

# FORT GANSEVOORT

## HUFFPOST

### What It Means To Be An Artist In The Time Of Trump

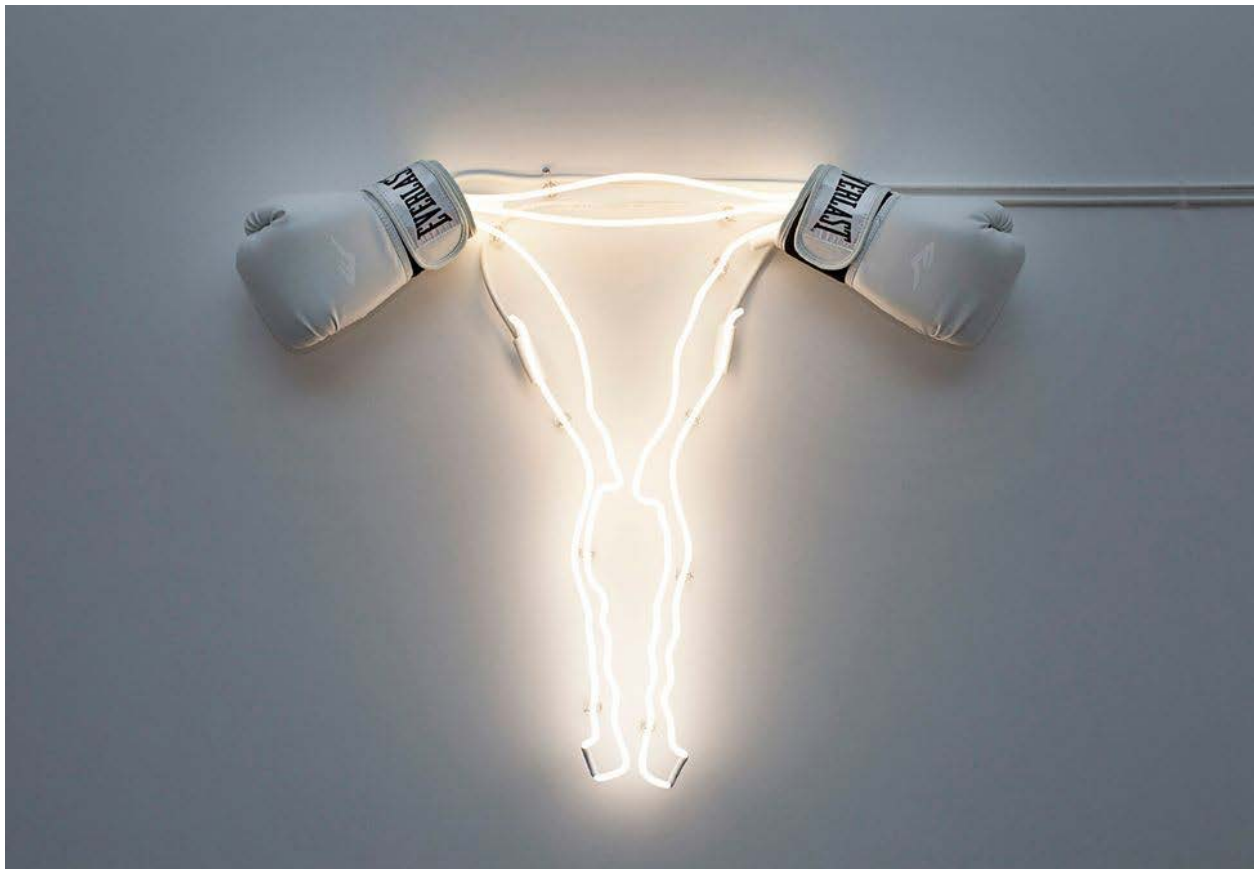
By Priscilla Frank

November 17, 2016

Being an artist today means something very different than it did just two weeks ago. As the nation collectively struggles to come to terms with what a Donald Trump presidency means, we call upon artists as activists, optimists, truth-tellers and revolutionaries, to resist the normalization of hate and prejudice, to stand up for the communities that have been marginalized, and advocate for an America that serves all of its citizens.

Shortly after the election, we reached out to artists whose work we admire, asking their opinion on the role of an artist over the coming four years. Our questions were simple: What is your mission as an artist today and what is your advice to others in the field?

#### Zoe Buckman



ZOE BUCKMAN

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“Personally I’m drawn to art that aims to spread critical thinking, inspire discussions, and challenge the status quo ... but today this kind of art needs to reach and expand much further than it has done to avoid us continually preaching to the converted.

“As artists we need to stop making work only for gallery or museum walls, or the coffee tables of collectors. Rather, in tandem with these shows and pieces, we also need to make work for the people. For free. On billboards, train stations, public parks, etc. In order for that to happen, public art organizations need to be braver and stop highlighting work that is safe and decorative. The boards that control them need to give more power to the curators, and American cities need to lift much of the red tape that hinders and prevents artists from making challenging public art.

As artists we need to stop making work only for gallery or museum walls, or the coffee tables of collectors.

“Personally, I’m not on a ‘We need to feel good and heal’ flex right now. I don’t judge those that are, and of course I believe that we do need to come together and collaborate and repair. But my stance is more ‘We need to continue to feel uncomfortable, get our hands dirty, and clean out this gutter.’ Racism, misogyny, homophobia, intolerance, anti-Semitism and xenophobia have now risen to the surface and it’s time for a major extraction. I believe that artists can — and must — play a role in that, but we need both the resolve and the opportunities to take our work much, much further.” — Zoe Buckman, multimedia artist

Natalie Frank



Natalie Frank, Taming the Animals. 2016. Chalk pastel and gouache on paper.

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"Despair has become anger which is a wonderful tool to help mobilize. I've thought about what I can do: for me, becoming involved in Planned Parenthood in a meaningful way is a first step. Throughout the election, Trump waged war on women, like we needed another body on that ship ... I'm fearful that our rights could slip away, and fearful for so many others who have been targeted by Trump, whose rights aren't as solidified as ours. I am hopeful I can work with a larger organization that safeguards these rights (access to healthcare, counseling, mammograms, abortions), if only by my small contribution. Numbers add up to a voice and power.

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"I've always been interested in women's bodies, our stories, desires and the sexuality and violence that intertwine. I'm also hopeful that in using portrait in paintings, I can start to represent real women, real stories and convey to those who might not understand, that these issues of self-determination, feminism, humanism are shared and NOT bound by gender." — Natalie Frank, painter

## Vivek Shraya



VIVEK SHRAYA

In the aftermath of the Trump win, the role of the white artist is to continually name white supremacy.

"In the aftermath of the Trump win, the role of the white artist is to continually name white supremacy, and to recognize their privilege by supporting and amplifying the work of artists of

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color. The time for quirky, white indie covers of songs by black artists is over.” — Vivek Shraya, writer and visual artist

Tona Brown



JAMIE MCCARTHY VIA GETTY IMAGES

”Since the beginning of time artists have been able to use our various art forms to inform people of issues in a way that is more impactful than politicians. Often times people vote without really understanding the issues but because of party lines. Rarely are we seeing in today’s society voters who take the time to study the issues.

As a person of color, who is also transgender, our community has always felt the way that people are feeling today .

”As a person of color, who is also transgender, our community has always felt the way that people are feeling today with almost every presidential election. A fear and hope that the new president will care about us.

”But the time is now to fight! [...] There isn’t a woman alive that has not felt the way Hillary Clinton feels right now in the classroom, in corporate America, or even in our households.

”What I am doing to help spark change is to start a college tour around the country to help teach young people that their voices matter! We need them more than any other time in history! [...] I will also be performing at more fundraisers and events to encourage women,

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minorities and LGBT Americans to fight for what's right during this painful and confusing time in history. I will also collaborate with artists of various genres and get back in the studio to let my voice be heard. To the nation: stay encouraged, get more involved in your local politics, read and study the issues so that something like this NEVER happens again." — Tona Brown, violinist and mezzo-soprano

**Irena Jurek**



IRENA JUREK

"Our current political and social climate is arguably the most divisive, chaotic, and turbulent period that anyone of my generation or younger has ever experienced in this country. Still, I remain optimistic about the future, since dark and challenging times often lead to positive change. Sexism and racism are endemic to the art world just as they are to the larger world that we inhabit. We should each consider how we are contributing to the problem, and ways in which we can level the playing field.

It is our responsibility to visit studios and to seek out artists who are often overlooked because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds.

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“Curating is one of the most effective ways that artists can subvert the power structures that are in place, and it is also a direct way to take matters into our own hands. Sadly, apartment shows often suffer from the same lack of diversity as museum shows. It is our responsibility to visit studios and to seek out artists who are often overlooked because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Let’s work together to make the art world a more inclusive place. My suggestion extends not only to artists, but to other people involved in the art world as well, since we are all interconnected within the prevailing structures of power.” — Irena Jurek, visual artist

## Roxanne Jackson



Roxanne Jackson, “Indigo Kush” (View 1-4) 2016; Media: Ceramic, glaze, luster; 20 x 13 x 12 inches

“I think the role of an artist in general, and especially during this time, is to question the status quo. This can simply mean questioning notions of beauty — as definitions and expectations of this idea are too often merely passed down from generation to generation without question. This mode of non-thinking has consequences and leads to prejudice.

I think the role of an artist in general, and especially during this time, is to question the status quo.

“I think dealing with abjection is one of the most powerful and effective roles of contemporary artists. Transgressive work is a more accurate expression from a culture that has been engaged in war as long as we can remember, one that has a severely unequal stratification of wealth, a culture that disproportionately locks up poor minority groups for maximum sentences (while the same crimes from white offenders are penalized with rehab), religious groups that denounce science and inspire their congregation with fear and hate — not love and tolerance. In this polarizing climate, abject work is relevant. It holds a space and gives us permission to be outraged, to feel deep emotion and to express vulnerability. To cry out. And, ultimately to unite

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and stand against oppressors as humans have always done.” — Roxanne Jackson, multimedia artist

Genevieve Gaignard



Genevieve Gaignard, “A Rose By Any Other Name Would Smell As Sweet,” Mixed media, 2016

”As an artist, I’m constantly responding to popular culture and the political world around me. It’s how I make work. That being said, the news of a Trump presidency is scary and upsetting but this type of upset isn’t new — these kinds of tragedies happen all the time, every day, constantly.

I think this election is just forcing a lot of people to confront a dark reality that so many others already face on a daily basis.

”I think this election is just forcing a lot of people to confront a dark reality that so many others already face on a daily basis. Art has always served that same function for me and it will

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continue to. I also think there's a lot of collective grief happening and art is a really powerful space for expressing that anger. If you're not the type to protest on the streets or don't have the words to express your outrage, your voice can still be heard through your art." — Genevieve Gaignard, photographer and installation artist.

## Emma Sulkowicz



EMMA SULKOWICZ

"In a lecture two days after the election, Gregg Bordowitz said something along the lines of: 'Many people are wondering is art enough? That depends on how you define 'enough,' and what you expect art to do. If you expect art to do what art does, then yes, art is enough.'

"Everyone has different superpowers. For those whose superpower is helping people through their art, it's important that they now put that superpower to use. Too many people abstract the meaning from their work. More than ever, artists who have the privilege of any audience must speak clearly about the issues that matter most.

Everyone has different superpowers. For those whose superpower is helping people through their art, it's important that they now put that superpower to use.

"I disagree with those who believe that we all have to make art about Donald Trump now. That approach might work for some, but there are many of us who have intimate and personal knowledge about specific topics. If you have one pointed thing to say about, for example, misogyny, it might be more powerful.

"I believe that bad things happen because people desire to do them. Legislation can punish people for being bad, but can't prevent their initial desire. Art is powerful — is enough —



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because it can make people feel differently. It forces people to be sensitive to others. It creates compassion. Our mission as artists is to remember that we have the power to make each other feel.” — Emma Sulkowicz, performance artist

## Katya Grokhovsky



KATYA GROKHOVSKY

”I am finding words are failing my mouth, leaving me in an increasingly non-verbal state of existence. Fingers twitching, feet bound, dust settling in my eyes and ears, my languages are not sufficient. Scrambled thoughts, galloping forward, pulling my body through the thick mud. My mission is to rise eventually and keep working. Art, in a guttural radical battle cry of communication and expression, must simply dare to persevere, to keep keeping on, to participate, criticize, analyze, improve. Artists, please do not isolate, hide, retreat. Instead, speak through your work, however softly. Be brave.

Artists, please do not isolate, hide, retreat. Instead, speak through your work, however softly. ”Refuse the apathy, reject the hopelessness, engage, connect, change perceptions. Overcome and expose the bitter cynicism settling in the crevices of civilization, elevate, educate, uplift, ascent: generate hope. Expand your vision and dialogue, protect the vulnerable and ask for help, ignite a light, be a catalyst for powerful thought and ideas, muster up the courage.” — Katya Grokhovsky, visual and performance artist

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Sylvia Maier



Sylvia Maier, "Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin."

"The day before the election I had been working on my painting of the mothers who've lost their children to police brutality and institutionalized racism. I had been working on this project with Hawa Bah, Constance Malcolm, Kadiatou Diallo, Iris Baez, Valerie Bell and Sybrina Fulton — a project meant for healing relationships between the police and community by working together to prevent this tragedy from reoccurring.

Be the voice of the voiceless. Shine a light in this darkness.

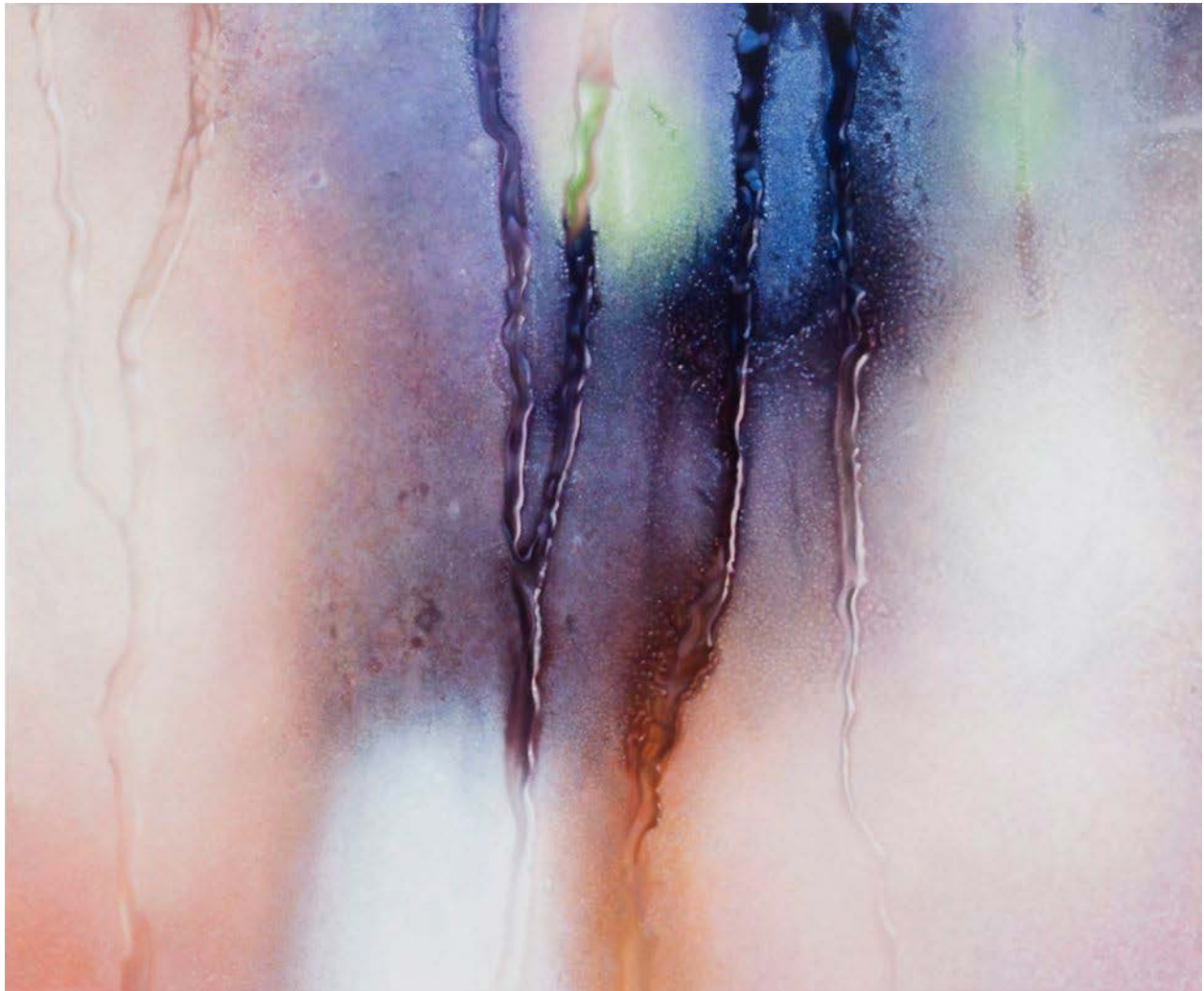
"As I am working I feel a stronger calling to counter all the darkness this person has stirred up. I have made my mind up to counter the hate against the LGBT community, xenophobia, sexism

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and racism with paint. To paint our people together fighting for everyone's freedom. Painting women as the major characters and catalyst for change. Painting women with admiration and respect.

"Be the voice of the voiceless. Shine a light in this darkness. Using art to preserve our ideals and beauty of humanity in spite of this whirlwind of negativity that has been unleashed and condoned. I think of artists like Goya who lived in turbulent times and documented them anyway." — Sylvia Maier, painter

## Marilyn Minter



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SALON 94 NEW YORK | Marilyn Minter, "Thigh Gap," 2016 enamel on metal 72 x 86.5 inches

"Not all artists are politically minded, and they don't have to be, I wouldn't want to see a lot of bad illustrations. But for those who are politically engaged, it's often when they do their best work. Keith Haring was a product of Ronald Reagan (who wouldn't even say the word AIDS). In my experience, great art emerges from the marginalized and the angry. No one is saying it better than Jerry Saltz.

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In my experience, great art emerges from the marginalized and the angry.

”Right now I’m licking my wounds, and allowing myself to feel the pain and get on the other side of it. Then I’m going to get angry and get tough. I’m taking notes. We have to start organizing. The gods have given us a HUGE target — all of his ideas are going to fail miserably. Manufacturing is never coming back. The wall will never be built. Let them try to overturn Roe v. Wade! I hope this WAKES EVERYONE THE F\*\*K UP!” — Marilyn Minter, multimedia artist

## 11. Aaron Johnson



Aaron Johnson, “Uncle Sam Funeral,” 22x28 inches, acrylic on polyester knit mesh, 2016

“The Trumpocalypse came as a severe shock to me. How could the people of America be so duped by this conman? I spent the first few days after the election just glued to my couch, paralyzed, reading countless articles online, trying to make sense of it. Is this alt-right-embracing sociopath going to start WWII? How much is his regime going to squash our freedom of speech, freedom of the press ... how soon until my access to empowering myself with information is revoked? How soon, if history repeats itself, will degenerate artists come under assault by the government? It’s nothing short of horrifying.

It’s time for artists to be activists, I truly believe that.

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"Getting into the studio was hard. I began by spending Friday painting protest signs, and Saturday handing out signs to fellow protestors as we marched up from Union Square to Trump Tower. It's time for artists to be activists, I truly believe that. Personally I'll be following Shaun King's Trump resistance platform, Bernie's Our Revolution, and Michael Moore as directives for how to fight back. It's also time for artists to keep making art. Keep painting, otherwise the fascists win! I'm trying, today, a week after the election, to get my painting will back. The visions are dancing in my head. I can take on this autocrat monster and his cabinet of hate mongers in my paintings, and I can be vicious.

"If this oncoming Trump blood bath is as brutal as it threatens to be, I can go right there with them and retaliate in my paintings. At the moment I'm a little scared to even put those gloves on, or reluctant to fill my head with all that evil. The other road, escapism (certain modes I work in when I'm turning away from the political) has its allure as well. To be decided. This week it's one day at a time in the studio." — Aaron Johnson, painter

## Eric Yahnker



Eric Yahnker, "Exceptional Suicide," 2015, books, 14 x 25 x 6.5 in.

"The artist's job is the same as it's always been, only now on a Viagra/steroids cocktail: Feel, react, repeat. Standing still is not an option. We've all been thwacked upside the skull by a

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flaming, ass-soaked sack of tangerine, barbed, electric jellyfish dicks. If a time like this doesn't move you to act, then get the hell out of the way, or go apply to fucking dental school, or something.” — Eric Yahnker, visual artist

## 14. Hanksy



TOM HANSKY

“Like most people, I listened to big media and thought Nov. 9 would be like any other hangover. Take a few Advil and try to recover from a shitty election cycle. And then Donald was elected.

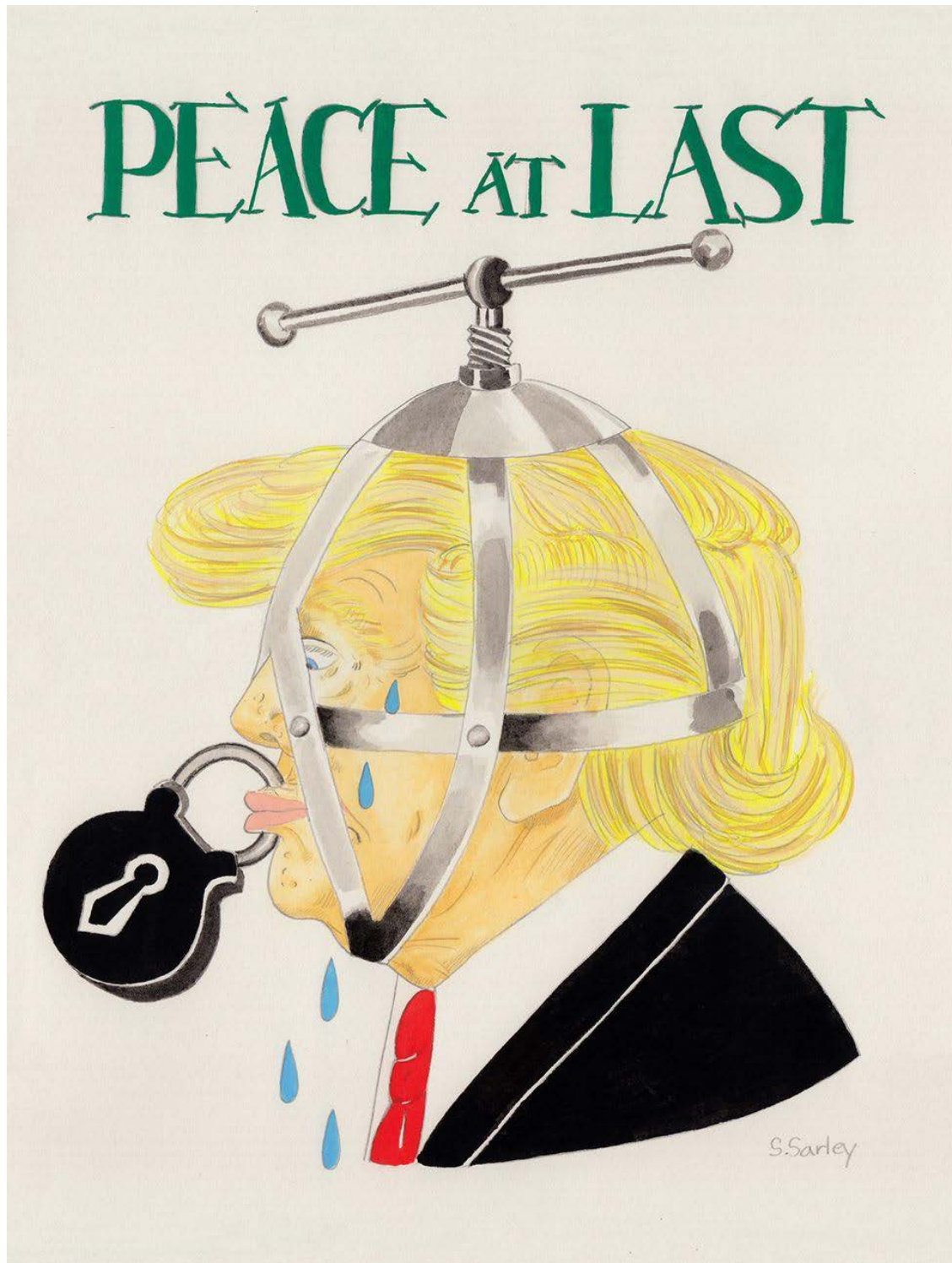
In hindsight I could have done more positive work. We all could have.

“I spent a good portion of Trump’s horrific presidential candidacy focusing on tearing him down. Most artists did. Because the negativity bandwagon is always much more fun to ride, right? Rather than uplifting and pushing for Bernie or getting out the vote, I put down Trump. Of course it was lighthearted, but it was much easier and bound to get more press. In hindsight I could have done more positive work. We all could have.

“But I played my hand over a year and a half ago. I randomly painted a mural that ended up taking on a life of its own. Now that he’s the next President-elect, that silly image of Trump as a poop emoji will be around forever. For better, for worse.” — Hanksy, anonymous street artist

**Stephanie Sarley**

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Stephanie Sarley, "Peace At Last, Gouache, 2016, 9 x 12. Based on a anti-suffragette poster.

My advice to other artists is to not let fear change your process.

"I'm staying strong, continuing to create art like I always have. My advice to other artists is to not let fear change your process. Art is a language, use it wisely." — Stephanie Sarley, multimedia artist

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Maureen Drennan



Maureen Drennan | This is Razan, a Syrian artist and recent refugee who fled her home country and now lives in the Netherlands.

“I believe the role of an artist is more important than ever and ideally should compel and challenge us to think in different ways. Artists can be powerful dissenters and transgressive to political and societal conventions.

“Good art often comes from an uncomfortable place. While it can be painful to explore, the creation and consumption of such art can be very therapeutic. In such a divisive time that we live in, the hardest thing we can do is to show compassion to those in opposition to our beliefs.

My goal is to deepen my understanding of other people’s experiences and share those stories with a wide audience.

“I feel enormously privileged to be an artist and to have met and photographed such inspiring people. My goal is to deepen my understanding of other people’s experiences and share those stories with a wide audience. Stories and narrative foster empathy and compassion, something that is sorely needed during this contentious time of anti-immigrant rhetoric. My advice to



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fellow artists is to not be afraid to explore things that are uncomfortable.” — Maureen Drennan, photographer

**Natalie Baxter**



Natalie Baxter, “America, Current Mood,” fabric and polyfill, 63 x 36 x 5 inches, 2016

Art creates an alternative context for dialogue on issues that elsewhere divide us.

”I strive to create work that is approachable to a wider audience than just those who share my political beliefs. Art creates an alternative context for dialogue on issues that elsewhere divide us.” — Natalie Baxter, multimedia artist

**Rebecca Goyette**



Rebecca Goyette , Still from “Ghost Bitch U.S.A.,” 2016

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“The art world needs to confront its own systemic racism and misogyny. Our cultural institutions have made progress, but there is so much more work to be done, before we are truly representing and monetarily backing diversity. In order for us all to form a united front against racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia, we need to act in solidarity with each other. We need to form tighter bonds.

Together as artists, we must use our power and creative capital to address the violence against people of color and LGBTQ happening now.

“Resistance must become our way of life. Together as artists, we must use our power and creative capital to address the violence against people of color and LGBTQ happening now. We must protest, organize, reach out to Muslim organizations, immigrant rights groups, protect services for people with disabilities.

“I have been struggling with my emotions as many have, since the news that Trump was elected last week, volleying from rage to sadness. I was inspired last night when I went to work with a group of artists with developmental disabilities. The artists had already formed an activist team and were gathering letters to share their thoughts, feelings and fears of Trump’s presidency with their local and statewide officials. They are fighting to keep funding for their services that are vital to their daily lives. [...] Anytime I feel stopped by emotion, I need to remember last night, where we stepped out to continue not business as usual, but stronger than ever.” — Rebecca Goyette, visual and performance artist

## Nina Chanel Abney



NINA CHANEL ABNEY

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“In the coming years, I do not foresee anything magical, per se, happening with art. Art is constantly in flux, it’s always changing and moving. If anything, we will see and hear more truth-telling. Personally, I’m going to use this time to take a more radical approach to my work, take more risks with the hopes to incite more conversation.

Personally, I’m going to use this time to take a more radical approach to my work, take more risks with the hopes to incite more conversation.

“Artists should not be safe. We are in the unique positions, through our respective mediums, to elicit a response without using violence or direct action. Why not push the boundaries?”

“As far as my mission: I plan to continue what I’ve been doing — just on a grander scale and hopefully to a larger audience. I think now more than ever people are open to dialogue on issues thought to be taboo or subjects once left unspoken of.” — Nina Chanel Abney, painter

## Rebecca Morgan



Rebecca Morgan, Family Reunion, 2016, Oil and graphite on panel

“I live in rural Pennsylvania. In the center of the state, deep in the rural T, my entire life, on and off. I left for grad school in Brooklyn and eventually moved from the city back to the country

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and bounced around to residencies and other experiences, but always back to my hometown for weeks, months, or years while waiting for the next opportunity. Now, I'm living in my hometown for my foreseeable future.

"I make art about this place and my complex and often conflicting rural identity. I make paintings, drawings, and ceramics that emanate from stereotypes of rural Appalachia and are at once diaristic examinations of myself romanticizing the rural and being repulsed by it. My work touches on truths about poverty, addiction, and off-the-grid living, as well as idealizations of uncultured country life, and in the same breath, low brow but loving portraits of characters, family and scenarios that I experience daily. I have more or less built a career around my diaristic experience living and growing up in this place. This is a place that I love, and I have worked very hard to love, even when it has not loved me back, or given me reason to love it.

"Living and working in rural Pennsylvania, in the last few months of the election in particular, has really started to make me re-evaluate my relationship with my rural identity and those that share it with me. As my work features lighthearted examples of local characters or cheeky representations of these rural individuals, it's now a seeming impossibility to render them in bittersweet love; it seems the scale is tipped drastically the other way.

My advice to other artists is that there is no wrong way to deal with the next four years EXCEPT to be passive and inarticulate with your time, words and values.

"Artists have always reflected society. I think the role of artists and creatives is to provide some kind of levity, clarity and lightness in the rough days ahead. In my own work, I want to make images for others to identify with. I want the images that I make to resonate with others — to mirror events in their lives and have them relate to it as a moment of relief and think, 'I've been there.' If I can create a moment that someone can laugh at or help them to accept or laugh off darkness, embarrassment, hopelessness — that is exceptionally powerful to me.

"I usually draw every day. I haven't wanted to make work about the election and I haven't wanted to make the work that I was making only a month ago, and also because I didn't want to do ANYTHING. I was heartbroken. I still am, to many degrees, but the predominant feeling now is to get back on the horse. [...] My advice to other artists is that there is no wrong way to deal with the next four years EXCEPT to be passive and inarticulate with your time, words and values. There is no wrong way to make art; whatever voice you choose is the right thing — whatever work you make is the right thing." — Rebecca Morgan, visual artist

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Brendan Fernandes



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART MASSACHUSETTS  
Brendan Fernandes, "The End," 2014. Installation views: wall painting and printed nylon flags.

"I feel daunted, a little numb today. Yesterday morning was a process of grieving in a way that I haven't felt before. This is a shocking moment. A life-changing experience for this country, but one that is also rippling out, affecting many throughout the world. It will take time to process this, but in that I am gathering myself to act up, to take action.

It is my responsibility as an artist to voice what I believe in and reflect what my communities are going through.

"This vote acts against women, Muslims, climate change, immigrants, people of color, and queer communities. These are communities that I am a part of, communities that I am supportive of, and communities that were already disenfranchised before this election reinforced our oppression. This is a capitalist win. And what's more is that it was a predominantly white, working class who has made this decision. A decision that will no doubt benefit the one percent far more than it will benefit themselves. Have those most vulnerable in

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our communities — women, people of color, immigrants, queers, the Land — being taken advantage of by a failing education system? Are we being victimized by massive frustration with a lack of employment and income inequality? Are we being made to look blamed? Are we again the casualties of desperate supporters looking for a ‘hero,’ a promised hope — false or not — that someone will make it right?

I am searching out what I am feeling. Enraged? Perhaps angry? Something is burning underneath. I know that as an artist I can use this to create. As an immigrant, a queer, a person of color and a feminist, I will raise a deeper, more powerful, more important voice to reflect my issues and defend the right to be different. It is my responsibility as an artist to voice what I believe in and reflect what my communities are going through. We must work together. In this moment of uncertainty, the world will turn to its artists as leaders, as voices of support, of hope and of unity. Now is the time to mobilize as artists, as galleries, as institutions of allies.” —  
Brendan Fernandes, multidisciplinary artist