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Natalie Frank and Zoe Buckman Create a Mural of Sexist Horror

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We Hold These Truths To Be Self-Evident: Mural by Zoë Buckman and Natalie Frank, Ford Foundation Live Gallery, New York Live Arts

As President-elect Donald Trump and his team continue to drag the national dialogue through new depths of disgrace, artists Natalie Frank and Zoe Buckman have decided to hold up a mirror to the ugliness. We spoke to Buckman and Frank about their plans to immortalize sexist statements that have come from the mouths of politicians in recent years and emblazon them on a mural at New York Live Arts. Support the project, titled “We Hold These Truths to Be Self Evident,” on their Kickstarter page.

How did the idea come about? Was there one statement from a politician that pushed you over the edge? Or was it the collective mass of so many in recent months?

Natalie Frank: Post election, the opportunity to make a mural on the long and visible Ford Foundation Wall at New York Live Arts seemed like the perfect place to voice my rage. For me, and for so many women, for so many people, this election was and is devastating and traumatic. The language that is used—“Pussy” “Boy” “Alt-Right” “Rapists and Murderers,” Trump mocking women, the LGBTQ community, blacks, hispanics, Muslims, Jews, the disabled, the list goes on—was and is shocking, disgusting, unbelievable. And then, that others, fellow Americans, followed... I have been reading these comments that men and some women have made about rape, Planned Parenthood, and choice for years. This election is the tipping point.

Zoe Buckman: I’m London-born but have lived in America for three elections, and am now a citizen here. It has always upset me deeply how in the run-up to a general election, the topic of rape and choice is suddenly back on the table as a talking point. The U.K has many problems, but choice is not an issue there. I come from a country in which not only can a woman get a free and safe abortion before 12 weeks on the National Health Service, but she is actually offered free counseling afterwards--because the state recognizes that arriving at that decision is difficult for many women, irrespective of the circumstances. I’ve given birth, had a

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miscarriage, and terminated a pregnancy, all here in the U.S. When I turn on my T.V and hear a bunch of old white men talking about how abortion is murder, among many other things, they're talking about me. And I take it personally. I feel blessed to have had access to great healthcare here and to be mainly surrounded by nonjudgmental individuals. But most American women are not as fortunate.

How are you going about selecting the quotes?

NF: We are working on the design now, which will affect how many we ultimately use. There is no shortage. We are looking at politicians from the past 20 years, with an emphasis on those who will soon be taking office. There doesn't seem to be a gray level of egregiousness. They are all pretty horrific.

Of all the horrific things coming out of politicians' mouths these days, why did you choose to focus specifically on the comments they're making about women's bodies?

NF: There are so many offenses and prejudices to tackle. Both Zoe and I make work that focuses on women, our power and the ways in which our bodies can relay these narratives of power.

ZB: In the wake of this election we've realized that intolerance, misogyny, xenophobia, racism, and homophobia are reigning rampantly in both public opinion and the opinions of those in power. It's awful, and not one of the above is more worrying or more deserving of attention than the other. When it comes to my artistic practice, I guess I make work that is simultaneously political and personal. I choose to speak from my personal experience and so that's why I want this mural to focus on sexism and women's bodies.

How are the statements informing the design and aesthetic of the mural?

NF: The words will run in and out of the reclining Odalisque of a woman. She will dominate the wall, amidst this sea of language that is meant to pin her down.

ZB: The text will also be white, deliberately.

How did you come to work with New York Live Arts, and where exactly will the mural be located?

NF: Bjorn Amelan and Bill T. Jones extended the invitation with Live Arts. They are great artists and activists. The mural will be on their main Ford Foundation wall in their lobby, visible to the street at 219 W. 19th Street at Seventh Avenue.

What effect do you think isolating these comments might have on viewers?

ZB: Something happens when you bring a mass of text like this together. For a previous body of work I collected lyrics about women from two '90s rappers—the uplifting and the misogynistic messages. This piece will be a lot more painful. You highlight a particular line, or in this case, a sentence, and the effect is two-fold. At first there's the impact of the individual sentiment itself (which is enraging), but secondly, there's how it visually takes its place in the composition of all

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the other similar sentiments. You can see the onslaught of hatred, the army of sexism, and the repetition of these Post-Truths.

NF: I hope: rage, action, and reflection. Vote!