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Utah Museum of Contemporary Art tackles politics, immigration in new exhibits

By Scotti Hill
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"American Hobo" by Kathryn Andrews will be on display at the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art as part of the exhibit "Ideologue" through July 23.
Fredrik Nilsen, David Kordansky Gallery

SALT LAKE CITY — In an election year, art's propensity to challenge and foster intellectual discussion is as important as ever, and the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art reflects this. On Friday, the museum unveiled a new roster of exhibitions that address such relevant and timely issues as immigration, terrorism and economic inequality.

"As a curator, I have always been interested in and motivated by sociopolitical issues," said Rebecca Maksym, curator of exhibitions for UMOCA.

Maksym has amassed a reputation for engineering shows that examine the imperative social and political questions of the 21st century; last year's "Panopticon: Visibility, Data and the Monitoring Gaze" highlighted the psychological nuances of America's post-9/11 existence.

Twice a year, the museum closes for two weeks as workers install new exhibitions in each of its galleries. The reveal of the exhibits serves as the culmination of months of hard work and introduces members of the public to new artists and topics they are unlikely to encounter anywhere else in Utah.

Visitors will encounter plenty of intriguing and complex artworks in the museum's newest exhibitions.

Kathryn Andrews' series of brightly colored "American Hobo" images are reminiscent of pop art's fascination with popular culture and consumerism, yet they contain a decidedly darker connotation. Whereas Warhol's silkscreens relished in the artificial beauty of celebrities, Andrews' hobos contain uncomfortable implications of the poverty and inequity of today. The bright, synthetic colors overlaying images of clowns and homeless people capture a cynical iteration of the American dream. Visitors can detect similar critiques and inquiries regarding contemporary American politics in the work of other artists in the exhibition.