

Sandow Birk and Elyse Pignolet

KQED Arts

An American Procession Marching Toward Confrontation

By Cy Musiker

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Lots of artists have joined the so-called resistance since the election of Donald Trump as president. Among the most thoughtful are Southern California's Sandow Birk and his wife Elyse Pignolet. The duo make paintings and prints that are often bitter, bloody satires on world politics, American consumerism, and the depravities of war — and now, the two have collaborated on a massive, 40-foot-long woodblock print (in three parts) called "American Procession." It depicts a parade of figures from 300 years of American history, both famous and obscure. Abraham Lincoln, Cesar Chavez, Sonia Sotomayor, San Francisco musician and mayoral candidate Jello Biafra and dozens more march from the left. Steve Bannon, Antonin Scalia, Cotton Mather, California railroad baron Charles Crocker and dozens more march from the right.



A studio image of Sandow Birk and Elyse Pignolets "American Procession" at Mullowney Printing in San Francisco. (Photo: Courtesy of Catharine Clark Gallery)

At the center of "American Procession," where the two forces might be expected to meet in ideological battle, is a triumphal arch in ruins, so I hope Birk and Pignolet are not predicting the future of our current hyper-partisan politics. The giant woodblock prints (inspired by a ceramic mural depicting a parade of all the kings of Saxony, two blocks long, which the two saw in Dresden some years ago) get a preview at two showings: Dec. 16 at Catharine Clark Gallery, and Jan. 20 at Mullowney Printing. Both events are free, but you'll have to call the venues for details.