

This Is the Art That Mattered From the 2016 Presidential Election

We're far from "Hope."

Ben Davis, November 7, 2016



Deborah Kass, *Vote Hillary* (2016). Courtesy of Brand New Gallery.

When you think of the most iconic recent election art, you probably think of Shepard Fairey's Hope graphic for Obama from 2008, which created a color palette and starry-eyed aesthetic that have become political cliché. Election 2016's most visible artistic expressions, by contrast, have been notable for just how little of this hopeful spirit they have channeled.

"This is absolutely nasty, nastier than anything I have seen before," Ken Rudin, an expert in political memorabilia, told the *Economist* earlier this week.

And so, the art orbiting this campaign has instead hearkened back to another inspiration, the Obama Joker graphic that became the right-wing's viral rejoinder to Hope in 2009, a gutter bucket, trollish meme. The visual language of this election cycle is distinguished by a relative lack of positive representations of the candidates (a point I made recently on the BBC show "The Cultural Frontline")—though savagely anti-Trump art has been by far the most visible.

Below, a final poll of the art that made the news this campaign cycle: Pro-Clinton, Pro-Trump, Anti-Clinton, Anti-Trump, and Undecided:

Deborah Kass, *Vote Hillary*

Even if the central image is a snarling Trump, the title and inscription at the bottom leaves no doubt that this belongs in the pro-Hillary column. Kass, celebrated for her feminist riffs on Warhol, here draws on the Pop artist's 1972 graphic for George McGovern, which featured the image of a clown-hued Richard Nixon with the slogan "Vote McGovern."