

Uyeda, Gan, "Kathryn Andrews: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago," *Frieze*, No. 178, April 2016, p. 157

USA

Kathryn Andrews

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO

There is a cruel subtext to the title 'Run for President', Kathryn Andrews's show at MCA Chicago, a title that might, at first, sound like a call for radically democratic political participation. The artist's first solo museum exhibition in the US, however, provides a stark reminder that political access is contingent on cultural and economic capital: not everyone, it seems, can run for President of the United States.

Andrews's motley cast of characters includes Jason 'Wee Man' Acuña, Bozo the Clown, Captain Crook, Sammy Davis Jr., the Joker, Richard Nixon, Zachary Taylor and the lethal weapon from *Lethal Weapon* (1987) (the gun, that is – not Mel Gibson). These figures appear either in two-storey-tall, black and white photographs mounted on massive curving walls or are referenced by Hollywood props embedded in the works on view. *Coming to America (Filet-O-Fish)* (2013), for instance, consists of a McDonald's playground mascot whose base supports two stainless-steel tubes capped with coins bearing the regal profile of Eddie Murphy from the eponymous 1988 film. The sculpture suggests an intermingling of Benjaminian aura, brand power and fame, neatly eliding Hollywood's celebrity touch and the legitimizing power of art institutions.

Andrews's sculptures are hydras, with heads pointing in many different directions. There are hobos and candy wrappers, gifts and balloons, costumes and props, archival photographs and shiny surfaces. The works' diverse cultural, political and historical references tend to frustrate attempts to survey them thematically. As a result, Andrews and curator Julie Rodrigues Widholm rely on the architecturally-scaled photographs to evoke the show's titular aspirations towards the White House. These images include shots of Nancy Reagan sitting on Mr. T's lap, Bozo the Clown's 1984 marketing stunt presidential campaign and Richard Nixon posing with Sammy Davis Jr. – linking Andrews's visually chaotic works to the circus of presidential politics.

An effective if altogether different current in the show is Andrews's play with legal agreements. Past projects include the successful negotiation of image licensing rights

to depict Bozo the Clown without his trademark red hair and, here, Andrews has obtained official certification of her film props' authenticity, allowing them to function as true silver-screen fetishes. For the sculpture *Gift Cart* (2011), the artist assembled a cartload of well-worn, wrapped gift boxes, all rented from a prop house in Los Angeles. At its core, the work is a transferable, 99-year, flat-rate rental agreement – a parody of the systems that determine the economic value and ownership of images.

As with *Gift Cart*, Andrews's *October 16, 2012* (2012), places its owner under an unusual contractual obligation. Brightly coloured rubber and mylar balloons hover, tethered to a wall-mounted, rectangular stainless-steel grate, as if marking the location of a suburban child's birthday party. The work is accompanied by guidelines stipulating that each year, on the date of its creation, the sculpture's 'birthday' must somehow be celebrated; if the owner desires, they may affix new balloons. The gesture infantilizes the otherwise austere grate, critiquing the sober self-importance of minimalism: when was the last time you sang 'Happy Birthday' to a Donald Judd?

Gathering these rowdy pieces together under the thematic canopy of presidential politics – currently the centre of a media frenzy in the run up to the US election – is a convenient and timely, if somewhat arbitrary, way to survey Andrews's recent work. Standing between a 12-metre Richard Nixon and a bunch of Bozo the Clowns, it's hard not to think of a certain clown-like, media-hungry candidate who currently dominates Republican primary polls. Donald Trump's supporters believe him to be insulated from corrupt party politics though, of course, no candidate can exist outside the modern celebrity-campaign-industrial complex. This is the cruelty of Andrews's urging us to 'run for president': without pockets full of cash and celebrity, boy, howdy, good luck.

GAN UYEDA

4
Kathryn Andrews
Hobo (The Candidates), 2014, ink
on paper and Perspex, aluminium,
paint and mixed media,
111 x 94 x 6 cm

