

Rodrigues Widholm, Julie, "Run For President!," *Kathryn Andrews: Run for President*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, 2015, pp. 17-49

Run for President!
Julie Rodrigues Widholm

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On May 1, 1984, Bozo the Clown launched his campaign for President of the United States. Earlier that day, Bozo-creator Larry Harmon appeared on *Today* explaining that he went into children's television to become a "doctor of humor, love, peace, and understanding in this world" instead of going to medical school.¹ That afternoon, Harmon, dressed as Bozo in full makeup and costume, arrived at Columbia University in a 1977 Fleetwood Cadillac stretch limo accompanied by "secret service" men wearing suits and red clown noses (fig. 1). The college punk band Nasty Bozos '84 hosted the event and performed during Bozo's announcement. Bozo's campaign for office was part critique of then incumbent Ronald Reagan, part marketing ploy, and part performance art.

A large-scale black-and-white documentary photograph of Bozo's political/marketing campaign greets viewers in *Kathryn Andrews: Run for President*. Andrews situates her fastidious sculptures and wall-based objects against a conceptual and pictorial backdrop of American presidential elections, both real and fictional. A meditation on how a politician, celebrity, artist, or everyday Jane assumes positions of authority in this country, this exhibition asks: How do image producers—such as artists, corporations, Hollywood studios, and politicians who mirror and shape social values at large—employ visual cues and tools to elicit desire for their goods? Andrews calls attention to our power, or lack of power, to resist such forces. In doing so, she also considers how we gain authority ourselves in light of persistent divides along gender, race, and economic lines.

- 1 Larry Harmon, as Bozo the Clown, announces his candidacy for president of the United States, March 1, 1984, Washington, DC



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2 Bozo the Clown Bop Bag

The exhibition is divided into sections that chart the rise and fall of those attempting to obtain power in a democracy. The first section considers the candidates: Who runs for office and why? The second section explores the strategies used in campaigns to entice voters. How does recognition, i.e. celebrity, play into our decisions as voters, consumers, and art viewers? Next, the exhibition addresses how those sitting in office use their positions of authority and how they affect their constituents. And finally, the end of the term arrives—a moment of deflation, scandal, or occasionally, an assassination—which begins the cycle again.

The exhibition is not only about politics but how artists gain authority with their work and how some styles, such as Andy Warhol's pop art or Donald Judd's minimalism, have become authoritative brands in their own right. Andrews's sculptures, installations, and performances highlight this phenomenon in the art historical canon and star-obsessed art market by employing the aesthetics of pop art, minimalism, and conceptualism as readymades. Extending a long-held interest in the political, which hails from her time studying documentary photography and social history at Duke University, Andrews then reinscribes these art-brands with new narratives of gender, class, and race. This in turn raises questions about participation (in the canon, in the market, in politics) related to authority, authorship, and inclusion.

The Candidates

Somewhat facetiously, Andrews responds to the question of what qualities a viable candidate must possess and why with three sculptures: blue, black, and pink variations of "Bozo"™ "The World's Most Famous Clown" Bop Bag with Occasional Performance (2013; pls. 6–8) set against the black-and-white photomural of Bozo's campaign rally and on a long stretch of red carpet. These cylindrical steel sculptures, from a series of five, are covered in automotive vinyl wraps bearing Bozo's image from a toy that was originally produced in the 1960s and is currently produced by Warm Fuzzy Toys (fig. 2). But here the artist has run the trademarked red, white, and blue Bozo through a rainbow filter so that he appears in black, white, pink, blue, and yellow. Inverted custom chrome-plated steel stools top each "bop bag" sculpture, crowning the candy-colored cartoon character. Andrews requested permission to officially license the Bozo Bop Bag, an inflatable toy punching bag with Bozo's iconic red hair and squeezable red nose, and was allowed to reproduce the

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5 Detail of Kathryn Andrews, *Homer with Bozo Hair*, 2014–15

knowingly plays into the bling factor that attracts viewers to shiny reflective objects, like voters to an attractive candidate with perfect teeth and a full head of hair.

Andrews uses familiar subjects—birthdays, candles, balloons, and wrapping paper—to explore images that already carry narratives about basic human experience, life and death, and joy and sadness.³ She began to use clowns as an extension of this type of celebratory imagery, recognizing that they occupy a unique position within popular culture because of their ability to paradoxically elicit joy, fear, and loathing. It is precisely this ambiguity that Andrews employs to suggest the darker, more complicated side of seemingly innocuous imagery.

The "occasional performance" in these objects' titles refers to live performances in or near the sculptures that vary with each exhibition. In this exhibition, stand-up comedians—our culture's self-deprecating clowns without makeup, our most extreme happy-sad characters—are slated to address issues of race, class, and gender with biting humor. The sculptures were designed to be a site for a performance. The comedians complete the sculpture by standing in for Bozo to make audiences laugh. Andrews humorously posits the possibility of candidates using extreme jokes peppered with raw, often painful truths to announce their positions on political issues.⁴

These performances not only merge humor and politics but also allude to a history of comedians as presidential candidates. For example, Dick Gregory, an African American comedian from Chicago, ran for president as a write-in candidate in 1968 to bring attention to race in politics and received about 47,000 votes.⁵ In 2012 comedian Roseanne Barr, who was a candidate for the Peace and Freedom Party, came in sixth place with about 67,000 votes.⁶

Andrews's use of the clown is riddled with the subtext of the pathetic or inept male figure: the punching bag (quite literally in Bozo's case) who appears to undermine notions of masculinity and authority. By depicting Bozo without his iconic red hair, Andrews denudes him of his most recognizable signifier. As a result, he becomes bald, a sign of waning masculinity for some men. As part of her licensing agreement, Andrews agreed to use Bozo's red hair by itself in another artwork. *Homer with Bozo Hair* (2014–15; fig. 5) places Bozo's hair on an animation still of Homer Simpson as the hypermasculine Hulk, from an episode about his ongoing anger issues. This fixation on men's hair is just one example of a visible characteristic that in fact has no bearing on qualifications or intelligence. Are candidates with a full head of

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8 Film poster of *The Graduate*, 1967

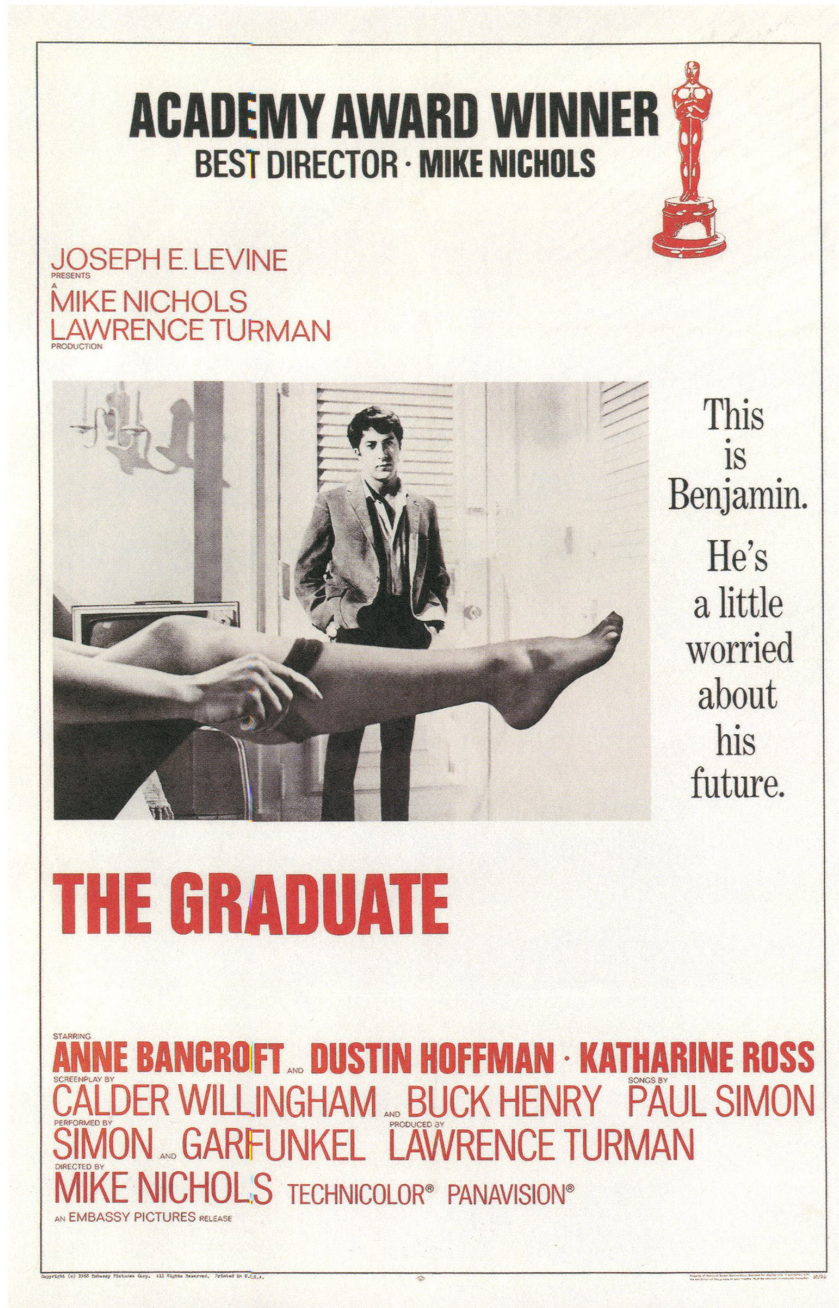
work and embraces the art of adjacencies and assemblages to generate new meanings.

Within the exhibition, the apposition of Andrews's sculptures with black-and-white images from popular culture reveals rhizomatic cultural connections that are both humorous and critical. Andrews includes images from sources such as magazines, newspapers, television, the internet, and nineteenth-century lithographs, collapsing these categories into a totalizing archive whereby an erasure of the original medium occurs. The "original" becomes insignificant, although the images are printed on a large enough scale to cover an entire exhibition wall, dwarfing the viewer and approximating the power they hold over our collective imagination. It also highlights how images function and circulate outside of their original contexts.

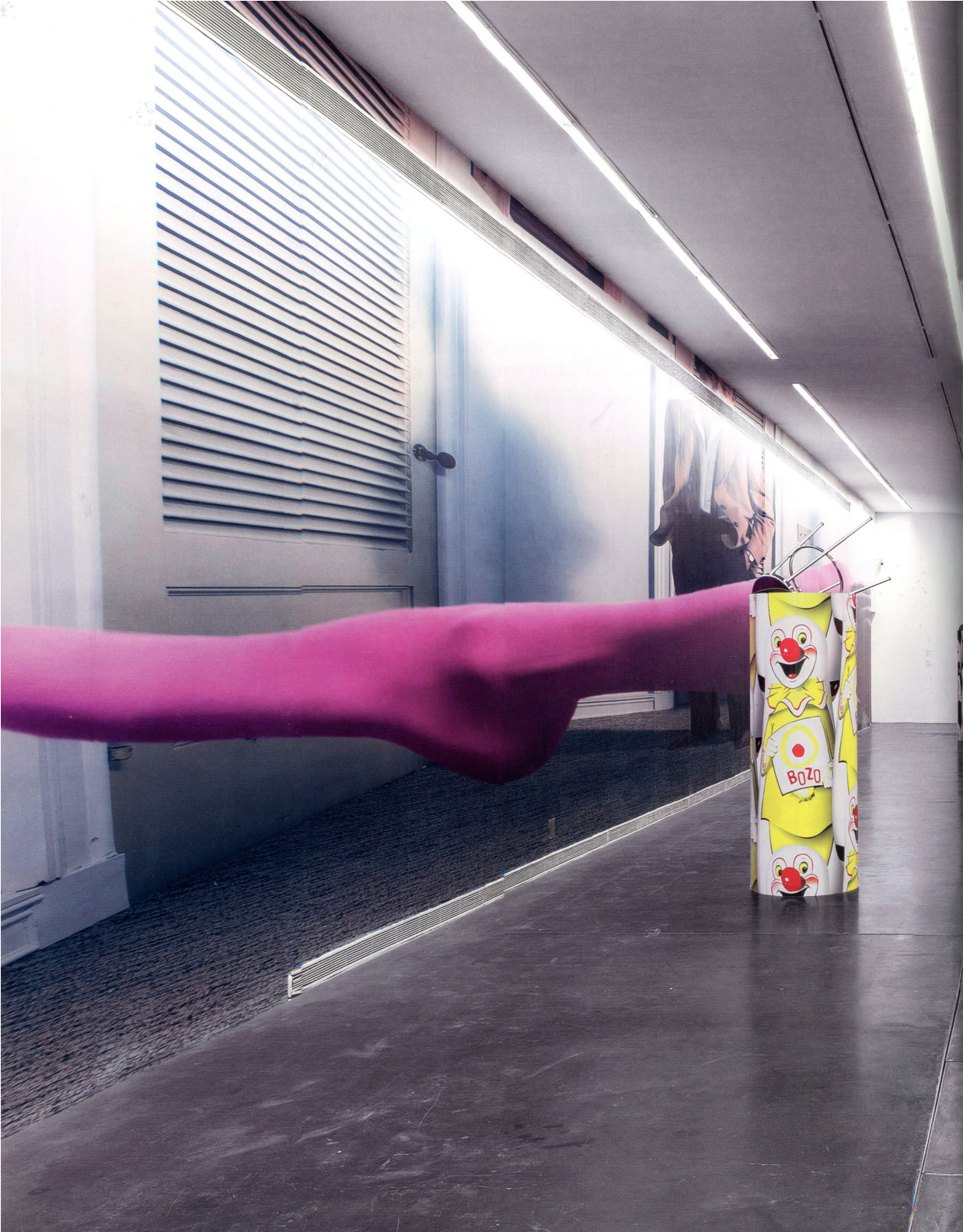
Another important legacy of Kelley's work, which connects directly to Andrews's practice and many others of her generation, is the exploration of how images exert influence beyond the author's intent, i.e., how meaning is the sum of context plus the viewer's personal experience. This exhibition creates a context for the works that reveals how interpretation can change in different settings and how no meaning is fixed. Bozo's own campaign for president was a marketing tool, and Andrews uses a documentary image of that event to connect the subject of a campaign to the realm of advertising, in which Andrews presents Bozo's image as a persona for consumption. In this context, the Bozo sculptures absorb meaning from their proximity to that image. When Andrews first showed the Bozo sculptures, however, she constructed a very different presentation. The works were shown in a group exhibition of artists from Los Angeles at the Ullens Center in Beijing, China (fig. 9). There, the artist lined the Bozo sculptures along a narrow gallery between two enormous photomurals depicting the artist's restaging of the moment when Dustin Hoffman stares at Anne Bancroft's outstretched leg in the 1967 film *The Graduate* and famously asks "Mrs. Robinson, you're trying to seduce me, aren't you?" (fig. 8). The Ullens Center presentation suggested an overpowering female sexuality and insecure masculinity represented by Bozo without his wig on a cylindrical (phallic) form in line with the fictional Mrs. Robinson's crotch. In contrast, in the MCA exhibition, the juxtaposition of these three sculptures against the photomural of Bozo running for president offers a drastically different semantic reading of the work.

For three new paintings created for the exhibition, Andrews turned to nineteenth-century popular culture: *WEE MAN FOR PRESIDENT aka Historical Campaign Poster Painting No. 1 (The Bird to Bet On)* (2015;

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- 9 Installation view of Kathryn Andrews, *The Los Angeles Project*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China, 2014
10 Currier and Ives, *The Bird to Bet On*, c. 1880



pl. 13) and *THE JOKER FOR PRESIDENT* aka *Historical Campaign Poster Painting No. 4 (An Available Candidate)* (2015; pl.14). Both consider historical discussions about political candidates in nineteenth-century popular culture by appropriating two black-and-white images from printmakers Nathaniel Currier and James Merritt Ives, known as Currier and Ives.

The widespread distribution of Currier and Ives prints dovetails with Andrews's interest in mass media and popular accessibility, as well as printmaking as an artistic medium. Currier and Ives launched the first mass-produced news images with their "cheap and popular prints." Taking advantage of the new post office system, they disseminated three pictures a week of breaking news, idyllic domestic life, civil war, and politics. Currier and Ives put art—though generally not considered fine art—in the hands of ordinary Americans. Their hand-colored lithographs were the first affordable color images, a seemingly democratic art market in stark contrast to the contemporary art market for the one percent. Like today's newspapers, Currier and Ives's prolific images both reflected and created a national identity and opened the door to news as entertainment.⁷

Andrews's *WEE MAN FOR PRESIDENT* aka *Historical Campaign Poster Painting No. 1 (The Bird to Bet On)* reproduces a Currier and Ives

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- 11 Promotional photo of Jason Acuña, aka Wee Man, from *Jackass: The Movie*, 2002



caricature of 1880 presidential candidate General W. S. Hancock as a gamecock (fig. 10).⁸ Playing on his name, Andrews draws a connection between the bloodlust sport of cockfighting and candidates' desire to win, which is satirized for being stronger than the desire to serve the greater good. Already in 1880, this parody presented the campaign as entertainment, like a wrestling match that glorifies male aggression. Andrews transformed this image into its black-and-white negative and overlaid a band of bright yellow paint on the left with a touch of blue on the tail feather. On the right side, Andrews inserted a red, white, and blue Captain America costume worn by *Jackass* character Wee Man (fig. 11). Wee Man, a professional skater and stuntman who has a form of dwarfism, represents a subversive masculinity and conjures the other *Jackass* characters, whose juvenile male stunts are meant to prove how tough and rebellious they are. On the other hand, the Captain America costume refers to a mythic superhero who represents American nationalism, patriotism, and heroism.

THE JOKER FOR PRESIDENT aka Historical Campaign Poster Painting No. 4 (An Available Candidate) depicts an 1848 Currier and Ives print of either General Zachary Taylor or Winfield Scott sitting atop a pyramid of skulls while holding a blood-stained sword (Stiles, fig. 10). Both generals led violent Mexican War campaigns. Taylor won the Whig nomination and presidency in 1848. This painting intimates the cost of

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12 Detail of Kathryn Andrews, *Coming to America (Filet-O-Fish)*, 2013 (pl. 4)

those perched in positions of power and, like the critique of the Whigs' choice of candidate in 1848, is a scathing comment on the suffering, death, and destruction meted out by political leaders today. The blue violet silk screen against a field of yellow on the left side of the painting adjoins the relief edge of the white silk screen on top of a magenta background on the right and harkens to Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series (1962–63) in which the iconic pop artist addresses civil rights and the death penalty. In formal terms, Andrews's work demonstrates how color, surface, and entertainment can capture a viewer's attention but also obscure sinister undertones or violent realities. It also contains a certified costume of Jack Nicholson's character The Joker from *Batman* (1989), invoking a psychopathic villain whose sadistic grin hides evil.

The Campaign

Andrews explores the complexities of constructing one's brand during campaigns—and, by extension, in society at large—in a black-and-white photomural of Sammy Davis Jr. and Richard Nixon at a 1973 White House gala for returned POWs. Davis had also publicly hugged Nixon at a campaign rally in Miami, causing a backlash for both of them. Davis was already disparaged for his short-lived marriage to a white woman in the 1960s and was also ridiculed for supporting a Republican, while Nixon was criticized for using a black celebrity for blatant political reasons when he was not known for caring much about black voters. Sammy Davis Jr. was connected to the presidency not only for his photo-op with Nixon, but also for his 1933 performance, at age seven, in a film called *Rufus Jones for President*.⁹ In this short musical satire starring Ethel Waters, Sammy Davis Jr.'s character, Rufus Jones, is elected president of the United States, only to find out he was only dreaming.

In *Coming to America (Filet-O-Fish)* (2013; pl. 4), Andrews combines a McDonald's playground sculpture of trademarked pirate character Captain Crook (who stole Filet-O-Fish sandwiches much like the Hamburgler stole hamburgers) with two silver coins inserted into the ends of stainless steel tubes (fig. 12). The coins are props from the 1988 comedy *Coming to America* and bear the likeness of Eddie Murphy's character Prince Akeem of Zamunda. Pirates and doubloons, or coins, naturally go together, but the work also directly connects McDonald's and McDowell's, the fictional fast-food restaurant where

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13 Detail of Kathryn Andrews, *THE JOKER FOR PRESIDENT aka Historical Campaign Poster Painting No. 4 (An Available Candidate)*, 2015 (pl. 14)

Prince Akeem finally finds his (working-class) wife. This sculpture addresses complex, interrelated issues of class, displacement, and the American Dream, along with the promise and impossibility of individual mobility as both a real and unattainable phenomenon. The work also obliquely references Ronald McDonald, the iconic clown of the McDonald's empire, thereby extending the cast of simultaneously humorous and frightening clowns that are associated with American culture.

Situated near the Nixon/Sammy Davis Jr. image, the sculpture of Captain Crook linguistically alludes to Nixon's famous 1973 denial of his involvement in the Watergate cover-up scandal: "I'm not a crook." Considering villains such as Batman's Joker or Captain Crook, or even Nixon within a campaign context, begs the question: How will we know if a candidate is trustworthy? How does a campaign dupe us, for lack of a better phrase, into believing in a candidate's good will? And at what point do candidates cross the line from savvy image-producers to masters of manipulations and lies?

Andrews's *Die Another Day* (2013; pl. 5) addresses the construction of individual identity, or perhaps even the "acting" involved in a campaign, with a large dressing-room mirror framing a prop bullet from the James Bond film. This work literally reflects viewers and asks us to consider how we construct our own image. At the same time, it suggests the small deaths that occur each day in the presentation of self to others. Further, the film *Die Another Day* is replete with duplicitous imposters. This reference raises ongoing questions about truth and fiction in Andrews's work.

The official Hollywood prop itself raises questions about the value given to celebrities and the objects they have worn or touched.¹⁰ In her works, Andrews has used Brad Pitt's T-shirt from *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, Ashton Kutcher's ring from *The Killers*, and Jack Nicholson's Joker costume from *Batman* (fig. 13), among others. These objects become imbued with the imprint or trace of the celebrity's physical being, the very thing that is so far removed when our entire relationship to celebrities is built on the flattened images that give them value through ubiquitous familiarity. In most contexts, a T-shirt is devalued when it is worn, not highly coveted. Yet when the magic authority of celebrity takes hold, Eminem's knit cap from *8 Mile* sells for \$4,500 on eBay!

In addition to the value—some may say absurd value—that is given to

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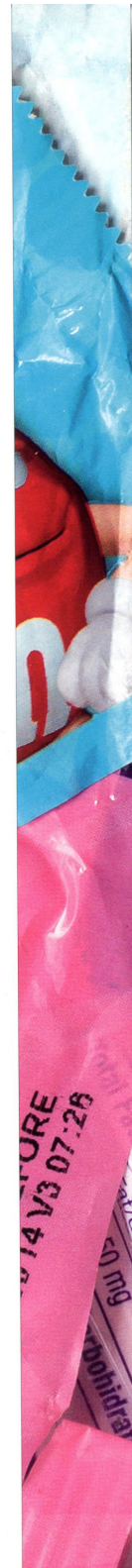


- 14 First Lady Nancy Reagan sits on Mr. T's lap, December 23, 1983, the White House

objects that celebrities have worn or touched as talismans of their charisma, the use of celebrity film props brings to mind Walter Benjamin's steadfast notion of the "aura" of original works of art in an age of mechanical reproduction. The aura that is created around fame and celebrity translates to value for its own sake. Being famous doesn't generally correlate to higher intelligence or skill (if the last twenty years of reality TV are any indication), so why do we give authority and value to those simply because of their fame? A celebrity's perceived value increases with the incessant reproduction of his or her image via media. This repetition instills a sense of familiarity that creates an additional demand for physical objects touched by the celebrity, thereby imbuing them with an aura of exalted value and/or authority. How does this aura, in turn, help celebrities rise to political power? What juju made former actor Ronald Reagan governor of California and then two-term US president? What characteristics caused Arnold Schwarzenegger, known more widely as his film character The Terminator, to become elected governor of California? Would Donald Trump be leading GOP polls if he wasn't a celebrity? Conversely, politicians and other image makers capitalize on this phenomenon by asking celebrities to lend their image to a cause. Nixon no doubt hoped to gain some of the black vote with the endorsement of Sammy Davis Jr. and his fans.

According to University of Chicago anthropologist William Mazzarella, branding is "to own and organize charisma."¹¹ Both John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton have been described as highly charismatic presidents. Many celebrities (and artists) possess magnetic charm that feeds into their assumption of authority. Sociologist Max Weber described charisma as one of three pure types of authority, along with the legal-rational and traditional. His theory acknowledges that these forms can shift and mix based on social contexts; it also notably examines the interactions between leaders and followers, rather than leaders alone.

The crossover of celebrity, politics, and self-branding is further embodied in the exhibition by a large photomural of Nancy Reagan sitting on Mr. T's lap in the White House (fig. 14). As part of her "Just Say No" campaign, Nancy Reagan invited Mr. T to dress as Santa Claus to send a message to kids to say no to drugs and stay in school. In a very meta act of celebrity marketing and merchandising, Mr. T gave Nancy Reagan a Mr. T doll.¹² Through celebrity, Mr. T, born Laurence Tureaud, one of twelve children who grew up poor on Chicago's South Side during the civil unrest of the 1960s, made his way from the



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15 Detail of Kathryn Andrews, *Tropical Hobo*, 2014 (pl. 10)

Robert Taylor housing projects to the White House.

Andrews's *Gift Cart* (2011; pl. 2) brings the Christmas presents at the feet of Mr. T's Santa Claus into three dimensions with several colorfully wrapped boxes that show the wear and tear of their former use as studio props. The frayed boxes undermine the expectation that gifts should be perfect, while the fact that the props are rented further shifts the normal infrastructure of art making and buying. Whoever buys the work assumes the ninety-nine-year rental agreement for a flat fee. The custom-made stainless steel cart, like Andrews's work in general, is essentially a container for other things, transporting them from one location, or meaning, to the next. Yet, in the context of *Run for President*, *Gift Cart* also becomes symbolic of the hollow nature of many seductive campaign promises.

The last work in this section of the exhibition, *SPIDER-MAN FOR PRESIDENT aka Historical Campaign Poster Painting No. 5 (Backed to Win)* (2015), appropriates a Currier and Ives image of Benjamin Harrison soaring to victory on the back of an eagle flying above the White House while holding a scroll that reads "Republican nomination."¹³ A costume from a popular film is embedded—as in many of Andrews's works—here, in this case Tobey McGuire's *Spiderman* (2002) wrestling outfit. Although the subjects of masculinity and physical competition are present in this work, as they are in others in the series, Andrews was most interested in how these two figures relied on nonhuman entities to become invincible: Peter Parker, the orphan underdog, is bitten by an irradiated spider and becomes the superhero Spiderman, and Harrison rides a bald eagle, the enduring animal symbol of American freedom, to victory. This reliance on a mysterious animalistic force recalls Max Weber's notion of charisma as a supernatural or superhuman quality that leads to one's assumption of authority and power.

11 Office

In the words of Peter Parker's Uncle Ben, "With great power, comes great responsibility." Once a candidate is elected, the public begins to scrutinize how he or she will exert power. A larger-than-life black-and-white photomural of the Oval Office (fig. 18) mounted on a curved wall provides a backdrop for Andrews's *Lethal Weapon* (2012; pl. 13), a stainless steel cylinder sculpture. Upon close inspection, a dark hole cut out on the side reveals the barrel of a gun directed at the viewer.¹⁴ The prop gun from the 1987 film *Lethal Weapon* used in the artwork

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16 President Richard Nixon meets Elvis Presley in the Oval Office, December 21, 1970



is ironically no longer a lethal weapon because it has been decommissioned by Andrews, who was required to become a registered gun owner in the state of California to complete its purchase. Mel Gibson's character in the film is considered a lethal weapon, and within the visual context of the Oval Office, the work asks how those in power may also purport violence through policies and legislation. Take for example gun policy, a particularly divisive issue in the United States today. In 1970, Elvis Presley was the first civilian to bring a handgun into the Oval Office, with Richard Nixon's permission.¹⁵ The photograph of them together on this occasion is one of the most requested images from the National Archives (fig. 16).

Within the MCA galleries, works from Andrews's *Hobo* series hang across from the Oval Office photomural, standing in for the populace or constituents directly affected by presidential policies. Typically identified as down-and-out transients seeking a better life, the hobos represent all US residents who aspire to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.¹⁶ In addition, each of these works symbolizes one or more pressing social problems, such as civil rights abuse, alcoholism, industrial food production, pollution, diabetes, or obesity. *Tropical Hobo* (2014; pl. 10), for instance, with its garish pink and blue palette, suggests how certain colors have entrenched gender associations and can be used to evoke specific ideas, such as innocuous sweetness. Andrews included candy wrappers to evoke a tropical mood while simultaneously pointing to the epidemic of obesity and processed food

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17 Detail of Kathryn Andrews, *American Hobo*, 2014

in this country, stemming in part from federal subsidies to the corn and soy industries. The top register is filled with Tropical Chewy Lemonheads, Coconut Water, and Tropical Typhoon Mike and Ike's—transitioning from pink on the left to blue on the right, like an escapist fantasy sunset at the beach (fig. 15).

Hobo (The Candidates) (2014; pl. 11) includes campaign buttons that match each colorful stripe in a gay pride flag: "Get America Moving Again Carter in '76"; a Dukakis button from the 1988 Democratic National Convention; and Al Gore's 2000 campaign button with his face alongside those of Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln on Mt. Rushmore. The red, white, and blue color scheme in *Hobo (Santa's Helper No. 2)* (2014; pl. 12) evokes the American flag and American politics. The upper register is made with crushed Budweiser beer cans and red, white, and blue Christmas lights. (Does beer help Santa get through his long nights? Will Santa's beer belly fit through the White House chimney?) *Hobo (Re-elect the President)* (2014; pl. 9) has a multicolor striped background and depicts an African American hobo figure. The gay pride flag is folded in the register above with the following buttons: "Year of the Woman '92," "I Love Mikelly's," "A Budweiser in Every Refrigerator," "No More Burnt Cookies! Ask Me Why," and "Rock and Rollers for Carter." These are not necessarily campaign buttons but pins that support a cause or brand. Andrews may have included the enigmatic Mikelly's button, whose source is unclear, in homage to Mike Kelley, who unexpectedly died in 2012.

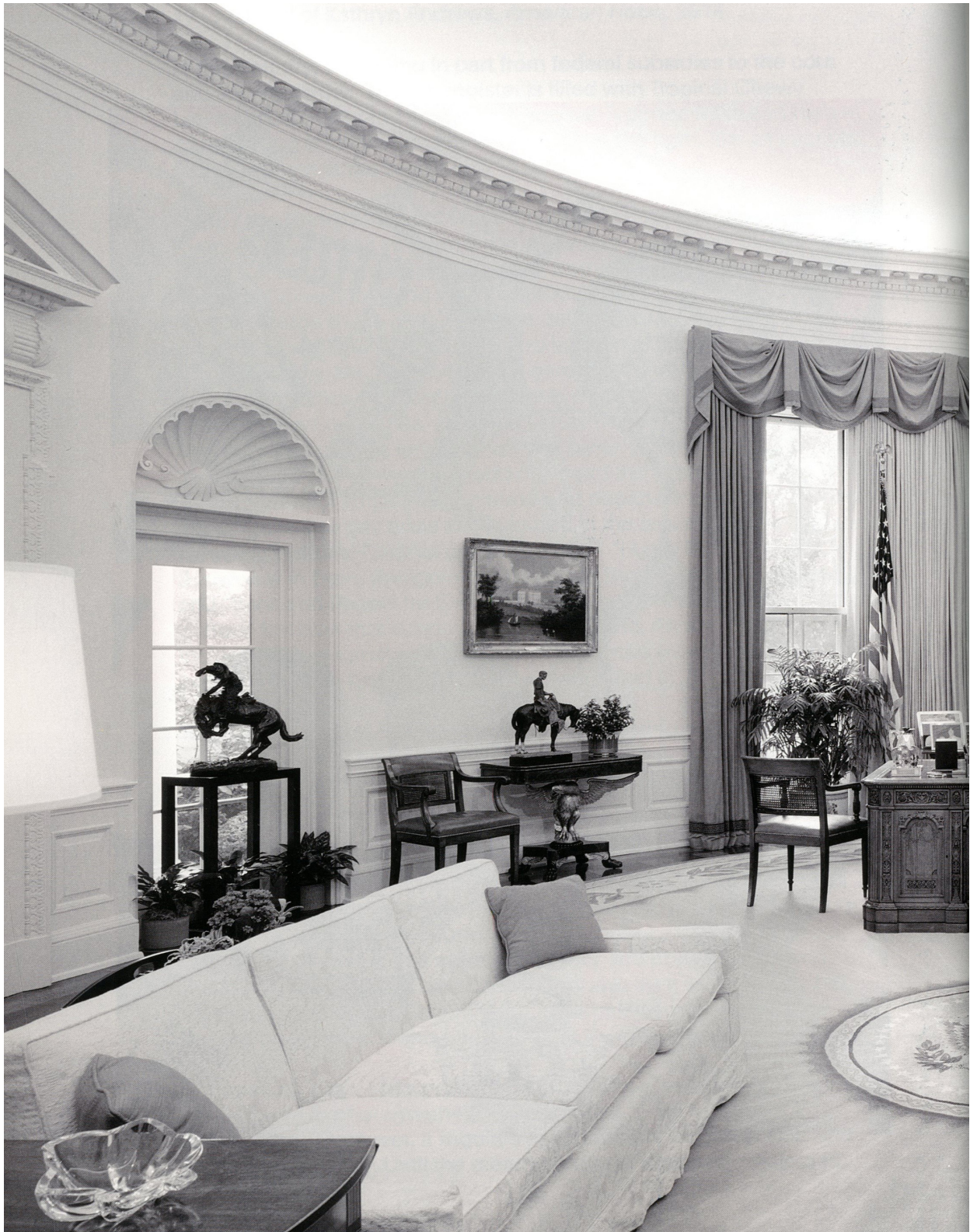
To make the works, Andrews first put out a casting call for older men. After researching historical images of hobos and clowns and working with a stylist, she gathered a cache of costumes for the photo shoot. One image from each shoot was then silk-screened onto a sheet of Plexiglas in various shades of muted brown, gray, black, and blue, with halftone dots visible as a sign of the printing process. Andrews populated the top section of the custom-designed frames that surround the portraits with artist-fabricated and found objects, such as flags, campaign buttons (fig. 17), beer cans, lottery tickets, and candy wrappers that resonate visually and conceptually with the images and striped backdrops. Andrews then worked with Jeff Wasserman, a former Gemini G.E.L. printmaker, to silk-screen the striped backgrounds and photographic images onto the Plexiglas.

Printmaking plays an important role in Andrews's work: it relates to her background in photography and her interest in the removal of the artist's hand. Moreover, it requires collaboration, technical skill, and material specificity. Until the recent deluge of digital technologies,

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18 The Oval Office during the Reagan administration

printmaking dominated mass media. It is also undeservedly low on the hierarchy of art practices for its perceived ease of reproduction and rejection of the unique object. Its reproducibility diminishes its market value. I suspect Andrews is interested in it also for its status as a second-class material.

The End of Term

Every four years the US presidential term ends, and a new election cycle begins. The end of term may be a moment of celebration, or deflation, or it may be brought about prematurely through assassination, a fate that ended the presidencies of Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, and JFK and threatened to end those of Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan among others. The forces that propel a figure into a position of authority are often equal to the forces that bring him or her down, and the media's role in capitalizing on fame and shame is particularly powerful.

The final work in the exhibition, *October 16* (2012; pl. 1), is a metaphor for this cyclical and at times fleeting quality of authority. Helium-filled balloons in various states of deflation are attached to a wall-mounted gate made of chrome-plated steel. One of a series of four similar works, *January 23*, *March 30*, and *December 24*, each with its own "birthdate," Andrews invites the work's owner to participate in its authorship with a loose set of accompanying guidelines:

THE WORK BEGAN IN THE YEAR THAT IT WAS MADE ON THE DATE OF ITS TITLE
BALLOONS WERE ADDED TO THE WORK ON THAT DATE
ONCE A YEAR THE WORK HAS A BIRTHDAY
ON THIS DATE THE OWNER MAY LEAVE THE WORK AS IS
THE OWNER MAY ADD NEW BALLOONS
THE OWNER MAY REPLACE THE ORIGINAL BALLOONS
NEW BALLOONS MAY OR MAY NOT RESEMBLE THE ORIGINALS
THE OWNER MAY ACKNOWLEDGE THE WORK DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT YEARS
THE OWNER MAY ALLOW A THIRD PARTY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE WORK
ACKNOWLEDGMENT MAY TAKE A FORM NOT MENTIONED HERE

In perhaps the most democratic work in the exhibition, aesthetic authority in the form of decision making is shared.

Sociologist Max Weber stated that power is "the chance of a man, or a number of men, to realize their own will in communal action, even against the resistance of others" and that the basis from which such



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power can be exercised may vary considerably according to the social context.¹⁷ The United States took a significant step away from its stained history of slavery and discrimination in 2008 when a majority of voters chose Barack Obama. When the context in this country shifted, the outcome changed, and a landscape of new possibilities opened up for this generation's Rufus Joneses. Andrews recognized that this exhibition occurs during President Barack Obama's last year in office and that it takes place in the president's adopted hometown of Chicago, as she so brilliantly expands how and what we see.

Andrews's conceit for this exhibition argues that the authority of images and their meanings always rely upon their context and what we, as viewers, bring to the encounter. In all areas of life, Andrews asks: Who is participating in this exchange of power and how? Who is voting? Who is visiting museums? Can we be critically aware of how advertisers and other image producers lure us to charismatic objects, and can we resist? Andrews shows us the consequences of fixed meanings. Or, rather, she shows us the pleasure of not seeing them as fixed and lobbies for a less rigid ownership of meaning. With humor and levity, Andrews intertwines popular culture and fine art on equal democratic footing as agents of meaning. Her work compels us to imagine unexpected disruptions of social hierarchies, like Mr. T and Nancy Reagan hanging out at the White House, or a McDonald's playground sculpture on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, or perhaps even the first American female president!

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Notes

- 1 Harmon, Larry, interview by Bryant Gumbel, *Today*, NBC, May 1, 1984.
- 2 For more information, see Robin Clark, ed., *Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface* (Berkeley: University of California Press, and San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2011).
- 3 Email to author, May 26, 2015.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Voting statistics from nytimes.com/2009/03/14/theater/14greg.html?pagewanted=all. See also Dick Gregory, *Write Me In* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).
- 6 Voting statistics from fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/federalelections2012.pdf.
- 7 Mary Steele, *Currier & Ives: Perspectives on America*, DVD video, narrated by Scott Simon (Springfield, MA: WGBY-TV, 2008).
- 8 A celebrated general in the Union Army who defeated the Confederates at the Battle of Gettysburg.
- 9 A twenty-one-minute short film from *Broadway Brevities*, a series of two-reel short films produced by Warner Brothers between 1931 and 1943.
- 10 Andrews draws a parallel line of questioning related to the value of artworks, which is equally affected by celebrity, brand, and the perception of value around the artist's hand. Market value continues to dominate the conversation around contemporary art, as works sold at auction consistently break records. In May 2015 Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (Version 'O')* (1955) sold for the highest price of a single painting: \$179 million. The contemporary art auction and celebrity prop market have now merged. The items offered in Bidoun's 2015 benefit auction on Paddle8 included: Cindy Sherman's eyeliner, Hal Foster's breath mints, Lawrence Wiener's gold tooth, Tala Madani's body lotion, Yto Barrada's third grade report card, Wade Guyton's Nikes, Jeremy Deller's iPod, Laura Owens's bus pass, and Shirin Neshat's kohl, among other items; bidoun.org.
- 11 Conversation with the author, May 13, 2015. Sociologist Max Weber defines charisma as "A certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader." Maximilian Weber,



- "The Nature of Charismatic Authority and its Routinization," in *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. by A. R. Anderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1947).
- 12 Mr. T is an actor known for playing B. A. Baracus on *The A-Team* television show in the 1980s and Clubber Lang in *Rocky III* (1982). Mr. T began his career as a bodyguard to celebrities such as Michael Jackson and Diana Ross. With his signature mohawk, heavy gold chains hanging on his well-chiseled chest, and macho catchphrase "I pity the fool," Mr. T was the paragon of 1980s masculinity.
- 13 Harrison was the grandson of ninth US president William Henry Harrison, whose campaign slogan "Tippicanoe and Tyler, too" has become one of the most famous campaign slogans of all time. In the election of 1888, Benjamin Harrison beat incumbent Grover Cleveland with electoral college votes but not the popular vote to become the twenty-third president. While in office he supported African American voting and education rights and signed the Sherman Antitrust Act.
- 14 In the film, Danny Glover and Mel Gibson play detectives who forge a friendship, sparking a genre that has become a brand itself: buddy cop films featuring black and white male cop duos: Philip Michael Thomas and Don Johnson (*Miami Vice*), Samuel Jackson and Bruce Willis (*Die Hard*), Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones (*Men in Black*), Eddie Murphy and Judge Reinhold (*Beverly Hills Cop*), etc.
- 15 The gun was a commemorative WWII Colt 45. Presley collected police badges and wrote a letter to Nixon asking to become a federal agent at-large to fight the war on drugs. Nixon met with Presley, who requested and received a federal badge from the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. See nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/elvis/elnix.html.
- 16 See Kristine Stiles's essay in this publication for an in-depth examination of Andrews's *Hobo* series in relation to the historic figure of the hobo. See also Tony Fitzpatrick, *This Train: An Artist's Journal* (Chicago: Firecat Press, 2011), a series of collages addressing hobos in Chicago.
- 17 Max Weber, "Introduction to Sociology," at cf.ac.uk/socsi/undergraduate/introsoc/weber11.html.

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