

# ARTISTS CONTINUING THE FIGHT

ONE YEAR at the Brand Library

by Betty Ann Brown ·

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A large and remarkably diverse crowd filled the Brand Library & Art Center on Saturday, November 18, for “ONE YEAR of Living Dangerously: Political Art Comes of Age in L.A.,” an exhibition curated by artists **Joey Forsyte**, **Lawrence Gipe** and **Alexander Kritselis**, in conjunction with Brand Exhibition Supervisor, **Shannon Currie Holmes**.



Alexander Kritselis, Keiko Fukazawa

All three of the artist-organizers contributed work. Forsythe built an interactive installation that encouraged viewers to participate in the political system. Gipe used charcoal on paper to juxtapose two violent images; a man throwing a bomb and a military airplane taking off with a billowing cloud of exhaust. Kritselis painted a multi-paneled, wall-sized piece that addresses the plight of Iraqi refugees from Turkey seeking asylum in Greece. (The artist's mother was an "unwelcome refugee" expelled from Izmir in 1921.)



Charcoal drawing by Lawrence Gipe

“ONE YEAR” features the work of 21 LA artists, from the venerable **Ben Sakaguchi** to newcomers like **Kohshin Finley**. Sakaguchi’s signature citrus labels (reconfigured to make social statements) contrast with Finley’s exquisitely wrought portraits of African American friends and family, their faces marked with swaths of white paint.



Kohshin Finley with his portrait paintings

Also exhibited are several of **Linda Vallejo**'s "Brown Dot" series, where ethereal brown dots—the number of dots representing various percentages of the brown population—are configured to evoke ghostly portraits. Among **Kim Abeles**' contributions is an image of the president's Mar-a-Lago club, with pendant golden golf balls, each ball representing a presidential golf date from last year.



Jackie Sharp with Kim Abeles' Mar-a-Lago painting

Certainly the most humorous—and because of that, perhaps the most incisive—are **Thin Nguyen**'s T-shirts, emblazoned with ironic statements of bias. One reads: I AM A BIGOT, the red words aligned over smaller white terms, HOMOPHOBIC and TRANSPHOBIC.

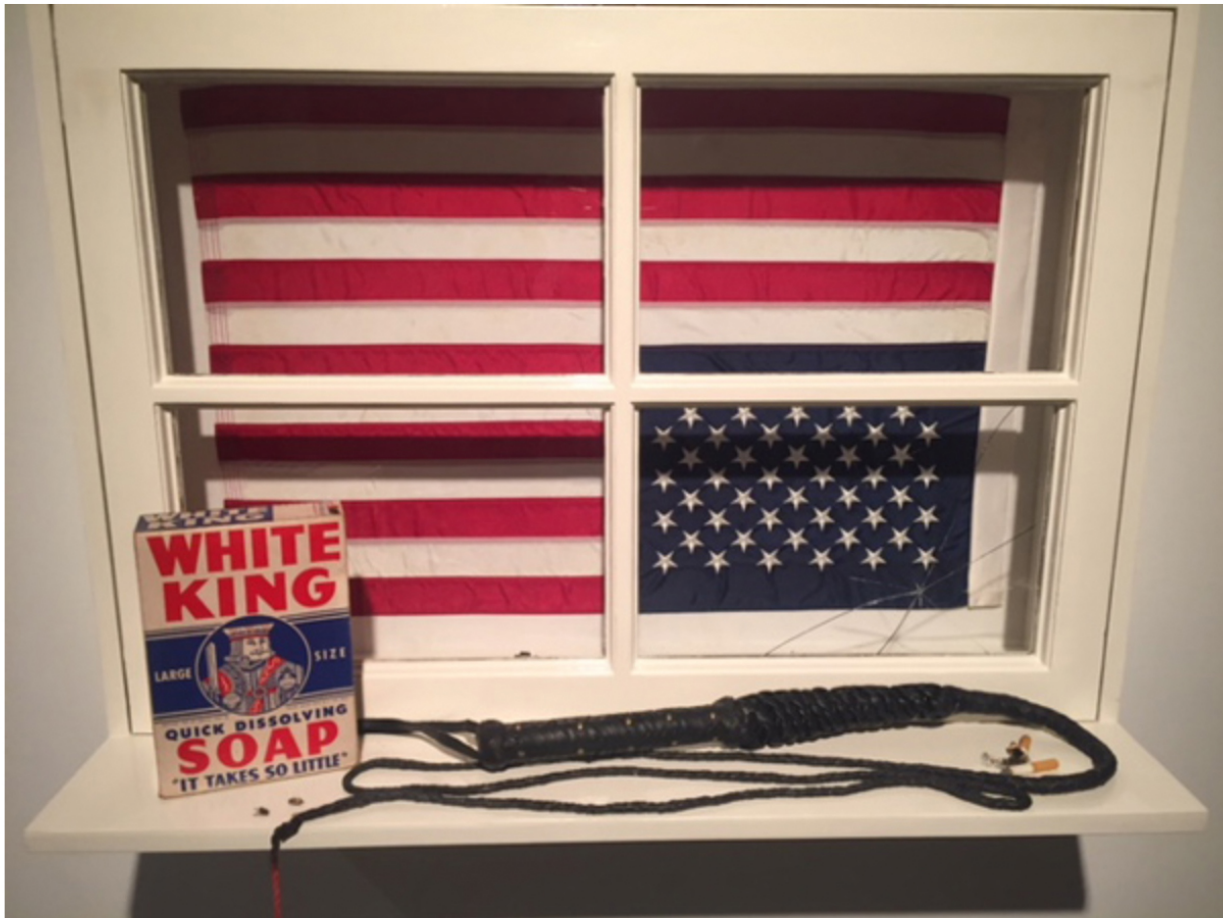
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Thinh Nguyen's T-shirts

Another series weaving whimsy with commentary is **Keiko Fukazawa**'s porcelain guns, packed like precious objects in velvet-lined boxes and covered with tiny white flowers. **Mark Steven Greenfield**'s images include a grimacing black man with the word "Motherfucker" defined by his jaw. Among **Emily Elisa Halpern**'s three pieces in the exhibition is an assemblage combining and upside-down American flag with a black whip and an old box of White King Soap.

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Work by Emily Elisa Halpern

Also included in the exhibition are **Guillermo Bert, Eileen Cowin, Scott Grieger, Nery Gariel Lemus, Constance Mallinson, Star Montana, Amitis Motevalli, Umar Rashid (Frohawk Two Feathers), Alexis Smith, and HK Zamani.** (Alas, I do not have room to discuss every work in the show.) It is a visually dizzying and conceptually confronting exhibition. As artist-curator Lawrence Gipe writes, "ONE YEAR presents a group that has channeled their anger, desires, and hopes about the world in to art [...] Los Angeles is on the cusp of a new political art tsunami, the crest of which has yet to be realized."



The racial/ethnic/gender diversity of the exhibition artists (and, by extension of the viewers who attended the opening) is strongly enhanced by the inclusion of several younger artists. Kohshin Finley was at the opening with his father—guerilla garden artist Ron Finley—as well as his two brothers. It is reassuring to see that members of the new generation are as politically and aesthetically engaged as their predecessors. Some of us are constantly discouraged and dismayed by the lack of character in our political leaders. How good to know that young people are continuing the fight against bias and corruption.

*Photos by Betty Ann Brown and Lynda Burdick*