

# HYPERALLERGIC

News

## Billboard Companies Reject “Inflammatory” Art for Pro-Voting Campaign

The designs by artists Deborah Kass and Cleon Peterson were critical of the Supreme Court as well as abortion and pro-gun legislation.

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Deborah Kass's rejected design for a Georgia voting campaign (images courtesy PFAW)

Billboards designed by artists Deborah Kass and Cleon Peterson for a “get out the vote” campaign in Georgia were rejected by two of the largest billboard companies in the United States, Outfront Media and Lamar Advertising.

The designs were spearheaded by the progressive advocacy group People for the American Way (PFAW), which will now display Kass and Peterson’s designs on mobile billboard trucks that will be dispatched throughout Atlanta. PFAW is also encouraging people to share the censored artwork by Kass and Peterson — as well as work produced by other artists such as Shepard Fairey and Carrie Mae Weems for the same campaign — on social media ahead of the upcoming midterm election.

Kass’s design features a muted row of black-and-white photographs of the five Supreme Court justices who voted to overturn Roe v. Wade in June, reversing almost a half-century of legal precedent. Across their smiling portraits are the words “You’re Killing Me” in boldface Republican red, and beneath it, in smaller font and in Democratic blue, the word “Vote.”



One of Cleon Peterson’s designs for the campaign

The companies refused to display two of Peterson’s designs. Utilizing exclusively black, red, and white, Peterson admitted that both had an “intimidating” aesthetic. One graphic depicts a line of headless men looking down into the skirts of chained women. Another shows hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan reaching up for a gun.

Despite the content of the images, Peterson told Hyperallergic that “they’re very truthful in the policies that are enacted now. What seems crazy as an image is just a reflection of what’s going on.”



Another of Cleon Peterson's billboard designs shows KKK members reaching for guns.

Kass echoed Peterson's alarm, remarking that this midterm election is important and can serve as a rebuke to "the end of democracy as witnessed by the subjugation of 51% of the population and the criminalization of uteruses."

"Who gets to be free in this country? If you're not free to make decisions about our own body, you are not free, period," she told Hyperallergic. Kass, whose iconic "OY/YO" sculpture marks the entrance of the Brooklyn Museum, is known for addressing feminist themes in her work, and has long produced art with straightforward political messaging for Democratic campaigns.

"These laws are killing women, and one begins to think that's the point. This is violence against women," Kass said. "These horrible anti-abortion laws are inscribing violence against women and girls into the law, on top of incentivizing rape, incest, and pedophilia."

"I'm never surprised when things get censored," Kass added.

Svante Myrick, executive director of PFAW, was unsettled by the news. "We were really shocked and disappointed. They're great, quality art from really accomplished artists, but they're also not graphic or obscene," Myrick said. "They're not as obscene as what Republicans intend to do if they take power. If you're offended by this artwork, wait until you see the laws that the Republicans pass."

According to PFAW, Outfront Media called the images "inflammatory." Lamar Advertising told PFAW that their legal team had rejected them. Neither company replied to Hyperallergic's request for comment.

Georgia's midterm elections, which Myrick called "maybe the most important one in the entire country," will decide virtually every state legislative position, including a Senate seat, the attorney general, the secretary of state, and 14 House representatives.

“I just hope that people don’t feel ambivalent and overwhelmed by the hysteria going on in society, and that they take action and recognize how significant this election is,” Peterson said.