

Andy Diaz Hope

arts&culture > art of the state

Cut the Cable

By Kris Vagner
May 19, 2016

SF

248 Utah Street
SF, CA 94103
+ 415 399 1439

NY

313 W 14th Street 2F
New York, NY
By appointment only

WEB

www.cclarkgallery.com



This presidential primary season, as candidates and pundits have quibbled, quarreled and often been just plain rude, have you found yourself yelling at the TV? Has the mute button become your bestie? San Francisco artists Jon Bernson and Andy Diaz Hope feel your pain.

Bernson is a musician who's composed theater soundtracks, scored films, and written a song with his band, the Exray's, that was featured in *The Social Network*. Diaz Hope is an artist who tends to make sculptures out of smaller fragments: a foot-high geode constructed of mirrors, for example, or portraits made of gel caps. They met through the San Francisco gallery scene a few years ago.

"We'd go to other people's openings and just talk," said Bernson. After a couple of years of hitting it off socially, they'd still never seen each other's artwork. In

2014, they realized they were similarly weary of the uncivil tone of political discourse they were hearing in the media, especially on cable news networks.

"In Obama's second term, the partisan rhetoric really reached a feverish pitch," said Bernson. "It'd gotten to the point that there really was a deadlock." This shared observation inspired the two to work together. They decided to construct a device that would strip partisan discourse of its power.

Bernson programmed a laptop to distort the sound of two 24-hour FOX and MSNBC news feed, breaking them into largely unintelligible, bassy, spacey bleeps and bleeps punctuated by an occasional intact phrase. (Here's one of many examples of what it could sound like at a given moment: Blurry, deep house

segues abruptly into Hillary Clinton's voice saying, "It's time there's a great awakening in this country," then separates into something resembling a somnambulant synth.)

Diaz Hope built a structure shaped like a space-age monument, largely of mirrors and speaker fabric. A disco ball inside the piece refracts the news-feed pictures into tiny shards that traverse the walls and ceilings of a small, darkened viewing room. It's possible to pick out a few faces and bits of text, but mostly the picture is scattered into tiny, floating triangles and dots of light.

Although this was the first collaboration between the two artists, the piece came together easily in just a few weeks, with just a few tweaks to the initial designs.

"Our styles are complementary," said Bernson. "We have a lot of similar influences. We'd been exploring them through different mediums."

The piece is called "Beautification Machine." After stops at Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco and the Art Basel fair in Miami Beach, it's now in the permanent collection of the Nevada Museum of Art.

So, does this art piece actually remove the bite from political partisanship?

NMA staffer Chelsey Lundin, who supervises museum security, spends a lot of time in the galleries.

"Each patron tends to have a different reaction to the 'Beautification Machine,'" she said. "Some patrons walk in and walk out very quickly. I think the complete darkness and enclosure of the room makes them uncomfortable. On the other hand, I have seen other patrons spend upwards of 15 to 20 minutes in the room." Some lean over the machine to try to see how it works. Kids tend to like it. Sometimes, Lundin said, "Adults don't want to engage with the piece because of its political undertone."

This might suggest yet another demographic divide, one between cable news fans who don't want their media messed with and the cable-news-weary, who might find this fantasy chill-out room full up cut-up cable feeds to be the "mute" button they've been craving.