



Installation view, *Kathryn Andrews: Run for President*, (photograph © 2015 Nathan Keay; provided by the MCA Chicago)

The second and final showing of *Kathryn Andrews: Run for President* closed at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas in early January 2017. When I visited, I saw wall-sized photomurals of past presidential publicity gambits—often palpably raced ones—framing sculptures with mirror-polished steel surfaces, sagging balloons, and memorabilia from blockbuster movies including *Spiderman*, *The Matrix*, and *Lethal Weapon*. There was also clown-related symbolism, particularly in the installation that drew from Bozo the Clown's 1984 presidential run, but also in four portraits of men made-up as hobos and/or clowns. Andrews's show was a kaleidoscopic arrangement of symbols, surfaces, and images drawn from the American performance vernaculars of Hollywood and the US presidency. At turns, each loomed large in one work to appear again half hidden, nearly missable, in another sculpture or installation some feet away. Allusions to the roles that race, gender, sexuality, and class play in these vocabularies cut through constantly.

It was a topical show above all else. *Run for President* first opened on November 21, 2015, at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. On that day, about a year before the 2016 election, Republican front-runner Donald J. Trump had made headlines. The celebrity businessman was promising to instate a Muslim registry should he win, under the pretense of improving national security. Two years later, the morning I began writing this, I had just read of Trump's first executive order barring US entry to citizens and refugees from seven Muslim countries. I am not arguing a causal relationship between these events. They are coincident and still that matters; such is Andrews's exhibitionary gesture. At its best, *Run for President* deals with such historical convergences and *how* they matter.

Andrews and curator Julie Rodrigues Widholm must have deliberated plenty during the conception and development of *Run for President*, a show that concerns presidential power, how men have cultivated it, and how they exploit identity to do so. Imagine the decisions both women made while preparing the show over the course of the 2015 primaries! Aspects that may have begun as commentary on an election that would replace our first black president with yet another white politician (but maybe a woman) naturally shifted as the presidential race grew increasingly strange and frightening. Part of the reason I write after the show's closing is just this timing: when she solicited me for this review, field editor Natilee Harren set the due date three months after the elections so that this text "could best reflect the current political climate" (Harren, email message to the author, September 21, 2016).

Today changes how many might think about Andrews's *Run for President*, whether Andrews or Widholm foresaw Trump's electoral victory or not. The show deals cannily in what people now call "Trumpism," although the term did not much exist when Andrews began working toward the exhibition. Trumpism is "personal and political gain marred by intolerance, derived from wealth, and rooted in the history of segregation, sexism, and exploitation," as historians N. D. B. Connolly and Keisha N. Blain have put it (Connolly and Blain, "Trump Syllabus 2.0," June 28, 2016, Public Books, <http://www.publicbooks.org/trump-syllabus-2-0/>). Trump's rise to power has us thinking about history and its forces anew. The current political climate came fast for some, yet was always here for others. Now many cast back in time to understand Trumpism's precedents and causes, holding history's long arc against its specific incidents.

Thus the topicality of Andrews's exhibition lay within its historical method. Through sculptures and installations that framed and constellated historical images with present environments, the show moved through specific instances and more allusive abstractions; this left *Run for President* open to reflect on history's unpredictable path. For example, at the Nasher, two photomurals bracketed half of the exhibition's main room: one depicting Nancy Reagan perched on Mr. T's knee, from 1983, the other showing Dick Nixon clasping actor Sammy Davis Jr. to his side, in 1973. Both images represented Republican attempts to appeal to black voters via celebrity. In *Run for President* they became visual parentheses for three mirror-polished steel sculptures: one a column, the second a mirror, the third a shelf. All contained movie props. Andrews affixed the Nixon-era image to the outside of a curving wall whose interior facade she covered with a third photomural showing Nixon's Oval Office.

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With its Neoclassical landscape, a bronco sculpture, a Lincoln bust, some flags, a crystal ashtray reproduced on a massive scale, the decor's symbolic power weighed heavily. I thought about the decor's relation to the cameras that recorded it. After all, the Oval Office is used for televised addresses as well as greeting foreign dignitaries and celebrities. (Particularly so under Nixon, who kept his working office in another building.) Perhaps that is why Andrews placed the reflective column *Lethal Weapon* (2012) in front, which further reflected, repeated, and distorted the image of Nixon's Oval Office. The sculpture's footprint echoed the office carpet's central oval emblem, as if the axes of two image worlds—office in 1973, gallery in 2016—were set at angles to one another, each spinning like a top, overlapping and fracturing. Andrews carried such effects further by hanging the vanity-mirror steel sculpture *Die Another Day* (2013) on the wall facing the office and column. To stand between these works was to see the image of one's body careening between both mirror objects, to see it set monstrously among the symbolic accoutrement of Nixon's power in a visceral anamorphosis.

Andrews finished the sculptures well before Trump's entry into the presidential race, so I do not mean to imply that they speak knowingly to the now. Both *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Another Day* incorporated decommissioned movie props. This is one of Andrews's long-standing tactics, used in most of the show's other works, which explored authorship and the readymade. Andrews has explained that the props may be temporarily associated with her name, but they return to their common use (Michael Ned Holte, "Slight of Hand," *Kaleidoscope*, March 2011, <http://michaelnedholte.com/2011/03/slight-of-hand-feature-interview-with-kathryn-andrews/>). Her intent is to investigate the ways in which an artist's name works as a commodity signifier. In other words, it trucks in identity performance and its extreme cases: celebrity.

Andrews's work, then, had already touched on several forces circulating through Trump's path to power. When first conceiving *Run for President*, Andrews explained in an interview with Hamza Walker for the show's catalogue that she began searching for a catchall premise: "I've made many different kinds of objects addressing disparate subjects, so how to contain everything interested me as a problem. . . . I was interested in attaching a new concept to these things and seeing if it would stick. I was thinking about how to create a situation that might fall apart, and how to invite the viewer to reflect upon how he or she turns to context to make sense of art, and in general, things in the world. I came to the idea of running for office as a backdrop." (83)

It seems plausible to me that Andrews picked the images from her collection of contemporary and historic sources and arranged for the photomurals to bracket her older sculptures as the forces now known as Trumpism became increasingly evident. But it does not matter if she did; Trump had already drawn the connection between himself and Nixon. Trump borrowed phrases from Nixon for his own campaign and used Nixon's 1968 Republican National Convention speech as a template for his address at the 2016 convention (Manny Fernandez, "When Donald Trump Partied with Richard Nixon," *New York Times*, December 18, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/18/us/politics/when-donald-trump-partied-with-richard-nixon.html>). This being relatively well known, it would not surprise me to learn that Andrews intentionally touched on the relationship between the two men. In December 2016, USA Today reported that Trump planned to display in his redecorated Oval Office a framed 1987 letter from Nixon, which says: "Dear Donald, I did not see the program, but Mrs. Nixon told me that you were great on the Donahue Show. As you can imagine, she is an expert on politics and she predicts that whenever you decide to run for office you will be a winner!" ("Trump's 'Amazing' Letter from Nixon Will Hang in Oval Office," USA Today, December 15, 2016. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/12/15/newser-trump-letter-nixon-hang-oval-office/95465212/>). Maybe when history repeats itself in the third instance it is tragedy and farce at the same time (to invoke Marx's famous commentary on Napoleons I and III).

Andrews's *Run for President* mimics this architecture of historic moments that is already there. I mean the circularity of incident: what we choose to see and how we set it in relation to what we have seen before. "The narrative historian always has the privilege of deciding that continuity cuts better into certain lengths than into others. He never is required to defend his cut, because history cuts anywhere with equal ease," as George Kubler wrote. "For others who aim beyond narration the question is to find cleavages in history where a cut will separate different types of happening" (Kubler, *The Shape of Time* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962], 2). Since *Run for President* arrays a series of resonant moments manifested in so many surfaces and skins, Andrews is not what Kubler called a "narrative historian." Instead, she seems to be looking for ways to cut into history that center on our era's tactile materiality. We now read our news and thus process history on computer screens or watch it on TV. Accordingly, that one side of most of the exhibition catalogue's pages are printed in high-gloss white seems appropriate. So too is the finish-fetishy chrome and colored Plexiglas that abound throughout the show. Even spectacle comes at us in some kind of object. You can always imagine yourself touching it.