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Protest Art in the Era of Trump

By M.H. MILLER

Six boundary-pushing artists talk about protesting current events through their work. The intention is to galvanize and educate, but reactions to the art can be as thorny as the issues the work addresses.



"Sunny Day White Power," 2016, acrylic, cellophane tape, charcoal, collage, gel medium, ink. Latex mask, oil paint, oil stick, painter's tape, push pins and rope on newspaper on shower curtain in artist's frame, 90 3/4"x74"x24".

©Pope.L, courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY



"Don't Touch Me," 2016, cardboard and color changing LED lights, 52" H x 67" W (132.08cm H x 170.18cm W).
Photograph by Robert Wedemeyer, courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

Andrea Bowers

Andrea Bowers makes use of materials found at protests — cardboard placards, pithy slogans. She has been an activist for 15 years — helping Teamsters unionize Frieze art fair, for example, and attending various actions across the country, including the Standing Rock Reservation protests in North Dakota. This work was made following the election, and debuted at Art Basel Miami Beach last December.

“I’ve always been in love with cardboard protest signs — I think they are beautiful sites of creativity. I was so blown away by the signs of the Occupy Movement, and almost envious of that as an art form. So I thought how can I use those materials, but make it into something that I do. I’m a feminist. I feel outraged that Donald Trump was elected after what he said publicly about women and decided to make that sign as a feminist gesture. I thought it was funny, too, in terms of an artwork that says ‘**Don’t Touch Me.**’ I love the poetics of activist slogans.

“The election made me more committed than ever to protest art, to figuring out how to step up my game. Maybe I need to be more aggressive and talk directly about the issues. Maybe I don’t need to be so delicate or subtle in the way I talk about my work.”