

What Warhol Tells Us About Art in the Age of Trump

Michel Auder's show at Martos, reminds us why, despite the optimists, art was never going to find its *raison d'être* under the current regime

BY ANDREW DURBIN



Certain members of the so-called Resistance, struggling for meaning in the wake of the 2016 election, once argued that art would rediscover its purpose under Donald Trump. Joyce Carol Oates tweeted that artists would 'thrive' under oppression, a point echoed by *Time* magazine. Art would only get better, we were told, much as it supposedly had under Ronald Reagan in the mythic 1980s, and find in these troubling times its *raison d'être*. Two years in, I'm still waiting.

The largest work in Michel Auder's second show at Martos Gallery, 'And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press', is a 2018 series of 91 photographs that shares its name with the subject of the show. (Guess who.) Pinned along a dark hallway, each image is a 33 x 48 cm c-type print, mostly depicting candid scenes from daily life, including men and women lounging, men playing in a river, a baby awaiting its diaper change, a bullet-ridden stop sign in the countryside. All are constituent elements of a domestic universe of deliberately uninteresting tableaux, set mostly within the obliterating confines of the woods – and far from the bonkers political landscape Auder has in mind, given the title is lifted from Donald Trump's assertion that he never saw an invoice from the porn star Stormy Daniels. Other images capture bits of cultural detritus across the art-historical spectrum, from classical fragments of male faces and

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genitals to a shot of a computer playing Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) to Alice Neel's 1970 portrait of a shirtless Andy Warhol, with its transgendering emphasis on the artist's breasts. Sex recurs, sometimes to comic effect: a young Cindy Sherman stands alongside a giant photograph of a man's genitals, with Sherman's name inked across his protruding testicles. Auder, the gallery notes, 'embraces [image] saturation'.



Michel Auder, *Do Not Open Before Christmas*, 2018, c-type print mounted on Dibond, 2.1 x 1.1 m. Courtesy: the artist and Martos Gallery, New York

But I can only read in the work, which I like, what its quietude omits: the man who gave the exhibition its title and the protagonist of the film playing in the show's largest space, Donald Trump. *Trumped* (2018) is a slideshow of images of the president, various renaissance paintings, details of demons from tapestries and more scenes of home life, set to a low, droning soundtrack by Matthias

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Grübel. In the film, Auder's subject – the dubious subject of 'our' 'politics' – fully asserts himself among images like those one might find in the exhibition; he is open-mouthed, he points, he rolls his squinting eyes. He takes up huge amounts of visual and mental real estate (the only real estate he ever succeeded in), peddling the only infinitely renewable resource known to man: his stupidity. Here, the peace afforded by the print-outs arranged in the hall leading to the film is disturbed, or rather, Trumped, and Auder reminds us that even in those private, delicate spaces we may describe as the 'Trumpvoid', when the president's presence in our lives goes unacknowledged by those privileged enough to not be in his administration's immediate sight, he is always there, lurking at or below the surface. And no, things – art or otherwise – are not getting 'better', nor were they ever going to.



Michel Auder, *TRUMPED*, 2018, HD video with sound by Matthias Grübel, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Martos Gallery, New York

In Trump art did find, however, an apotheosis of the very strategies of performance and promotion it had developed over the last 50 years, particularly in his conceptual transformation from tabloid goon into totalizing event. (Quibble away.) It's no surprise, given this, that Trump adores Andy Warhol, whose presence in the show, via Neel's portrait, reads like a cue card; Trump frequently quotes *The*

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Philosophy of Andy Warhol on Twitter, and when Warhol was alive Trump repeatedly tried to commission a portrait of his Tower. From Warhol, Trump learned the greatest lesson of art in the 20th century: 'Good business is the best art.' And only business seems to be getting better.

Michel Auder: 'And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press' runs at Martos Gallery, New York, until 3 August.

Main image: Michel Auder, TRUMPED, 2018, HD video with sound by Matthias Grübel, video still. Courtesy: the artist and Martos Gallery, New York