

HAINES GALLERY PRESENTS

POLITICAL FICTIONS

SEPTEMBER 4 - NOVEMBER 1, 2014

Opening reception: Thursday, September 4, 5:30pm – 7:30pm

Bringing together an international group of artists whose diverse practices question the reportage and representation of current events, *Political Fictions* starts from the position that both artists and audiences can be active participants in the production, interpretation and transformation of media culture. By creatively intervening in the flow of news photos, television broadcasts and streaming data, these artists coax familiar images into revealing latent content. The exhibition takes its name from Joan Didion's 2001 collection of essays on American politics, which focuses on how the electoral process is packaged for the public consumption. The first in an ongoing series of curated exhibitions organized by Haines Gallery executive director David Spalding, *Political Fictions* brings the gallery's represented artists into dialogue with established and emerging artists from outside the gallery's regular program to address shared interests and urgencies.

TAHA BELAL | *untitled (pictures backwards)*, 2014

In his latest body of work, Taha Belal (b. 1984, Cairo; lives and works in Cairo, Egypt) draws surprising insights from the transformation of images as they travel between various news formats. With *untitled(pictures backwards)*,



Belal works with a Cairo newspaper's coverage of the weeks leading up to the Egyptian presidential elections, examining how this highly politicized moment was transformed into "news" for a two-dimensional platform. To create the work, Belal cut out all of the rectangular images from each page of the newspaper; using applied pressure from a pen, he then transferred the newspaper ink onto sheets of glossy photo paper. As if attempting to reverse-engineer the original photographs from their diminished state — reproduced on cheap newsprint in the service of a propaganda machine — Belal's process-oriented practice becomes a metaphor for the activity of the engaged viewer.

KOTA EZAWA | *The Simpson Verdict*, 2002

The work of Kota Ezawa (b. 1969 Cologne; lives and works in San Francisco, California) often explores the role of television, film and photography in shaping our relationship to reality in an age of



spectacularized media events. In his video *The Simpson Verdict*, Ezawa animates the original courtroom footage of the verdict being read at the conclusion of the 1994 O.J. Simpson murder trial, distilling it to a pared down, flattened animation style that has become his signature. The facial expressions and body language of Simpson — as well as the responses of the victims' families and others in the courtroom — become the central element of the piece. Setting these cartoonish figures against a disjunctive, unaltered audio track of bureaucratic legalese, Ezawa intensifies the impact of the human gestures, drawing attention to Simpson's shifting eyes and blank expression as the verdict is read. Seen live on television by more than half the U.S. population, this verdict was one of the most watched events in American television history.

JEANNE FRISCIA | *Wall (2003)*, 2003/2014

For her text-based installation, *Wall (2003)*, Jeanne Friscia (b. 1964, New Jersey; lives and works in San Francisco, California) has reworked the text from George W. Bush's 2003 State of the Union address — an object lesson in fear mongering in the wake of the 9/11 — alphabetizing all of the President's

terror	this	watch
terror	this	water
terror	this	way
terrorism	this	way
terrorist	this	ways
terrorist	this	ways
terrorist	this	ways
terrorist	this	we
terrorist	this	we
terrorist	thorough	we
terrorist	those	we
terrorist	thought	we
terrorists	thought	we

words and arranging them into columns that glow from the surface of a light box. Creating *Wall (2003)* inspired Friscia to revisit and rearrange all eight of Bush's State of the Union Addresses. Inverting the equation typical of monuments, such as

Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Friscia's *Wall* (2003) draws our attention not to the victims of war, but to the script and stagecraft of its instigators. What becomes evident are the patterns of repetition, presence and absence as this particular narrative becomes an index of fright, manipulation and diversion. The work's implications extend beyond the political immediacy of its source, pointing to how alternative readings of dominant media can be productive and revealing.

ALFREDO JAAR | *From Time to Time*, 2006

Since the early 1980s, Alfredo Jaar (b. 1956, Santiago, Chile; lives and works in New York) creates artworks that re-engage desensitized audiences with global inequities and explore the limitations of art in representing events such as genocides, epidemics and famine. Consisting of nine *Time* magazine covers, *From Time to Time* analyzes the visual clichés about Africa disseminated by this highly popular news outlet. The cover stories revolve around wild animals and natural disasters, while the ninth cover reads, "Somalia: The US to the Rescue" over the image of a malnourished child, epitomizing the mentality of superiority that prompted the ultimately unsuccessful interventions of 1992-1995. As the artist has remarked, "Images are not innocent. Every single image out there in the world represents...an ideological conception of the world."



TODD LAVINE | *Selections from A Transmission, Interrupted*, 2014

Social media plays a role in both the framing and waging of armed conflicts such as the Syrian Civil War, which has been growing in intensity for more than two years. In *Selections from A Transmission, Interrupted*, Todd Lavine



(b. 1989, New York; lives and works in Menlo Park, California) examines online depictions of one key figure, Lieutenant Abdul Razaq Tlass. Tlass was the top leader of the Farouq Brigade — an armed rebel organization of the Free Syrian Army — until he was connected to a cybersex scandal posted on YouTube. Tracing the arc of his rise and fall via Lavine's carefully selected and edited images and video footage — ranging from staged photographs and stills from a hacked

Skype video to news broadcasts, all circulating online — we experience Tlass as a mosaic of conflicting constructions that never quite adds up.

DINH Q. LÊ | *The Scroll of General Nguyen Ngoc Loan*, 2013

To create this 150-foot scroll of rippling photo paper, Vietnamese-based artist Dinh Q. Lê (b. 1965, Hà Tiên, Vietnam; lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City) appropriated Eddie Adams's well-known photograph of police chief General Nguyen Ngoc Loan's public execution of a Vietcong prisoner—digitally stretching the image so that it spans the work's entire length. It was Adam's photograph, coupled with unprecedented access to televised coverage from the front-lines, that helped to galvanize American public opinion against the Vietnamese-American War. Testing the limits of legibility, the scroll is remarkable for its ability to call to mind the Adams' image, despite the distorting effects of Lê's artistic process.



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Image captions, page 1, clockwise:

Kota Ezawa, *The Simpson Verdict*, detail, 2002, video with sound, 3-min. loop; Jeanne Friscia, *Wall* (2003), detail, 2003/2014, durtrans transparency & light box, 60 x 40 x 5 inches; Taha Belal, *untitled (pictures backwards)*, detail, 2014, newspaper ink transfer on inkjet photo paper, 11.5 x 8.5 inches

Image captions, page 2, clockwise:

Dinh Q. Lê, *The Scroll of General Nguyen Ngoc Loan*, 2013, c-print with gold lacquer box, 96 x 54 x 98 inches; Todd Lavine, *Selections from A Transmission, Interrupted*, detail, 2014, mixed-media installation; Alfredo Jaar, *From Time to Time*, 2006, detail, 2006, cibachrome print mounted on plexiglass, 49 x 38.5 x 1 inches