Nina Katchadourian

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Even the losers: 'Monument to the Unelected' looks at the presidents that weren't

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"Monument to the Unelected" by Nina Katchadourian is presented by the Catharine Clark Gallery and BOXBLUR, the Abrahamson Family Trust and the Odyssey Project at UW-Madison. RUTHIE HAUGE

Riders on the Lake Monona Bike Loop who speed past a cluster of election signs might easily mistake them for the work of an enthusiastic voter.

Up close, the signs at 2012 Waunona Way are not what they seem. "Gore/Lieberman: A World of Difference," one reads. "Re-Elect Bush/Quayle. Experience Counts," says another.

"Barry Goldwater. In your heart you know he's right." "Aaron Burr is my president" — with a silhouette of the current continental United States.

These fictional plastic signs commemorating the losers of elections past make up Nina Katchadourian's art installation, "Monument to the Unelected." It was first created in 2008, and she's added a sign after each presidential election since.

"Given the heightened stakes of this election, we decided it was important to have this project appear at multiple venues, particularly in battleground states," said Catharine Clark, who represents Katchadourian at her San Francisco gallery. Clark is presenting this work through a related nonprofit called BOXBLUR.

Now on view at 2012 Waunona Way, "Monument to the Unelected" by Nina Katchadourian was created in 2008 and includes fictional signs of the losers of presidential elections past.
RUTHIE HAUGE

"Monument to the Unelected" is currently on display in eight locations including New York, Arizona, Ohio and three in California. At each one, a first-time voter has been chosen to place the 59th sign. Viewers can watch that installation over Zoom (visit **pacegallery.com** for a link).

"Monument to the Unelected" by Nina Katchadourian is on display at 2012 Waunona Way in Madison, as well as at seven other locations around the country.
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Katchadourian has already created signs for President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden. In Madison, on Saturday, Nov. 14, at 3 p.m., first-time voter Stanley Sallay is set to place one of them into the installation. Sallay is a 2007 graduate of the **Odyssey Project at the University of Wisconsin-Madison**, a co-presenter of the installation here.

Several iterations of "Monument" appear in public spaces, like the Roots Community Health Center in Oakland and a street corner near the Museum of Contemporary Art in Cleveland.

The Abrahamson Family Trust, a private entity, is presenting "Monument" in Madison. The Waunona house is owned by the family of retired Justice Shirley Abrahamson, the **first female justice to serve on the Wisconsin Supreme Court**. Her son, Daniel Abrahamson, now lives in Berkeley, California and made the connection between Katchadourian's piece and his family home.

"That location has been a venue for campaign signs since I was born in 1964," Daniel said. "It's also been a venue for my mother's own signs for statewide election campaigns. It's a rich ground for civic engagement."

Public locations add something unexpected to the piece, Clark said.

"That location has many people walking, riding and driving by," she said. "It's a neighborhood in an urban environment where you might expect to see lawn signs, political signs on lawns. We like the element of surprise if they chose to look a little deeper."

The Abrahamsons plan to leave the signs up through mid-November. Daniel has been getting feedback on the piece, even from 2,000 miles away.

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"I have childhood friends in the neighborhood who have texted me, 'What the heck is going on in your yard?'" Daniel said.

"Monument to the Unelected" can feel emotional for viewers, particularly the more recent signs ("I'm with Hillary," 2016). Vandalism at various installation sites over

the years has been minimal, mostly confined to someone nabbing a sign that then must be quickly reprinted.

At an opening for the installation at the Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco on Oct. 31, Clark noticed a new level of reverence for the democratic process. "It feels like it's at risk right now," she said.

"We do get strong responses from people who find it funny and people who find it emotional," Clark added. "A lot of people are scared and anxious about the outcome of this election and the consequences of that outcome. There's a lot of emotion right now."

Sallay, an artist himself, recorded his response to the piece. As he explained, he'd been denied the right to vote because he was wrongfully incarcerated. Then, in 2016, he didn't vote because he felt it didn't matter.

"I chose to remain politically invisible because I thought I knew what the outcome would be," Sallay said in the recording. "When I look at the 'Monument to the Unelected' I think about … how my community, my state, my country might look different if persons who were and are incarcerated could vote.

"I think about how my ancestors laid down their lives in order for people to gain their rights to vote and live in dignity."

Presenting work with a social justice theme fits with the Abrahamson family values, Daniel said. But "Monument to the Unelected" may resonate with viewers in a different, powerful way during this election cycle in particular.

Seeing the signs, even fictional ones, from election losers "takes a different tone this election," Clark said.

"This thing that's always been central to a functioning democracy, the peaceful transfer of power, has been made a partisan issue."

https://madison.com/ct/entertainment/arts-and-theatre/even-the-losers-monument-to-the-unelected-looks-at-the-presidents-that-werent/article_7005e3a9-f1fc-541c-95d0-6a0a8c8142df.html