

Nina Katchadourian

HYPERALLERGIC

Signs of a Presidential Loser

By Hrag Vartanian on November 4, 2016

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If you walk by Lefferts Homestead in Brooklyn's Prospect Park you might do a double take. Unlike other homes in the city, this property doesn't have campaign signs for Clinton or Trump, but a cluster of lawn signs for Presidential losers — literally.



The artist at Lefferts Homestead

Nina Katchadourian's "Monument to the Unelected" (2008/12 and ongoing) is about paths not taken, the people who could've shaped the future of this country but instead are kicked to the dustbin of history for their inability to procure enough votes. Most will easily recognize the names of the waking nightmare that was McCain/Palin in 2008, or even the failure for Jimmy Carter (he was running with VP candidate Walter Mondale, a Presidential loser

himself), but the older names — like Tilden/Hendricks or Landon/Knox — are lost on most of us, left to the domain of Presidential historians and history geeks.

Built by a Dutch family in the 18th-century farming village of Flatbush, the Lefferts Historic House is hosting Katchadourian's special project, which she only shows every four years during election time.



A view of the display.

The project was originally commissioned by the Scottsdale Museum of Art for a show on humor. “I was invited to come to Scottsdale, and have a look around, and think of something to make. I get asked a lot about the humor in my work. It is never something I sort of seek out to make or do,” Katchadourian told Hyperallergic. “It was very difficult, and I spent a lot of time in Scottsdale looking around, thinking ... It happened to be the time before the 2008 election, and I was noticing all of these election signs on corners and front of houses. For the first time, I really spent time thinking about those, and realized they are a very peculiar and interesting tradition. Half of the names on these signs go on to make their way into history, and half of them you never think about again.”

The artist has been careful to make the piece feel as neutral as possible, because she sees it as a strange Rorschach test. “When I see people encounter it, they often project onto it what their own political views are.”

She hasn’t kept the original slogans or designs of each campaign, even if some of the wording is clearly related — for instance, Michael Dukakis was known as the Massachusetts Miracle, but that was not his platform or slogan. And the reactions are always interesting. “I’ve had reactions from both ends of the political spectrum,” she said. “Today, people have stopped and been curious and laughed, and there is certainly, I hope, a double take about what is happening when you have it in front of a historic house. This house is from 1783, and that’s fairly in sync with the start of our election system.”

The work looks like a puzzle we work to decode, trying to find meaning in this accumulation of signs — *paging, Ferdinand de Saussure*.

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The other side of Presidential failure

“I was trying to provide an opportunity for us to consider the choices we’ve made. I think it’s an interesting moment to do that when you’re about to make the next choice,” she said. “By design, I only ever show this piece at the time of an election. For the first time this year, I’m also adding a component, which is we are going to add the sign of the newest loser to the piece on Wednesday, whoever that may be. I think the strategy of the piece, in a way, is to point to history in order to point to this present moment, and the history we are about to make.”

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At noon on Wednesday, November 9, a new sign will be added and even the artist isn’t sure which one it will be — she made one for each side.



How most people will see the work from the street

Nina Katchadourian's "Monument to the Unelected" (2008/12 and ongoing) will be up at Lefferts Homestead until November 13.