



## GUTFREUNDCORNETTART

Changing the World Through Art

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### **Artists Comment on Democracy in the USA *What's Right, What's Left: Democracy in America***

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 11, 2015: Gutfreund Cornett Art, in collaboration with the Phoenix Gallery, is pleased to announce the opening of *What's Right, What's Left: Democracy in America*, an exhibition of activist artists at Phoenix Gallery, New York, New York, Thursday, January 7, 2016 with strong visual statements on the state of the USA and the global influence of American policies and politics.

Twenty-three works by twenty-one artists juried by Dr. Kathy Battista, Founder and Director of the MA Contemporary Art program at Sotheby's Institute of Art, will be installed in the gallery portraying themes of democracy, women's rights, LGBT issues, privacy and surveillance, the 1% and money, race, gun rights, immigration, environment, and other political issues and processes.

Gutfreund Cornett Art, a curatorial team with a mission to "Change the World through Art", asked for work that in the upcoming election year reflects on democracy in the United States. What is happening within our borders with the increasing polarization of our political parties and how do our views of democracy affect those outside our borders when we try to spread the American Dream? How does increasing surveillance affect the tenets of democracy? We have both freedom and a lack of privacy in this digital and Patriot's Act world as drones and wiretaps are commonplace and virtually unquestioned and unopposed; but do we have a voice in any of this Big Brother culture and with voting restriction laws being passed across the country to silence particular demographics of the American public. How does the media portray democracy -- truth vs. spin? What is actually news versus entertainment in bombastic, biased editorials? Artists consider democracy in relation to civil, personal and political rights, economic gain, and the debate over freedom of speech, freedom of choice and freedom to choose to live as you wish. What did our forefathers intend in the Constitution with the freedom of speech, the right to bear arms, the pursuit of happiness, etc. To whom do these tenets apply in a racially, religious and politically divided country?

**This international juried exhibition showcases work by** Nic Abramson, Ransom Ashley, Michael D'Antuono, Cat Del Buono, Justyne Fischer, Lindsay Garcia, Shawna Gibbs, Ruthann Godollei, Ingrid Goldbloom Bloch, Emily Greenberg, Gracie Guerrero-Bustini, Shreepad Joglekar, Monika Malewska, Victoria Helena Mihatovic, Kate Negri, Gina Randazzo, Sinan Revell, Nick Schmidt, Laura Sussman-Randall, Dan Tague, and Eike Waltz in the gallery and the forty-two additional artists with sixty-one works to be shown together on a monitor in the gallery in order to accommodate as many viewpoints as possible and expand the conversation beyond the physical limitations of the gallery.

**Dr. Battista says:** Democracy, a fundamental ideal of the United States constitution, is a contested term as of late...In the so-called West we look at nations that live under dictators and despots as uncivilized and barbaric; however, we live in a nation of contradictions...How does one find elation living in the midst of such turmoil? How do we understand and differentiate our nation from others that we consider less civilized? Is democracy the key to the well-being of all citizens?...But there is also what is right FOR America—how should we behave as a world superpower and how should we support as well as discipline our citizens?...The works in this exhibition cover a

range of these issues with visual acuity and insight, as well as humor and playfulness...I was reminded of the ability of art to transcend political party or message through the assertion of universal concepts and truths...I am particularly excited about the range of works in the gallery exhibition as well as the digital display. They read as a time capsule of 2015 in the United States. The concept of democracy, albeit difficult to adjudicate or predict, assures one thing: that in a civilized nation people can agree to disagree, debates can be waged and that people will continually revise and update their positions. Citizens, and especially artists, need to keep talking, keep creating and continue to propose different viewpoints.

With each exhibition, Gutfreund Cornett Art highlights work of nonprofits related to the theme – for *What's Right, What's Left: Democracy in America* the nonprofits chosen are **Vote Smart** and the **New York City Youth Poet Laureate Program**.

**GCA says:** “Art can be a powerful, productive force instrumental in sparking change or critical thinking. Gutfreund Cornett Art is committed to supporting local, national, and global art activism to help us to understand what is happening in our society, who we are, where we come from and where we’re going. We specialize in creating exhibition opportunities for artists on themes of “art as activism” to stimulate dialog, raise consciousness and create social change.”

A color catalog accompanies the exhibition and is available on Amazon.com.

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**For more information about the exhibition:**

**Contact the Curators:** Karen Gutfreund and Sherri Cornett at [GutfreundCornettArt@gmail.com](mailto:GutfreundCornettArt@gmail.com)

**Press Kit:** <http://bit.ly/1OJkU0V>

**Online Gallery:** <http://bit.ly/1NA7FP7>

**Online Catalog:** [http://issuu.com/gutfreundcornettart/docs/democracy\\_catalog\\_for\\_issuu](http://issuu.com/gutfreundcornettart/docs/democracy_catalog_for_issuu)

### **About Gutfreund Cornett Art**

Gutfreund Cornett Art specializes in creating exhibition opportunities for artists on themes “art as activism” to stimulate dialog, raise consciousness and create social change. With backgrounds in national and international projects, advocacy, nonprofits, government, corporate art and a successful DIY Blockbuster shows on feminist issues, Gutfreund and Cornett have combined these skills to provide unique opportunities for artists, communities and our relevant nonprofit collaborators to come together around social and environmental themes.

### **About the Phoenix Gallery**

From its origins as a prestigious artist co-operative in New York, celebrating its 50th Anniversary in 2008, the Phoenix Gallery has evolved into a community-oriented center for all the arts. Founded in 1958, during the “Tenth Street” days, the gallery now has artist-members from around the world, all dedicated to the highest level of professionalism. Each brings his/her own unique style and vision to the diverse group that makes up the Phoenix Gallery. These artists, all carefully chosen for membership by Phoenix artist peers, work in all media and create art that encompasses and reflects wide cultural and ethnic interests.

In addition to providing artist-members elegant space to exhibit, the gallery reaches out to the members of the community, scheduling juried competitions, dance programs, poetry readings, book signings, plays and lectures. A special exhibition space, The Project Room, has been established for guest-artist exhibits. The Phoenix Gallery is a non-profit 501-(c) (3) organization.

In continuous operation since 1958, the Phoenix Gallery represents a committed artist community that runs a non-profit public exhibition space for fellow professional and emerging artists. In addition, it awards fellowships, hosts juried exhibitions, and promotes the work of all its members.

The Phoenix Gallery is located at 548 W. 28<sup>th</sup> Street, #528, NY, NY 10001.

Website: [www.phoenix-gallery.com/](http://www.phoenix-gallery.com/)

Contact: Linda Handler, Director ([phoenix-gallery@phoenix-gallery.com](mailto:phoenix-gallery@phoenix-gallery.com))

### **About the Juror**

Dr. Kathy Battista is the Founder and Director of the MA Contemporary Art program at Sotheby's Institute of Art, New York and Senior Research Fellow of the Centre for Global Futures in Art, Design and Media at the Winchester School of Art University of Southampton.

She is a writer, curator and educator. She is author of *New York New Wave: The Legacy of Feminist Art in Emerging practice 2015* and *Re-negotiating the Body: Feminist Artists in 1970s London* (IB Tauris, 2012), which won the Choice Book Award for 2013. Her essays have appeared in the following edited collections: *Drawings in the 21st Century: Papers on Contemporary Practice* (Ashgate, 2015); *Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender* (Temple University Press, 2009); *Arcade: Artists and Placemaking* (Black Dog, 2006); *Surface Tension: Supplement 1 (errant bodies, 2006)* and *Surface Tension: Problematics of Site (errant bodies, 2003)*; as well as many exhibition catalogues.

Kathy is currently curating a major retrospective of the work of E.A.T. (Experiments in Art & Technology), which opens July 25th 2015 at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria and will be accompanied by a full scale book. Recent curated exhibitions include *Linea: Katie Holten and Mariatheresa Sartori*; *Marta Jovanovic: Republika*; and *Shony Rivnay: Soft Corps* (Bosi Gallery, New York, 2014); *Syri-Arts Benefit* (Beirut Exhibition Centre, 2013); *Royal Academy Encounter* (Katara Arts Centre, Doha, 2012); *Sweethearts: Artist Couples* (Houldsworth Gallery, London, 2012).

Kathy has taught at Cornell University; Birkbeck College; The London Consortium (University of London); Kings College; the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford University; and Tate Modern. Kathy was founder of the Interaction education and events program for the UK-based public art agency Artangel. She received a PhD and was a Postdoctoral Fellow of The London Consortium, University of London; a MA from the Courtauld Institute of Art; and a BA from Fordham University.

### **About Vote Smart**

Vote Smart's mission is to provide free, factual, unbiased information on candidates and elected officials to All Americans. [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)

### **About the New York City Youth Poet Laureate Program**

The NYC Youth Poet Laureate Program provides a platform for young voices to promote civic engagement, voting and community building. <http://www.nyccfb.info/nyc-votes/programs/yp/>

### **Full Statement by Dr. Battista:**

#### **Democracy in America**

When invited to jury this exhibition, I was excited about the possibilities as well as the challenges that it presented. I cannot think of a topic that is more important today. Democracy, a fundamental ideal of the United States constitution, is a contested term as of late. Democratic elections and governance are the hallmarks of an emancipated, first world nation. In the so-called West we look at nations that live under dictators and despots as uncivilized and barbaric; however, we live in a nation of contradictions, a few of which I detail below.

The United States has one of the highest statistics of incarceration in the world including the infamous Guantanamo Bay detention center, which some argue has defied laws established by the Geneva convention; a battle over freedom of choice, thought to have been resolved in the 1973 Roe vs Wade case, still wages, with the family values right recently eliminating Medicaid funding for Planned Parenthood in Texas; gun crime is at endemic levels, including random mass shootings in public spaces; and police brutality against the African American community is the topic of daily news. How does one find elation living in the midst of such turmoil? How do we understand and differentiate our nation from others that we consider less civilized? Is democracy the key to the well being of all citizens?

In the call for submissions to this exhibition the artists were asked "What is right and what is left in America?" The double entendre in the title, which I unfortunately cannot take credit for, was hiding in plain sight. Right and left in the political conception are traditionally understood as a conservative, Republican viewpoint versus a liberal, Democratic stance; of course, this binary seems antiquated at present in the increasingly centrist elision of the left

and the new extremism in the right. However, if we ask ourselves what is “right” in terms of moral aptitude, it lacks the discrete boundaries of a fixed position. What is “right” is subjective, the subject of debate, and stands for different things depending on who is asked and who answers the question. Is it right to tell women how they can control their bodies? Is it right that guns are so easily accessible in this country? Is it right that we incarcerate more people than any other democratic, civilized nation? But there is also what is right FOR America—how should we behave as a world superpower and how should we support as well as discipline our citizens?

We can also ponder what is left? In political terms it has become increasingly centrist in its views, veering close to conservative viewpoints at times. Alternatively, “what is left?” also means what remains. If we ask ourselves what remains we are left with both disparities and inconclusive ideals. We are left with a second amendment that many find outdated, a leftover from a time when bearing arms was not related to gang, youth, and random mortality. We are sadly not left with a conclusive stance on reproduction. So what is left in America? How far are we as a nation from what we were originally founded as?

The works in this exhibition cover a range of these issues with visual acuity and insight, as well as humor and playfulness. Looking at the works that were submitted, I was reminded of the ability of art to transcend political party or message through the assertion of universal concepts and truths. Making a selection that would fit into the intimate proportions of the Phoenix Gallery required discipline. I had the luxury of a plethora of works to choose from, many of which were significant to me for several reasons. There were works that had huge visual impact, which I wanted to include for their sheer physical presence. This was difficult given the confines of the space and the fact that I wanted to be as inclusive as possible regarding the amount of featured artists. There were pieces that dealt with political issues through abstract aesthetics, which were magnificent in their subtlety and nuances. I could have selected, and considered doing so, an entire exhibition of abstract work. This would have been a completely different show than what one sees at Phoenix Gallery.

In the editing process, the works that prevailed represent a wide use of media and techniques. There are videos that use straightforward editing, found and created footage, as well as digital enhancement. There are sculptures that contain found objects as well as those finely crafted traditional materials. There are paintings, drawings, photographs and prints that use figuration and text to portray individual and universal messages. There are also installations (one of which is performative and interactive for the duration of the exhibition) that were important for me to include for the challenging nature of these works.

I am particularly excited about the range of works in the gallery exhibition as well as the digital display. They read as a time capsule of 2015 in the United States. I hope that I have the luxury of looking back at this work in decades to come, to see how contemporary artists have progressed or returned to these debates. Hopefully what is right for our nation, in a moral rather than political sense, will prevail and that we will be left with ideals and policies that we are proud of. The concept of democracy, albeit difficult to adjudicate or predict, assures one thing: that in a civilized nation people can agree to disagree, debates can be waged and that people will continually revise and update their positions. Citizens, and especially artists, need to keep talking, keep creating and continue to propose different viewpoints. Although we may not like a viewpoint, being part of a democracy means allowing every opinion, left or right.