

FORT GANSEVOORT

The logo for HuffPost, featuring the word "HUFFPOST" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The letter "H" is partially enclosed by a green vertical bar on its left side, and the letter "T" is partially enclosed by a green vertical bar on its right side. The text is set against a solid black rectangular background.

Two Feminists Are Turning the Degrading Things Politicians Say About Women Into Art

By Priscilla Frank
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Two Feminists Are Turning The Degrading Things Politicians Say About Women Into Art

“It’s blindingly clear that there is a war on women right now and that there always has been.”

A dark blue rectangular background with white, bold, sans-serif text. The text is a quote: “AND WHEN YOU’RE A STAR THEY LET YOU DO IT. YOU CAN DO ANYTHING. GRAB THEM BY THE P * * * Y -- YOU CAN DO ANYTHING.”

**“AND WHEN YOU’RE A STAR
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By now, most Americans recognize the quote above as belonging to president-elect Donald Trump. His 2005 rant bragging about sexually assaulting women, captured on the set of Access Hollywood, quickly became one of the most notorious reveals of the 2016 presidential campaign.

Although Trump’s words could be considered to be among the most infamously degrading comments made about women’s bodies — uttered by a prominent and powerful man in contemporary culture, no less — they face

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steep competition. Republican state lawmaker Lawrence Lockman, for example, asked in 2014: “If a woman has [the right to an abortion], why shouldn’t a man be free to use his superior strength to force himself on a woman? At least the rapist’s pursuit of sexual freedom doesn’t [usually] result in anyone’s death.”

In an upcoming project titled “We Hold These Truths To Be Self-Evident,” artists Natalie Frank and Zoë Buckman are publicizing the ignorant, misogynistic language employed by former and current politicians in relation to women’s bodies. And they are doing so via a massive mural.

“Researching the quotes was tough, emotionally,” Buckman said in an interview with The Huffington Post. “Seeing these words typed out, reading sentiment after sentiment of disrespect and hatred, the preposterous absence of science, fact, or reality, the utter lack of compassion, and the blatant misogyny: It’s blindingly clear that there is a war on women right now and that there always has been.”

“And the worst thing about it, is that these people are in positions of power. They’re not angry nobodies mouthing off about rape in their kitchen. They’re elected officials, elevated by society and rewarded with the ability to help govern our country.”Zoë Buckman

The resounding message behind the project, as Frank explained to HuffPost, is that such comments aren’t merely erratic outbursts or outlandish soundbites. They have real consequences. “These words lead to legislation and real-world effects,” Frank said. “A lot of people were entertained by Donald Trump. It’s a lesson in how quickly words can become actions.”

Frank is a figurative painter whose past works depict domestic spaces and classic fairy tales with a similar combination of grotesque elation and feminine power. This current project, a large vinyl mural, is completely new territory. But following the election, Frank expressed, she felt a need to do something. “Women have been so traumatized about the language Trump used,” she said, “the way he talks about sexual violence, the way he mocks it.”

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Buckman has long created work with a feminist bent. In one previous project she embroidered rap lyrics onto vintage lingerie to illuminate the contradictions between women's personal and political convictions. Often, Buckman's process subverts everyday objects with ceremonial importance to illuminate subtle aspects of feminine identity.

Murals, however, were uncharted territory for her, too. "I had hoped that the work I was making in the runup to the election would be less relevant, irrelevant even, today," Buckman expressed, "but I now find myself even more compelled to make work that aims to inspire critical thought and discussion."

***"If it's a legitimate rape,
the female body has ways
to try to shut the
whole thing down."***

-Representative Todd Akin, Republican of Missouri

The "We Hold These Truths To Be Self-Evident" mural will be on view on New York Live Arts' theater lobby's Ford Foundation Wall. The title is pulled from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1848 Declaration of Sentiments, when the first-wave feminist referenced the Declaration of Independence clause before amending the original statement to "that all men *and women* are created equal."

The title, Frank explained, emphasizes just how recent our nation's strides towards gender equality are, and similarly, how tenuous. "It hasn't been 100 years since women got the right to vote," Frank said. "There is a real fragility there, and a gravity to women taking a stand for themselves and their rights."

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“If there is anything this election has shown us [it’s that] the things we take for granted can be wiped out.”Natalie Frank