



Deborah Kass Seeks to Save Our Democracy with Her Art

by **Reese Alexander**

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Last Monday, FF2 announced a new series focusing on women artists participating in the “People For” ‘Artists for Democracy’ campaign.

As explained in that earlier post, People For is a progressive organization dedicated to fighting against right-wing extremism. In the run up to November, their ‘Artists for Democracy’ campaign gives partner artists a platform “to create work which highlights the supreme importance of the 2024 presidential election.”

Each Monday for the rest of September, we will interview one of these artists as they use their voices and talents to back the Kamala Harris campaign.

Today, we are proud to spotlight ‘Artists for Democracy’ contributor and mixed media artist Deborah Kass!

Reese Alexander: What drew you to work with People For?

Deborah Kass: I was invited to participate by Carrie Mae Weems. I’ve always been aware of People For and the great work they do, so I was thrilled to be involved.

Reese: I saw that you were involved with the ‘Enough of Trump’ campaign at first?

Deborah: Yes, that was the first People For campaign I was involved with. Anything I can do, I will do. Anything that anybody asks me to do, I will happily do to help save our democracy.

Reese: Are you very passionate about elections specifically?

Deborah: Oh God, I’m very passionate about politics. It informs everything I do, especially my work. It’s the context we live in, and it is also a matter of life and death at the moment.

Participating in the American political process is our right; it’s also our obligation as citizens. So, to be able to do that creatively—that’s a privilege.

Reese: How do you see artists such as yourself as uniquely situated to speak to the public about these issues, perhaps better situated than politicians?

Deborah: I don't know if we're better at it, but I do know that democracy is not a spectator sport. Women's rights have been taken away. That's half of all Americans. So, we're really compelled to participate in any way possible, and to contribute whatever talents we have to save democracy.

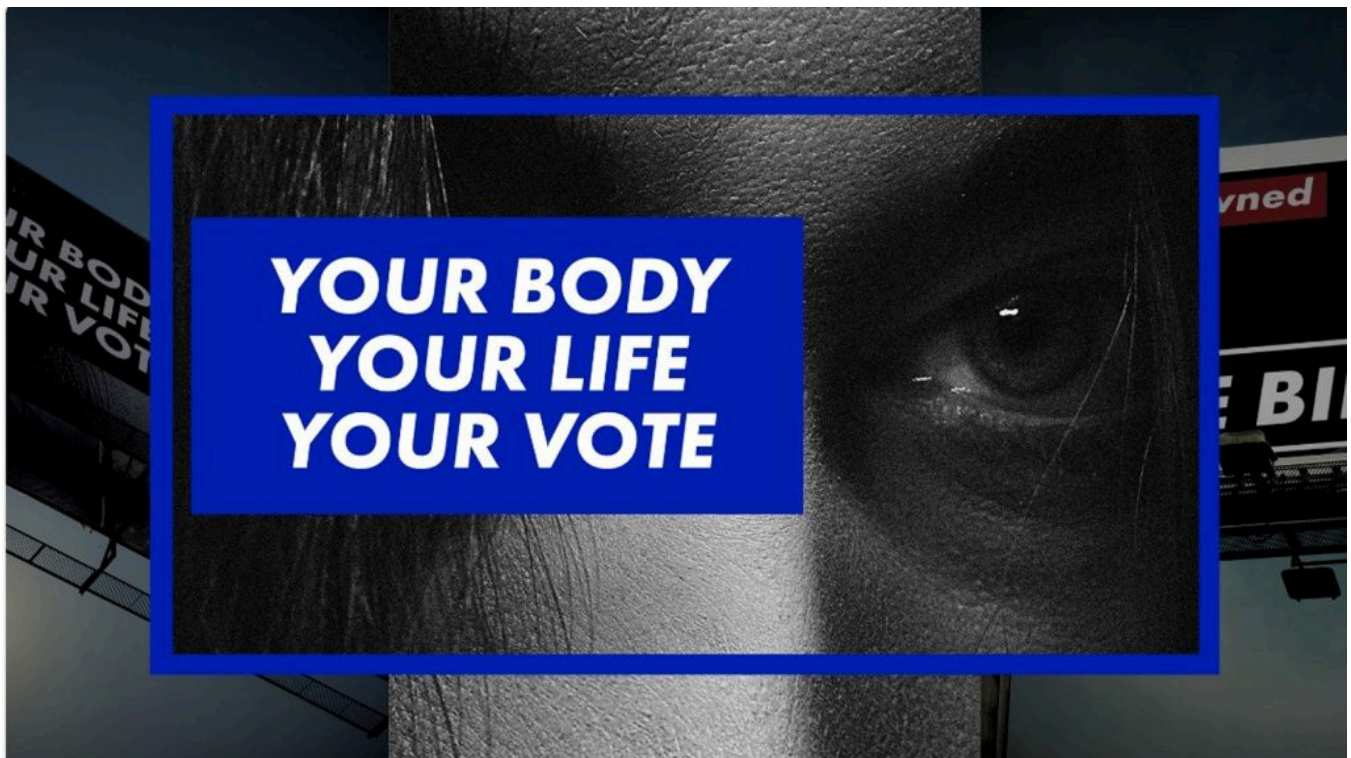
What's unique about being an artist is the ability to harness the power of images, and the power of words and images—and deliver a message. Now is the time for all good people to come to the aid of our country.

Reese: I wanted to talk a little bit about the specific piece of artwork with which People For For provided us that you created, which is the closeup of the woman's face with words over it. What were your thoughts in contributing that specific work?

Deborah: Well, for one thing it was a tribute to Barbara Kruger's 'Your Body Is A Battleground' from 1989.

But, in this situation, however many years later, the right to control one's body is the bottom line. Who controls your body, you or the state? It's nothing short of disgusting to have a minority—men—dictating the rights of the majority—women—while women are paying taxes for the privilege of men controlling us.

These Republican men are literally killing women, and you have to kind of ask at this point: What is their problem? Are women citizens? Are women full human beings? There's obviously a minority of men—Republican men to be exact—in this country who think we're not, which is so sick and weird. Also evil, sinister, perverted, and deadly.



So that's why I created this public service message: 'Your Body, Your Life, Your Vote.' My freedom and your freedom is on the line.

Reese: I saw in my research that some of your billboards in Georgia were censored. I wonder, what have you noticed about responses to your election-focused art, both positive and negative?

Deborah: The 'Vote Hillary' print in 2016 was an official, fine art print of the Hillary Clinton campaign. It's one of my proudest moments, to be honest. They sold like hot cakes and raised a ton of money for her campaign.

But...I don't know what other reactions are. Getting censored for an artist is kind of fabulous. Once censored by the billboard company, People For put the image on a truck and drove it around instead!

My contributions tend to be really angry, super pissy, super stark. I like to get to the bottom line. I like the message to be accessible.

People react however they're gonna react.

Reese: I'm a college student, and this election cycle I've noticed a lot of young people voicing they may abstain from voting. What would you say to young voters—some of them young artists—who are still on the fence about whether to vote at all?

Deborah: Your freedom and future are on the line. Your ability to vote or not is on the line. I would encourage everyone to vote their self-interest, because your vote is the strongest voice you still have in our democracy. If you don't, you are to blame for your very dark, Handmaid's Tale future.

It's irresponsible to yourself, to your future, to your ambitions, to your happiness, to your children, and to your own body to not protect yourself at this moment with the best weapon you have, your vote.

Reese: How are you planning on continuing your backing of Kamala through election day, or even after election day, through your work?

Deborah: I take my responsibility as a citizen very seriously. So, I am just working every day to give and do whatever I can, and do whatever anybody asks of me.



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