

SUNDOGS

PARIS

Mitchell Anderson & Deanna Havas

The Republic

September 8 - October 14, 2018

And so when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city. Plato, *The Republic*

Mitchell Anderson: Is art meant to change society?

Deanna Havas: If your intent is to change society maybe you should try your hand at blogging.

M: For example, is the readymade a political, a lazy or no action at all?

D: In a punk way, the readymade has an inherent lazy quality. Anyone can do it. I heard that Duchamp ate the urinal cake as a dare.

M: I don't even count that as a readymade anymore, he painted on it and changed its display, separating it from its use. It's kinda boring proto-Minimalism. You know he made a living dealing works for Brancusi in America? Why is what artists do or don't do for money redacted from their reception?

D: Often what they have to do for money is weird and humbling, sometimes even illegal. Artists begin as temporarily embarrassed millionaires, but most have rich parents.

M: I don't know if most artists are getting parental support, but certainly artists our age are not representative of the full socio-economic range of society. Within this are endless issues of entitlement and privilege which have just not been discussed. How does this impact culture in a wider sense? Why is everyone hiding the obvious fact and the values that are promoted here?

D: I have to do a lot of odd jobs to supplement my practice. Most recently, I was a paid audience member for daytime television shows like *The People's Court*. It was the most civically-engaging experience of my life. Even more so than actual jury duty, which is more about bureaucratic procedure than anything else.

M: A collective belonging?

D: There's a sense of pride in performing your civic duties, doing your part to contribute to the grander project of liberty and justice. Even if its entirely simulated and scripted and occurs inside a television studio. Can you tell me about your project involving the homes of artist's families?

LIST OF WORKS:

Mitchell Anderson

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (McArthur Family), 2018

Inkjet print, Swiss Pear frame
43 x 26 x 2 cm

* Using internet search tools and the real estate database Zillow.com I have charted a growing selection of family homes of artist peers. The title references the Warhol painting, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Rauschenberg Family)*, 1963 in the collection of the National Gallery in Washington, in turn referencing James Agee's and Walker Evans' 1941 book documenting the lives of tenant farmers during the Great Depression.

Zillow is an online real estate database that provides information on more than 110 million homes in the United States.

"The Zestimate is designed to be a neutral, unbiased estimate of the fair market value of a home, based on publicly available and user-submitted data. For this purpose, it is important that it be based on identical information about homes (e.g., beds, baths, square footage, lot size, tax assessment, prior sale price) and that the algorithm itself be consistently applied to all homes in a similar manner. This ensures that there is no preference for some homes relative to others nor are there valuations based on facts that are not accessible to all Zillow users. Some homes may be very unique in ways that are not well captured by existing data, and the Zestimate may be less accurate on these homes.

Zillow's accuracy has a median error rate of 4.3%.

The median home value in the United States is \$218,000. The median price of homes currently listed in the United States is \$278,900 while the median price of homes that sold is \$231,700. The median rent price in the United States is \$1,695."¹

The information here was all searched using readily available free websites. The price and rental estimates from Zillow do not take into account any form of rent control, renovation, gentrification or home damage, all of which must be expected to be represented here.

"The most I can do - the most I can hope to do - is to make a number of physical entities as plain and vivid as possible, and to make a few guesses, a few conjectures; and to leave to you much of the burden of realizing in each of them what I have wanted to make clear of them as a whole: how each is itself; and how each is a shapener."²

Mitchell Anderson

from *'The Jungle'*, 2018

Embroidery on Indian cotton
c. 160 x 140 cm

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M: I've used free websites to find the addresses of a range of my artistic peers' family homes. The estimated values of those homes are presented as photographic prints. I see a need to discuss ideas of class and monetary privilege in the cultural realm. The family home is so closely related to any semblance of the American Dream that it's a useful platform to explore this. Of course, there are real implications of what is public and private in a society and what is readily available to anyone on the internet. But, this information is publicly accessible right now. When we look at the works as a whole, even accounting for errors and personal situations unknown, we can see in general that this broad, untargeted group of young exhibiting artists is not representative class-wise of America. Does this make us uncomfortable? It should.

D: How did you decide which artist's families to include in this project?

M: There's really no meaningful decision. When I think of an artist I look it up and if I can find it I add it to the project. I also ask friends to name artists our age to widen it away from the possibility I'm focusing on artists I'm interested in. The artists selected are ones that I consider peers in the sense that they are exhibiting and are part of a larger conversation of contemporary art. The set of 40 I have so far is not final. Due to financial limitations, I've only framed eight for the exhibition but not because of any hierarchy. I've printed the full set as a small pamphlet for the exhibition.

Yes, imagination rules the world. The defect of our modern institutions is that they do not speak to the imagination. By that alone can man be governed; without it he is but a brute. Napoleon Bonaparte, *Writings 1796-1817*

D: Are we living in a utopian republic?

M: I'm not sure I would even know what that was, but I'm worried that the structures of our society haven't changed during a time of social progress. We have the same old institutions of fear and the fucking military and the same religions, which are criminal organizations, and sports, which are the worst because they create a sense of success in people, the audience and fans, who have never had any and don't know that they could if they just wake up.

Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she Emma Lazarus, *The New Colossus*, Inscription at the base of the Statue of Liberty

D: Unchecked libertinism can create a public nuisance, collectivism is impossible with a cabal of self-interested psychos. How much money could we get from melting down the Statue of Liberty and selling the copper for scrap? Why do we, as Americans, worship a European anthropomorphism of Liberty, one that resembles a modest version of Delacroix' Marianne? Does she protect our harbor or is she a cursed talisman in our possession?

*From a series of embroideries which abstract text through the process of transcription. Here a section of the American classic, *The Jungle*, describes the feeling of witnessing the industrial slaughterhouses of Chicago. The metaphor relating factory workers to animals being raised for slaughter is one of the great failures of socialism in the early 20th century, as the novel was a success, but only in terms of creating regulations for the food industry.

Mitchell Anderson
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Cheng Family), 2018
Inkjet print, Swiss Pear frame
43 x 26 x 2 cm

Mitchell Anderson
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Syms Family), 2018
Inkjet print, Swiss Pear frame
43 x 26 x 2 cm

Deanna Havas
The Secret, 2018
210 x 200 cm
Digital print and enamel on linen
*A retro-reflective bacteria on the surface of the canvas over a grid of lens flares.

Mitchell Anderson
Memorial to Gunter Sachs, 2012
Wood, Gunter Sachs Memorial candle light installation, St. Moritz Lake
Installation: 150 x 30 x 3 cm
*Gunter Sachs (1932 - 2011) was a German industrial heir who became famous for being a jet-set era playboy and married to Brigitte Bardot during the second half of the 1960s. The winter following his death a large memorial was held for him in St. Moritz, Switzerland. For this the frozen lake of St. Moritz was covered in candles, resting on wooden slabs, forming a giant constellation of Scorpio, his astrological sign. The wood pieces in this work were recovered during this installation and relate to larger ideas of life, memory and social privilege.

Mitchell Anderson
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Kassay Family), 2018
Inkjet print, Swiss Pear frame
43 x 26 x 2 cm

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M: Who is being annoyed here? The public as an idea is a splintered whole. When the military or law enforcement use the word 'public' I'm probably not onboard. Is the Statue of Liberty a poet, given a crown and cast out by Plato from the French state in the first place? At this point she's become like Devil's Tower, beacons that marked progress and possibility before becoming the locations of final act action sequences in science fiction films. If the statue was absent would America lose an important symbol of embracing people from across the world?

D: I quite liked that Michael Jackson music video filmed in the torch.

M: Symbols are abstract and real. The Statue of Liberty is much more than a physical sculpture. But, this works in reverse as well. When I acquired John Wayne's personal gun holster I was curious about how this ordinary phallic object contains so much information on the errors of American society. I'm not just talking about the impossible idea of gun rights, but also forced masculinity in the public sphere, celebrity worship, the West.

D: Would you rather be governed by law or ruled by spectacle?

M: At this point law and spectacle are exact. I enjoy law sometimes and spectacle often. Bread and circus. Cake and darkrooms. I'd be fine inhabiting Ancient Rome if I was sure of my standing.

D: I'm not sure I would like ancient Rome. I saw some of their public toilets.... Heard they wiped their asses with a communal loofah that they re-used time and again after defecating in vulgar unison. I wouldn't enjoy that level of civic engagement.

M: Myths of orgies also, but people lived for shorter periods, which seems nice. And daddy Hadrian was around.

D: True, one has to wonder about the neo-classical revival. Perhaps we're not much better in our contemporary societies... There's trash and excrement everywhere, godless materialism, and innovative new strains of gonorrhea to accompany each Tinder software update. Do you ever fantasize about leaving civilized society?

M: It's an endless fantasy. Who wasn't seduced by Alex Garland's *The Beach*? But, I exist in a society and I react within it and around it with my work. Away from it, all I would be making is crafts. In these new paintings, I've been thinking about how the systems of political campaigning are expressed visually. I found salesman templates for buttons from the turn of the 20th century, the height of the campaign button boom, which have areas for candidate photographs and text left empty to be filled by whoever ordered them. This kind of found imagery exists between politics.

Indeed, a nation or city is ruled by the people, or by an upper class, or by a

Mitchell Anderson
Campaign blank, 2018
Acrylic on canvas
100 cm diameter

Mitchell Anderson
Campaign blank, 2018
Acrylic on canvas
100 cm diameter

* The creation of mass produced celluloid campaign buttons in 1896 revolutionized political advertising and created an early form of popular interactive propaganda. The compositions of these works are taken from salesman template samples from the turn of the 20th century, used by the Whitehead & Hoag Company, the largest manufacturer through the post-war period. Free of non-consensus political content to be added at a later time, the compositions reflect classic American visuals of an emptiness of political values and a certain consensus propaganda.

Deanna Havas
Shock & Awe, 2018
220 x 190 cm
digital print on linen

* An image of a CF-18 Hornet fighter jet plane refueling in mid-air above some blue flames and a moire pattern. An Homage to Richard Russell, a ground service operator who hijacked an airplane on a suicide mission on August 10th, 2018 near Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

Deanna Havas
Justify Your Humanity, 2018
180 x 260 cm
oil on canvas

* Dramatized clawing red handprints in cadmium red light on white, somewhat resembling Cueva de las Manos, but depicting a more violent cave.

Mitchell Anderson
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Fratino Family), 2018
Inkjet print, Swiss Pear frame
43 x 26 x 2 cm

Mitchell Anderson
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Marcus Family), 2018
Inkjet print, Swiss Pear frame
43 x 26 x 2 cm

Mitchell Anderson
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Henkel Family I), 2018
Inkjet print, Swiss Pear frame
43 x 26 x 2 cm

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monarch. A government system that is invented from a choice of these same components is sooner idealised than realised; and even if realised, there will be no future for it. Tacitus, *The Annals*

D: The revolution began, but when will it end?

M: The idea that there is an end goal in sight is quaint. The world changes as we move subjectively forwards and backwards and all without someone landing on an aircraft carrier proclaiming the mission is accomplished. Are you part of a revolt?

D: I'm always in revolt, I am revolting. We're merely bacteria crawling on the face of this wretched planet that quivers with cadence of the living and decomposing.

M: Do you see the planet wretched because of humanity?

D: Humanity, but more broadly, life itself, and the vain and futile project of organization out of chaos.

M: So you're an environmentalist?

D: No, I find nature to be tacky. Recycling is a waste of time.

M: You think it's a waste of your or society's time?

D: Maybe people have nothing better to do than sort through garbage, that's their prerogative. To some extent, that's the beauty of liberal democracy. Do you sort your trash?

M: I'm a hoarder. I produce almost nothing, but one is compelled to sort garbage. One can't just throw out batteries with everything else. We have some guidelines and laws.

D: Oops. So there are.

M: Do you use tacky in the French way? Gauche?

D: Yes tacky as in gauche. I think we cut down all the forests because we didn't like them. Also we needed stretcher bars for paintings. I once rode a Flixbus through the Alps, the trees all looked like fractals and it made me feel ill. It was too much. I'd much rather look at a painting than some obscene fractal, even a bad one.

M: Plato mentions this idea of the painting versus nature a bit in *The Republic* when he talks about imitation. He's judgmental of art because it imitates. How does your art imitate?

Mitchell Anderson
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Hughes Family), 2018
Inkjet print, Swiss Pear frame
43 x 26 x 2 cm

Mitchell Anderson
Shootist, 2016
John Wayne's gun holster c. 1970s
33 x 19 x 6 cm

* Simple black leather gun holster from the personal collection of the actor John Wayne. Biographer Ronald Davis said, "John Wayne personified for millions the nation's frontier heritage. Eighty-three of his movies were Westerns, and in them he played cowboys, cavalrymen, and unconquerable loners extracted from the Republic's central creation myth." Devoid of its use and hung, it becomes a phallic piece of memorabilia. I see it as a carrier and recorder of a certain type of popular culture and its endless advocacy of violence, celebrity worship (and its impact on politics) and contemporary American expansionism.

Mitchell Anderson
Golf ball piece I, 2018
Merchandise, unemployment charity thrift shop, York, PA USA
25 x 20 x 25 cm

Mitchell Anderson
Golf ball piece II, 2018
Merchandise, unemployment charity thrift store, York, PA USA
32 x 24 x 32 cm

*Goodwill International Inc. is a nonprofit organization that provides unemployment related services. It is funded through an extensive chain of thrift shops, where used items donated by a public may be deducted from their taxes, before being sold in store. These bags of used golf balls were purchased from one of these locations in South Central Pennsylvania, where my parents live in the United States. Their structural forms of pure weight spreading out from a central point reflect on their content as leisure time luxury products cast off as an act of charity.

1 Zillow.com. (2018). [online] Available at: <https://www.zillow.com/> [Accessed 31 Aug. 2018].

2 Agee, J. and Evans, W. (1941). *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, p.97.

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D: I'm concerned with the amplification of imagery that is already present and existent in the world, images that may come from unclear sources, but are symbolically charged. There's an element of theatricality and mimesis in every artwork.

M: In my purest readymades, I guess, I wanted to skip that, but really I traded it for narrative which had its own tracings. How do you source the images or styles you take up?

D: I'm attracted to cheap, vague content that's freely available in the content-mill of life...

M: When you combine images in these new works, jets, blue fire, lens flares, what are you thinking about? Is there content here to be further deciphered?

D: My works in this show are quite big. I use spectacular imagery that is intended to evoke power, awe and unease. I'm more concerned with the visceral reactions these images might provoke.

M: Both of us have used reflective surfaces in this show. In my *Campaign Blanks* the old gold adds this sort of trashy aesthetic with connotations of success and grandeur. How do you see your use of retroreflective paint?

D: Retro-reflective paint is typically used in utilitarian applications, to enhance visibility in poorly-lit situations. It has a contingent property, but is also about self-reflection. In its application on my painting it renders a sort of bacteria on the surface of the canvas, a retro-reflective bacteria, over a grid of lens flares.

D: Is there any hope in utopia or have we lost sight of paradise?

M: Utopia, like the present, doesn't exist. Which doesn't mean we shouldn't work forward as if it might.

Mitchell Anderson was born in Chicago in 1985 and lives in Zurich. Recent solo and group exhibitions include Fri-Art Kunsthalle Fribourg and MAMCO, Geneva.

Deanna Havas was born in New York City in 1989, where she lives and works. Recent exhibitions include Swiss Institute, LUMA Foundation and Kunsthalle Bern. She has contributed to *Texte zur Kunst* and *Frieze* and is featured in "Social Medium: Artist's Writing (2000 - 2015)", an anthology published by n+1/Paper Monument.