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VOGUE

Why Protest Matters Today

By Zoë Buckman

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Artist Zoë Buckman is a proud Londoner based in New York, where she lives with her husband and daughter. Her multimedia work – from *Every Curve*, which saw her embroider rap lyrics that refer to women on to Fifties underwear, to *Mostly It's Just Uncomfortable*, created in reaction to the changes to Planned Parenthood – is political in nature, and her latest work is perhaps her most political yet. *We Hold These Truths To Be Self-Evident* is a 30ft mural, created with fellow artist Natalie Frank, which displays statements made by elected officials about women, their bodies, and their rights – it opens on February 13 in New York's Chelsea. Here, she writes for Vogue about being a Londoner in New York at a time of great political turmoil, and being an artist with a feminist viewpoint who wants to make her voice count.



YESTERDAY a friend of mine said, “Protest is the new brunch”, and I did a double take. At first it struck me as the most New York sentence I’d ever

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heard, but then I realised that the reason it had stopped me in my tracks was because, actually, in the context of my experience living here this past decade: this was not a typically New York thing to say.

Since emigrating from London in 2007 I have sought out the activists and advocates and artists endeavouring to inspire critical thinking and raise consciousness, however, I've often been confronted with the fact that we have been a small piece within a jigsaw of apathy... until now. I have never known America to be this alive with political thought, debate, action, enthusiasm and solidarity before. It is a horribly important time to be an American. People are awake. Perhaps they are awake for the wrong reason, and it shouldn't have taken Trump's win to burst their bubble, but it doesn't really matter now does it? Because we're in a new world and the only answer is to stand together and act, relentlessly.

There are endless petitions, protests, gatherings, rallies, boycotts, and talks happening all over the country, housed in people's living rooms or community centers or schools... the people are mobilising and it is making a difference.

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Champ - neon glass and leather

The day after the election I couldn't face attending the protest that took place in Manhattan. I had spent the day of the vote canvassing in Philadelphia and was feeling jubilant – excited to get home to my family and watch the results come in. It was a traumatic evening for just about everyone I know, and the next day I was sick to my stomach and utterly shell-shocked. I decided to stay home and hold my daughter tight that night.

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Since then I've been to just about every protest I've known about. The vibe has been peaceful but angry, the stakes of this presidency apparent on people's faces and in their voices. I attended the Women's March on Washington with a group of artists, curators, and art-world professionals. On the bus to DC my girlfriend and canvassing partner Ashley Artis pulled out the sign she'd made for me – it read “We Choose Love” – and I burst into tears.



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And Since A Man - embroidery on vintage lingerie

For me the most moving thing about the march – in addition to how badass it was to see the sheer volume of protestors – was the responses we got from the Washington locals, the police and National Guard. On the walk from the coach station to the memorial we passed houses in which people had put up signs with Martin Luther King quotes, homemade signs with sentiments such as “You are welcome here” and “Thank you!”, and crates with free bottles of water. The traffic cops, police, and National Guard who were there to direct people and keep it all in line were completely welcoming, cheering along with us and shouting out “You’re a lot nicer than the folks who were here yesterday!” – referring to those who had shown up for Trump’s inauguration.

The only incident that riled me was a fat white bloke driving a massive truck with a huge video screen on the outside of it. The screens showed video footage of abortions being performed. He was slowly meandering his truck on the road to the protest, playing country music and parading his disturbing footage in an attempt to paint abortion in a bad light.

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The Hamilton - 1950s gynecological chair with quilting fabric

In my immediate circle the two biggest concerns are racism and women's reproductive rights. Right now it's freezing cold in New York, yet we have a great sense of foreboding about the summer ahead. Each year as the country gets hotter, tempers run higher, and shit pops-off: meaning that white police start to "mistakenly" slay unarmed black people. This type of racially motivated murder spikes every summer only now people have camera phones and everyone learns about it. If I allow myself to imagine what it's going to be like this summer, when, after a shooting, our current president is expected to impart some wisdom, to inspire calm, to express condolences, and attempt

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to be the balm applied to the wounds of racial divide here... well it makes me livid just thinking about it.

As a woman who comes from a country where abortions are not a talking point, where I've never heard terms such as "legitimate rape" used and where sexual healthcare and contraception are free, it is hard to put down in words the sense of injustice I feel towards the fight for women's rights here. I guess I seek to better explore this with my work, and strive to make art that can spark discussions as opposed to simply hammer an agenda.

The results of this election haven't really changed my art practice, as I was already making work about this shit before, but it has afforded me greater opportunities to share my work. I'm salty about the fact that I have that man and his "win" to thank for some of my upcoming shows, frankly, but I will continue to do what I can to share my messages.

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Bitch Again - Embroidery on vintage lingerie

There is no shortage of causes for concern here: from fears about climate change, to the rise of Islamophobia, from Trump's approach to foreign policy, to how his Muslim ban will serve as propaganda for ISIS, from the rights of the LGBTQ community to welfare, prisons, healthcare and taxes... it's bottomless. I guess we all keep coming back to one thing though: action. Shit

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is getting real here, undoubtedly, yet more than ever before people are standing up. Conversations are often uncomfortable, because there's so much entrenched ugly thinking to be cleansed out... but as my dear friend, artist Hank Willis Thomas points out, "The road to progress is always under construction."

Zoë Buckman and Natalie Frank's latest work, "We Hold These Truths To Be Self-Evident", opens on February 16 at New York Live Arts, 219 W 19th Street



Arts & Lifestyle

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