

CONFRONTING WHITE SUPREMACY

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Suzy Gonzalez, *No Fascist USA*, corn husks and ribbon

By Marissa Del Toro

Images of Power, co-curated by conceptual artist Mark Anthony Martinez and independent curator Alana J. Coates, is an exhibition tackling heavy and powerful topics; it presents a critical visual dialogue on the current issues of racial and cultural conflicts occurring on both national and local levels. The thirty artists included in this exhibition are from across the country, from Texas to New York to California. The works range from collage works and paintings, to corn husk assemblages and photography. All of the artworks in this show carry an anti-fascist and anti-white-supremacist view expressed through distinctive perspectives and artistic expressions.

"*The Second Seal*" by Albert Alvarez brings a dark altarpiece composition that harkens to an

heinous figures from both historical and recent acts of hate. Alvarez depicts an open window of a contemporary ideology that is both subversively lurking and out in plain sight, making the power of hate and evil a visible force that the viewer cannot ignore or support.

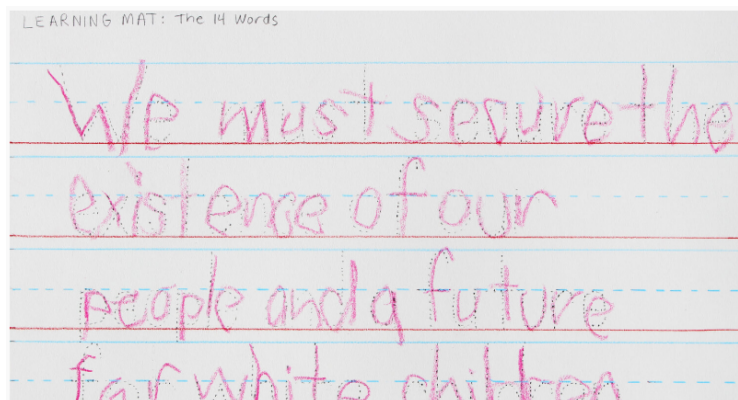


Albert Alvarez, *The Second Seal*, 2017-2018, collage ink on paper, 32 x 36"



Andre Filipek, *Dora Drawing #9*, 2017, Graphite on paper, 12.25 x 10.75"

In stark contrast to Alvarez's work, the graphite drawing by Andre Filipek uses the animated cartoon Dora the Explorer as a "vessel to [visualize] the political and internal anxieties related to the US/Mexican border, mestizaje, and Mexican American identity" that many Mexican-Americans undergo living in the USA. The figure of a young girl, Dora is depicted with her traditional bowl cut hairstyle, simple kid outfit of shorts and shirt, with white tennis shoes and frilly socks. Yet, Dora's demeanor is a cowering square like position, almost fetal, where her arms are crossed over her legs as she gives a grimace look of fear and pain. Her small square shaped body is restricted to a deep black outline of the almost square box that surrounds her. Gone is the typical jovial sound of Dora's bubbly personality; instead the viewer is witness to the emotional and mental deterioration of today's youth who undergo the strain of uncertainty in political limbo for certain policy issues such as DACA and Temporary Protected Status.



Another artist looking at childhood emotional and mental states is Raul Gonzalez in his piece “*Don’t Teach Hate (The 14 Words)*.” Gonzalez, a full-time artist and father of two, is acutely aware of what children pick up from their parents, guardians, general family members, or other authority figures. His drawing depicts the phrase known as the Fourteen Words, scrawled in child-like handwriting on children’s writing instruction pad. The Fourteen Words are a well-known slogan amongst white supremacist groups, who use it as a preamble to their hate-filled rhetoric of a white supremacist nation. The alarming nature of this piece calls into question what we are teaching our children. What do our children learn from watching U.S. elected officials give disparaging remarks towards communities of color, immigrants, other countries, and even a continent?



Rafael Fernando Gutierrez, Jr., *FLAG FOOTBALL*, 2018,
video/performance documentation, dimensions variable

Gutierrez portrays a critique focused on the recent controversy surrounding the U.S. national anthem protests begun by Colin Kaepernick in 2016 as protest to police brutality and racial injustice. A focused shot of the camera shows the U.S. American flag spread across the ground as a faceless figure wearing a grey hooded sweater enters the scene and uses a lighter to burn away any stray fringe. His black hands glide over the flag, smoothing its edges, and trimming its unruly flyaways. He continues this process for several seconds and then begins to fold, pausing to focus in on the process of each fold. This mesmerizing process continues the entire length of the flag until it is folded into a triangle.

Yet, the reverence of his actions is disrupted by the final act. Gutierrez arranges the folded flag onto a DIY kicking holder, pausing with each moment to show his meticulous process. Finally, with his black trooper boots in frame, he kicks the flag with the intent of a field goal. This video shows a sense of reverence and conflictedness for a symbol of American patriotism and freedom, yet this symbolic flag fails to live up to its standard of freedom and justice for all. As a former member of the United States Air Force, Gutierrez brings his personal background of serving in the U.S. military, but he also brings his personal identity as a black man living in 21st century America. One cannot ignore the implications of his grey hooded sweater set against the red, white, and blue as an image of frustrated injustice and disenfranchisement.





Mark Anthony Martinez, *(OFF) WHITE POWER*, 2017, 40 x 38",
Fabricated by the King of Neon

Turning to Mark Anthony Martinez's work, "*(OFF) WHITE POWER*" is a glowing, fluorescent, white-hot neon sign that depicts an emoji style fist with the words of the title beneath it. However, the "(OFF)" part of this statement remains dark without any gleam of electricity coursing through its glass tubes. At first glance, the warm, glowing fluorescents can be misconstrued as kitschy, pop-like support for white nationalism. Especially with the term "off white," which can be construed as a term in reference to racial hierarchy with the centering of whiteness as default, "off-white" ("ethnic" or "brown") as the intermediary, and indigeneity and blackness as invisible. Yet, the use of the emoji lexicon brings a critical analysis of the true darkness of white supremacy as it contemporaneously interjects itself into everyday life through text and image from social media to the White House. The darkening of the words "(OFF)" also expresses an act of complicity to white supremacy, one that is of ignorance of and neutrality toward the situation at hand. Yet, the somber words of "(OFF)" also reflect the disempowerment and denial in the respective existence and experiences of people of color as it is

feelings that have long been repressed. The artists in this exhibition are revealing, discussing, and analyzing their relationship to power, and showing the discrepancy, reclamation, and transformation of power through art. However, for the power of these images to persist, the viewer must take part in activating their own response to the work and continuing the conversation beyond the gallery walls.

Images of Power is on view February 10 through February 24, 2018 at the Freight Gallery & Artist Studios in the Lone Star district of San Antonio, Texas.



PREVIOUS



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