S/Election – Democracy, Citizenship, Freedom at the LA Municipal Art Gallery

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James Berson
“Peaceful Protest Helmet”
“S/Election Show”
Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
Photo Credit Patrick Quinn

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By Patrick Quinn

Through January 8th

Set up on a hill above East Hollywood, Barnsdall Park is a serene island of art, architecture, and oak trees.

A winding road takes you leisurely to the top allowing plenty of time to enjoy the view. Was it only moments ago you were stuck on Vermont cursing the Los Feliz hipsters or jamming your horn as you inched up Western Avenue? Though well known as the home of Hollyhock House, built for heiress Aline Barnsdall by Frank Lloyd Wright, the park also features creative workshops, a theater, and one of the best art galleries in the city. Run by the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the gallery features juried shows as well as hosting the C.O.L.A. Fellowship exhibition.

Currently on display is S/Election: Democracy, Citizenship, and Freedom. This timely group show addresses issues that have been the focus of the 2016 presidential election. The stated goals of the show are ambitious. “S/Election responds to various inquiries around citizenship such as, what does it mean to be an active citizen or exercise your rights, what does the status of “citizen” imply to those that are disenfranchised, displaced, immigrants, or refugees, and how does identity play into the privileges and/or duties of citizenship.”

The gallery recently appointed Erin Christovale as curator and this is her debut show. It’s provocative and engaging and a great start for the former New Yorker. In fact, she was just named one of the country’s 20 most influential young curators by the esteemed website Artsy.net.
This is a show that invites interaction and the sharing of opinions. This democratic tone is quickly established when you first enter the gallery. Visitors are invited to interpret certain pieces in the show and share their thoughts on small labels. The labels are then hung on hooks by the piece for other visitors to read.

Olga Lah
“Blessings All Around”
“S/Election Show”
Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
Photo Credit Patrick Quinn
Andy Robert’s piece is based on the time he spent in the “Little Haiti” neighborhood in Miami. Narsiso Martinez illustrates farm workers on used cardboard grocery boxes. The text in Privacy Burnout was pulled from a standard waiver form. To the Population consists of political buttons with provocative slogans.

Jane Szabo uses flags to examine issues of identity while in the same room Stephanie Sabo probes the red, white, and blue line dividing art from design. In another part of the gallery, Ramiro Gomez sees things from an outsider’s point of view. His subjects are the invisible laborers behind the backdrop of upper-class luxury.
Ramiro Gomez

“Cut-Outs”

“S/Election Show”

Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery

Photo Credit: Patrick Quinn
Jennifer Moon
“Prison Relics From Phoenix Rising, Part 1 This Is Where I Learned Of Love”
“S/Election Show”
Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
Photo Credit Patrick Quinn

Prison Relics documents the artist’s nine-month incarceration at Valley State Prison for Women in Chowchilla, California. Index of Fear is an interactive filing cabinet containing sound, text, and image-based triggers.

Las Gran Marchas commemorates two of the largest marches in U.S. history, the March 25th and May 1st 2006 marches in Los Angeles for immigrant rights. Charles Gaines’ piece marries the score of a tragic opera with a 1967 speech given by Black Panther Party member Stokely Carmichael. Matt Sheridan’s video installation was designed to make the American flag a kind of barred cage of reflection in a time of war.
In some ways, James Berson's series of Peaceful Protest Helmets may be the timeliest pieces in the show. They are designed to act as deterrents to the abuse of power by either the police or protesters. Not only by recording their actions, but by showing the abusers how these actions will be seen by the world. Not as an article in the newspaper or a segment on the 6:00 o'clock news, but as a clip on social media shared around the world, seconds after it happens.
S/Election – Democracy, Citizenship, Freedom runs through till January 8th
The Municipal Art Gallery is located at 4800 Hollywood Blvd. L.A. CA 90027 (323) 644-6269
The gallery is open Thursday – Sunday, Noon to 5:00pm.

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December 28, 2016 in art and cake. Tags: america, Andy Robert, art, art and cake, Art and Cake LA, art exhibit, art exhibition, artist, artists, arts, california, charles gains, conceptual art, contemporary art, Dorit Cypis, election, exhibit, exhibition, fine art, gallery, installation, James Berson, Jane Szabo, Jennifer Moon, lamag, los angeles, los angeles art, los angeles artist, los angeles gallery, los angeles municipal art gallery, Mara Lonner, Margaret Noble, Matt Sheridan, Monica Rodriguez, Narciso Martinez, Neil Clavo Rivas, Olga Lah, painting, patrick quinn, photography, politics, protest, Ramiro Gomez, S/Election, sculpture, southern california, Stephanie Sabo

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32 Artists Consider the Privileges and Burdens of American Citizenship

A group exhibition at the Municipal Art Gallery in East Hollywood critically questions the infrastructure of democracy.

Hyunjee Nicole Kim  |  19 hours ago
LOS ANGELES — “Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you want them to understand,” said the Martinique-born psychoanalyst and critical theorist Frantz Fanon. The quote sets the tone for *S/Election: Democracy, Citizenship, Freedom* at the Municipal Art Gallery in East Hollywood, a group exhibition that critically questions the infrastructure of democracy, particularly as issues have
been highlighted — or ignored — during an urgent presidential election. Specifically, the show, which was curated by Erin Christovale, features 32 artists who consider what privileges and burdens are associated with American citizenship and the winding road to the liberation promised but not necessarily granted to all.

Eight American flags hang from the high ceiling of the central exhibition hall. Monica Rodriguez’s “We Are America” (2011) inscribes various slogans on each flag in black block letters, the text taken from a protest against planned changes in US immigration policies in 2006: “NO FENCE CAN STOP HISTORY FROM MOVING FORWARD,” “WHERE ARE YOUR ANCESTORS FROM?” A writing desk is placed below the flags. Pencils and tags are provided for visitors to write their own observations and commentary, and hang them on most, though not all, artwork wall labels. For instance, under the description for Olga Lah’s “Blessings All Around” (2011), which affixes bunched-up construction-site orange netting to a white wall, an observer noted, “Democracy is not cash,” next to a trio of smiley faces.
The gallery has also posited its own rhetorical questions on the labels. The one for James Berson’s “Peaceful Protest Helmet” (2016) asks, “In what way has the documentation of violent conflicts affected your perspective on democracy?” A line of colorful helmets are emblazoned with “PEACEFUL PROTEST HELMET,” and a small mobile recording device is attached to each, with the lens facing the viewer. Facing the cameras, I wondered who benefited from the protections supposedly
provided by our government and was disheartened to recognize how citizens themselves must hold authorities accountable for their aggressive tactics presently.

Jennifer Moon is another featured artist whose work, “Prison Relics from Phoenix Rising, Part 1: This Is Where I Learned of Love” (2012) interacts with the gaze of the state. The project comprises photographic documentation of the objects she gathered during her incarceration at the Valley State Prison for Women. There is also a text chronicling her time there, in which she expounds upon her philosophy of love and care, necessary in an oftentimes ruthless society.

The imprisoned are not the only people shielded from public view. In a smaller gallery, Marco Kane Braunschweiler’s short video “James Baldwin #1–#5” (2014) captures a shifting silhouette of the author speaking about the socioeconomic destruction wrought by racism: “And
when the social fabric begins to give, chaos is one of the results. And nobody in this society escapes that.” Although his form is abstracted and his face unrecognizable, Baldwin’s words, first spoken five decades ago, expose how little has changed for black Americans despite the forward march of time.

In the central hall, Ramiro Gomez’s installation “Cut-Outs” (2015) hugs the length of two walls, depicting domestic workers tending stark California modernist spaces amidst painted blue pools and spiny green palm trees. As the cardboard figures pop out from the central panel invading the gallery space, we become aware of the mostly unacknowledged labor that keeps these intimate spaces pristine.
Several public programs were organized alongside the exhibition’s run, and I was able to attend “Geographies of Displacement,” organized and moderated by the Los Angeles-based pedagogical platform at land’s edge, which focused on anti-gentrification efforts in Los Angeles and examined the art and culture industry’s attendant responsibilities. The panel gathered a coalition of groups active in East and South Los Angeles to purposely ally activists and artists, and to remind the
audience that these two roles are not mutually exclusive. Other programs included workshops on community organizing and a lecture on the history of American elections and the reformative possibilities of ranked-choice voting. There will also be a forthcoming writing seminar on Saturday, January 7 that encourages participants to explore the philosophical construct of citizenship.

“Geographies of Displacement,” panel on anti-gentrification efforts at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery (image courtesy at land’s edge, photo by Camilo Ontiveros)
As a writer, Baldwin recognized the potential of his practice, stating, “What a writer is obliged to realize at some point is that he’s involved in a language which he has to change.” The participants in *S/Election* are preoccupied with manipulating language and its forms, utilizing it as a weapon against what can seem like an unyielding system and aligning themselves around the margins to consider the damage that has been done.

Los Angeles

“S/Election: Democracy, Citizenship, Freedom”
BARNSDALL ART PARK / LA MUNICIPAL GALLERY
4800 Hollywood Blvd.
October 20–January 8

Offering a curatorial selection as unexpected as the outcome of the recent presidential election, the mixed-media and socially engaged works by thirty-two contemporary artists in this exhibition straddle binaries that stem from democracy, citizenship, and freedom: obedience/rebellion, citizen/alien, and fixed/fluid. The most nuanced pieces are those that offer an opportunity to make a choice: Margaret Noble’s *Index of Fear*, 2015, is an interactive media archive where one can sift through an old filing drawer and pick out sounds to play that, according to a corresponding list of tangible fears, convey feelings of “futility,” “fiscal,” and “forgotten,” among other categories. Bethany Collins’s *Study for a Pattern or Practice*, 2015, offers a poignant blind-embossed rendition of the table of contents from the Department of Justice report on the Ferguson Police Department after the shooting of Michael Brown in August 2014. Olga Lah’s *Blessings All Around*, 2011, repurposes a swath of bright-orange warning-barrier mesh as a draped garment on the wall, capturing and reinforcing, like these other works, both the general and the complicated, specific feelings of helplessness and loss in our current political climate.

Visitor comment cards are filled with pencil scrawls and hung on small rows of hooks near some of the works. Their presence gestures toward the exhibition’s lofty themes regarding voting, with one stating: “use your voice to gerrymander your own reality,” hinting at past failures but also modes of future perseverance. Viewers also have the opportunity to write what citizenship and democracy mean to them using patriotic red and blue stickers that populate a cardboard cutout of silhouetted bodies in a crowd. One reads: “democracy means fascism.” Indeed, the strength of this show is the quiet affective space of consolation and reflection it has generated, both pre- and post-election.

— Amanda Cachia
S/ELECTION – DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP, FREEDOM

by Ezrha Jean Black ·

November 3, 2016 · in

http://artillerymag.com/selection-democracy-citizenship-freedom/
We Americans live in interesting times. The old Chinese curse has come home to roost long before the country itself has supplanted our economic and cultural hegemony. We have more freedom, more choices generally – but we’re not equally informed or empowered to sort through them efficaciously. An ever-increasing number of us may feel they have virtually no choice whatsoever. ‘Selection’ by definition is never value-neutral – though it may frequently appear arbitrary. **S/Election**, a sprawling 32-artist group show curated by Erin Christovale at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery takes the occasion of the current political year to explore the variable selection implied by citizenship status, and the frequently clashing values that characterize our political and cultural conversations around it. Some of these conversations – as with Linda Pollack’s *Habeas Steps* – go to the fraught (and most basic) relationship between the status-challenged citizen and the prerogatives of the state. Jennifer Moon revisits the ostracism and fracturing imposed by a state’s carceral justice system. Martin Gantman’s *Democraczy Album* unfolds a contemporary dialectic of social and political evolution through that most contemporary medium – the cell phone; and Olga Koumoundouros goes to that contemporary agora of political valuation – the refrigerator door. Other notable participants...
include Charles Gaines, Ramiro Gomez, Rubén Ortiz Torres, Mara Lonner, Jane Szabo, Jody Zellen, and Olga Lah. ‘Blessings all around,’ as Lah might put it. Now get out and vote.

Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
Barnsdall Park – 4800 Hollywood Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90027
Show runs thru January 8, 2017


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