

Grey Room

Fall 2016

Post-Election Artists Dossier

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MTL+	fierce pussy
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*Founding Editor

The current American political crisis is appalling but not unique. Long in the making yet somehow still shocking, the election of Donald Trump as the forty-fifth president of the United States is symptomatic of broader transformations unfolding across the globe. We are bearing witness to a toxic mix of populism, patriarchy, nationalism, neoliberalism, and financialization—locked, perhaps, in a fight to the death; or, potentially more catastrophic, mutating into some new hybrid form for which, as yet, we have no name.

Meeting only days after the election, the editors of *Grey Room* recognized that we could not let this moment pass in silence despite the inevitable logistical limitations of scholarly publishing. Academic journals are ill-equipped to seize the decisive time of *kairos*, which, as Antonio Negri writes, “is power at precisely the moment that the experience of time restlessly observes the edge over which it leans.” What we could offer at this juncture is a minor gesture of solidarity: to temporarily suspend academic business as usual, stopping the presses in order to assemble a collective response, opening the pages of *Grey Room* to a multitude of voices from within and outside the U.S., which were curated in part by us, the editors, and in part by the artists themselves, who were free to extend the invitation to others. Future issues of *Grey Room* will assist in the task of naming the current crisis. The present dossier aims simply to register the state of emergency in which we find ourselves.

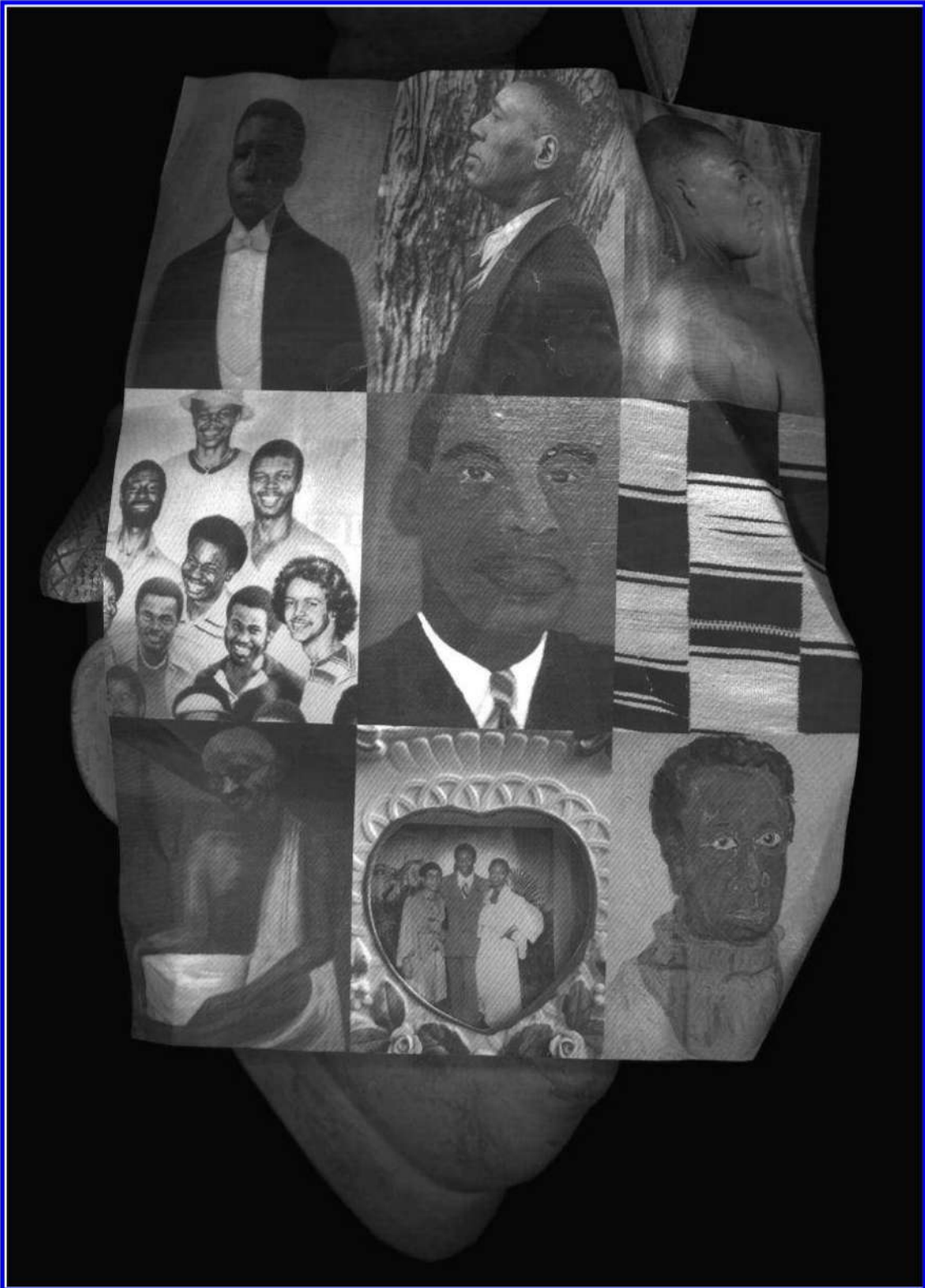
The catalyst was Zoe Leonard’s word piece *I want a president* (1992), which begins “I want a dyke for president. I want a person with aids for president . . .” and concludes “I want to know why we started learning somewhere down the line that a president is always a clown: always a john and never a hooker. Always a boss and never a worker, always a liar, always a thief and never caught.” Although written under different historical circumstances, this *cri de coeur* seemed uncomfortably apt to the present moment of counterrevolutionary identity politics. It was, indeed, the discomfort that forced the piece into our consciousness.

In the last decade, Leonard’s *I want a president* has attained a rare level of popularity for a work variously classified as a manifesto, a poem, or a conceptual artwork. Live performances, YouTube renditions, variations and adaptations, monumental installations, and numerous reproductions have proliferated across the globe and the internet. The work’s persuasive power cannot be divorced from a historically-specific identity politics that makes even Leonard uncomfortable.

We number ourselves among the uncomfortably persuaded. And so we circulated Leonard’s *I want a president* to artists and requested their responses, in words and/or images, to the work or the crisis at large. Understandably, some could not find the right images or words. Others justifiably found the effort insufficient. But many responded with haste and conviction, soliciting further responses and widening our circle to unfamiliar voices. The pages that follow reproduce all the works submitted before we went to press. Individually and collectively, they register the crisis for our moment and for the dark days that surely lie ahead.

—The Editors

I want a dyke for president. I want a person with aids for president and I want a fag for vice president and I want someone with no health insurance and I want someone who grew up in a place where the earth is so saturated with toxic waste that they didn't have a choice about getting leukemia. I want a president that had an abortion at sixteen and I want a candidate who isn't the lesser of two evils and I want a president who lost their last lover to aids, who still sees that in their eyes every time they lay down to rest, who held their lover in their arms and knew they were dying. I want a president with no airconditioning, a president who has stood on line at the clinic, at the dmv, at the welfare office and has been unemployed and layed off and sexually harrassed and gaybashed and deported. I want someone who has spent the night in the tombs and had a cross burned on their lawn and survived rape. I want someone who has been in love and been hurt, who respects sex, who has made mistakes and learned from them. I want a Black woman for president. I want someone with bad teeth ~~and an attitude~~, someone who has eaten ~~that nasty~~ hospital food, someone who crossdresses and has done drugs and, been in therapy. I want someone who has committed civil disobedience. And I want to know why this isn't possible. I want to know why we started learning somewhere down the line that a president is always a clown: always a john and never a hooker. Always a boss and never a worker, always a liar, always a thief and never caught.



Pradeep Dalal. *Talisman* (row 1: Paul, Horace, Bill; row 2: *The Clubhouse DC*, Horace, Bamana; row 3: Mohandas, Viola/John/Peaches, Beauford), 2016.