

Avram, “Danielle, “What’s another clown in the White House?’ Nasher unveils provocative ‘Run for President’ exhibit,”
DallasNews.com, Arts & Life, Arts, September 12, 2016

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‘What’s another clown in the White House?’ Nasher unveils provocative ‘Run for President’ exhibit

In 1984, TV personality Larry Harmon, also known as Bozo the Clown, announced his run for the American presidency. Running under slogans such as, “Put the Real Bozo in the White House,” and “What’s Another Clown in the White House?” Harmon’s campaign was part publicity stunt, part attempt to draw out voters, and part statement about the American political system.

An example of the golden marketability of political outliers and reactionary politics, Bozo’s campaign forms the backbone of Kathryn Andrews’ “Run for President,” which opened Saturday at the Nasher Sculpture Center.



The “Run for President” installation by Kathryn Andrews at the Nasher Sculpture Center. On the floor are variations of three works: Bozo the Clown Runs for President, 1984, photograph by Larry Harmon Pictures Corp. On the floor are three variations of the piece: “Bozo, the World’s Most Famous Clown” Bop Bag with Occasional Performance. From left, (Black Variation), 2014, aluminum, vinyl, polyurethane, chrome-plated steel, and performance; (Pink Variation), 2014, aluminum, vinyl, polyurethane, chrome-plated steel, and performance; and (Blue Variation), 2014, aluminum, vinyl, polyurethane, chrome-plated steel, and performance. (Nan Coulter/Special Contributor)

Presciently timed and eerily paralleling the circusesque plotline of the 2016 presidential election, “Run for President” is an amalgamation of ready-made Hollywood film props, found imagery and Andrews’ signature polished-steel pieces. The resulting exhibit has an atmosphere that is at once over-the-top, yet melancholy and even a little foreboding.

Although Andrews originally designed the show (first exhibited earlier this year at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago) to follow a linear narrative through a fictitious election, a term in office and the end of a presidency, the layout of the Nasher galleries caused her to reconfigure the objects in relationship to one another, resulting in a narrative abstraction.

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Across the room, large black-and-white prints of Sammy Davis Jr. with Richard Nixon, and Nancy Reagan sitting in the lap of Mr. T, tower over the space, amplifying the celebrity lunacy that surrounds the presidential office.



“First Lady Nancy Reagan and Mr. T at the White House Christmas Party,” 1983 (Bettmann/CORBIS) and “Gift Cart,” 2011 by Kathryn Andrews, stainless steel and rented props. (Nan Coulter/Special Contributor)

The effect is one of being able to see the electoral process laid out from beginning to end, and experience the emotional push-and-pull of each stage — from the initial swells of excitement, through resignation to reality, to the final “lame duck” days of a term — simultaneously.

It is happiness and sadness, bloat and deflation, seduction and rejection, rolled into one.

While echoing the current American political climate, “Run for President” is uncannily attuned to the environment of Dallas, particularly as it concerns our presidential history. It is worth noting that the exhibition opens on the heels of *The Dallas Morning News*’ recommendation of Hillary Clinton, the first time in more than 75 years the newspaper has backed a Democratic presidential candidate.

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“October 16,” 2012, chrome-plated steel, magnets and balloons. (Nan Coulter/Special Contributor)

Andrews acknowledges that installing the show in Dallas has raised some new thoughts about the exhibition. “The recent police shootings here and the city’s history of presidential assassination invite a closer reading of some of the works, particularly those with a violent subtext.”

Visitors enter the gallery on a long red carpet, celebrity-for-a-moment as the shiny metallic surfaces of various sculptures bounce their visages across the room. At one end looms a photograph of Bozo announcing his run for president: standing at a podium, flanked by Secret Service-style men wearing clown noses. Drained of all color, the image feels anarchistic and menacing.

The supports of these pieces are stuffed with costumes worn by the likes of Jack Nicholson and Tobey Maguire, a nod to the image commodification of political figures: think Hillary Clinton’s pantsuits, Michelle Obama’s biceps or Donald Trump’s cloud of hair.

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Large-scale replicas of 19th-century Currier & Ives political cartoons, printed on bold, color-blocked backdrops, adorn the walls, the colors referencing Hollywood villains and superheroes — suggestive of the duality with which we view presidential candidates.

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A large, arcing photograph of the Oval Office dominates one-half of the gallery, punctuated in the middle by Lethal Weapon, a shiny, cylindrical sculpture with a lone hole in its surface. Standing in front of this piece places the viewer in direct relationship to the desk of the president, while staring into the hole reveals a gun hidden within the cylinder’s hollow interior, the barrel pointed directly at the viewer’s face.



Artist Kathryn Andrews is photographed at the “Run for President” exhibition in a reflection of *Die Another Day*, 2013, polished stainless steel, glass, brass and certified prop with Oval Office during the Reagan Administration, The White House, 1981-89, reflected in the background. (Nan Coulter/Special Contributor)

Yet it is two quieter pieces that most poignantly underscore the myth of the American presidency. Gift Cart features a stainless-steel cart adorned with festively wrapped gifts rented from a Hollywood prop shop. October 16 is a chrome-plated gate strung with helium balloons, which are replaced annually and left to deflate over time. Both are indicative of the facade of the presidency, a vaulted position occupied by a never-ending string of predecessors and successors, each one playing the role for a specific amount of time.

Andrews notes, “Seeing the works in person is important. It gives way to really considering how material forms, such as the balloons in October 16, do things like cyclically inflate and rot, not unlike the idealism surrounding new leaders and what comes to pass.”