick up the line to reveal a breach of privacy. The crushing debt experienced by many Americans is highlighted in poignant portraits taken by **Brittany M. Powell**, part of a mission to document 99 debtors across the United States. Also dealing with visibility and invisibility, **Kate Sopko**'s project *The Fixers* is comprised of a series of community-made videos documenting outlier Cleveland neighborhoods overlooked by the mainstream media coverage of the Republican National Convention.

Looking towards the past to enlighten the future, art historical strategies can be found in *Of the people*. Neither the partisan elephant or donkey but nevertheless taking cues from the 19th century satirical cartoons of Thomas Nast, the bull in **Esteban del Valle**'s mural symbolically struggles to maintain the incongruous balance of power between the market and political speech. The traditional odalisque informed by the male gaze is inverted in

# Smack Mellon

**Guy Ben-Ari's** painting that pictures the Oval Office, the ultimate prize in the presidential contest, and its interior under feminine control.

New artist's projects included in the show take into account timely subject matter underscored during the election year. **Peggy Diggs's** project *Heirloom* considers the fairness of ballot design with a handcrafted "cozy" while **Nicholas Fraser's** performative drawings question the fundamental bias of voter maps. Looming large over Smack Mellon's space, the likenesses of big money donors made by **Lauren Frances Adams** are inspired by the portrait head roundels of historic lawmakers in the US House of Representatives chamber. Formed in 2015, **Ben Pinder's** *The Mythic History of America, For America Super PAC* is lawfully recognized here in drawings and genuine articles.

## RELATED PROGRAMS:

### **Friday, June 17, 11:30am-8pm: *Filibuster #2* by Alicia Grullon**

For this live re-enactment of Senator Bernie Sanders' Bush Tax Cuts filibuster, the interdisciplinary artist will follow strict filibustering rules: continual speaking, no bathroom break, no sitting or leaning and no eating or drinking until the 8.5-hour performance is complete.

**Drop In Activity also on Friday, June 17: Make your own political button while supplies last.** This event is part of the Etsy Craft Party taking place in the neighborhood. *Please let us know if you're coming. Registration is not required but encouraged.*

### **Saturday, June 18, 4-6pm; Saturdays and Sundays, 2-6pm: *Campaign Office*, performance/installation by Jeremy D. Olson**

*Campaign Office* generates new presidential candidates. Visitors are invited to launch their campaign by recording an announcement speech, generated automatically from 2016 campaign speeches, and will receive paperwork necessary to be an official candidate for president.

### **Saturday-Sunday, June 18-19: *T.RUMP Bus***

The **t.Rutt** artist team purchased Donald Trump's actual campaign bus on Craigslist in the fall of 2015. Since being recast by artists **Mary Mihelic & David Gleeson** as an anti-Trump rolling art project, it has traveled across the United States during the election season, creating a platform for responding to the presumptive GOP nominee's outrageous statements and behaviors. All the original Trump campaign artwork remains on the bus but it has been artistically altered and transformed into the *T.RUMP Bus*.

**We are offering special members-only tours of the *T.RUMP Bus* this weekend. Sign up for a Membership and support Smack Mellon!**

**Saturday, June 18 and Saturday, July 16, 12-6pm: *Mapping projects #7 and #8* by Nicholas Fraser**

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A series of mapping performances will be conducted that examine the absurdities inherent in the media's visualizations of the presidential election process.

**Wednesday, July 27, 7pm: *Panel Discussion on Propaganda* co-presented by Smack Mellon and Hyperallergic**

What differentiates propaganda from art? This conversation will probe historic propaganda imagery, its connection to today, and the role it plays in raising social consciousness and awareness for issues often overlooked by governments, institutions, and society. Moderated by Hyperallergic's editor-in-chief and co-founder **Hrag Vartanian**, in conversation with art historian at NYU **Miriam M. Basilio**; artist **Daniel Bejar**, who is part of the *Of the people* exhibition; and more to be announced soon.

**Thursday, July 28, 5:30-8pm: *Silkscreen Workshop* by Brooklyn Hi-Art Machine**

Come to Smack Mellon to make your own political poster copy. The evening includes a screening of the Democratic National Convention when the party's candidate will be announced.

**Sunday, July 31, 3pm: *Martha Wilson as Donald Trump – Politics and Performance Art Are One and the Same***

**Martha Wilson** embodies her trademark "invasions" of other people's personae.

**Immediately following performance: *Community practices: Art and Intervention Panel Discussion***

Select exhibition artists discuss their projects of social and political consequence. Participants include **Isabella Cruz-Chong**, Brooklyn, New York; **Sheryl Oring**, Greensboro, North Carolina; and lead artist **Kate Sopko**, Cleveland, Ohio, who will be joined by a fixer from her project; moderated by Erin Donnelly

**Additional events may be scheduled, check [www.smackmellon.org](http://www.smackmellon.org) for announcements.**

**Also, Smack Mellon staff will also conduct voter registration for the fall's general election Wednesday-Sunday, 12-6pm.**

**Erin Donnelly**, Programs Manager at Smack Mellon, has organized exhibitions in galleries and museums such as Maccarone, Municipal Art Society, Abrons Art Center, Kunsthalle Exnergasse in Vienna and elsewhere as well as curated public art projects along 14th Street in Manhattan and in the storefront windows of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. Publications include *Art in Odd Places: Sign and Site Matters*. She has taught in the Department of Photography and Imaging, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. She has a BA in Fine Art, MA in Individualized Study and Certificate in Museum Studies, all from NYU. She was a Helena Rubinstein Curatorial Fellow, Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum of American Art and received a David Alfaro Siqueiros Award from Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts.

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Lauren Frances Adams's project is made possible with support from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation and Maryland Institute College of Art. Kate Sopko's project is brought to you with generous support from SPACES and Art Matters, and with tremendous work from a huge group of collaborators.