HYPERALLERGIC

EVENTS

Ahead of Midterm Elections, the Art Community Responds to Zoe Leonard's "I Want a President"

Participants include artists Edgar Arceneaux and Edgar Heap of Birds, curators Helen Molesworth and Kimberli Meyer, and students from a Prison BA Program at California State Prison, Lancaster.

Matt Stromberg

I want a dyke for president. I want a person with aids for president and I want a fag for vice president and I want someone with no health insurance and I want someone who grew up in a place where the earth is so saturated with toxic waste that they didn't have a choice about getting leukemia. I want a president that had an abortion at sixteen and I want a candidate who isn't the lesser of two evils and I want a president who lost their last lover to aids, who still sees that in their eyes every time they lay down torest, who held their lover in their arms and knew they were dying. I want a president with no airconditioning, a president who has stood on line at the clinic, at the dmv, at the welfare office and has been unemployed and layed off and sexually harrassed and gaybashed and deported. I want someone who has spent the night in the tombs and had a cross burned on their lawn and survived rape. I want someone who has been in love and been hurt, who respects sex, who has made mistakes and learned from them. I want a Black woman for president. I want someone with bad teeth and attitude, someone who has eaten that nasty hospital food, someone who crossdresses and has done drugs and been in therapy. I want someone who has committed civil disobedience. And I want to know why this isn't possible. I want to know why we started learning somewhere down the line that a president is always a clown: always a john and never a hooker. Always a boss and never a worker, always a liar, always a thief and never caught.

Zoe Leonard, "I want a president" (1992) (© Zoe Leonard, courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth) Zoe Leonard's text piece "I want a president" was written over 25 years ago, at moment of political and cultural upheaval with chilling contemporary resonance. The nation was emerging from 12 long years of the conservative Reagan-Bush era, AIDS was the number one cause of death for men aged 25 to 44, and the NEA Four scandal marked a reactionary turn in government funding for the arts. Leonard's words aren't a call for civility or a plea to nd common ground. They unapologetically demand equality and empowerment for groups that have been longbeen discriminated against and excluded from positions of leadership in the US.

On the occasion of two Los Angeles shows of Leonard's work — <u>Analogue at Hauser & Wirth</u> and the upcoming <u>Survey at the Museum of Contemporary Art</u> — Hauser & Wirth has organized <u>an afternoon of responses to this seminal work</u>. Participating artists include Lita Albuquerque, Edgar Arceneaux with performer Joana Knezevic, Nao Bustamante, and Edgar Heap of Birds who will be presenting performances or readings that reconsider "I want a president" on the eve of the impending midterms. Also participating will be Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, curator Kimberli Meyer, and former MOCA curator Helen Molesworth, who will be reading Leonard's text. Dr. Bidhan Roy, founder of the <u>Prison BA Program at California State Prison, Lancaster,</u> has asked his students to write their own responses, which he will read at the event, providing a platform for those whose voices are rarely heard outside prison walls.

When: Saturday, November 3, 1pm

Where: Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles (901 East 3rd Street, Downtown, Los

Angeles)

More info at Hauser & Wirth.