The New York Eimes

Turning Points | Artist's Lens: 2018, as Seen by Five Artists Opinion Section December 5, 2018



"Heavy Rag" (2018) by Zoe Buckman, at Albertz Benda gallery in New York.CreditCreditCourtesy of Zoe Buckman and Albertz Benda, New York, photo by Casey Kelbaug

<u>Turning Points</u>, a magazine that explores what critical moments from this year might mean for the year ahead, asked five artists to select one of their own artworks and describe how it symbolized or reflected 2018.

### Zoe Buckman

"Heavy Rag" (2018)

2018: The year that the words "rape," "assault" and "harass" became inescapable, appearing seemingly everywhere online and in news media across the United States. The year some heads rolled, and lives were ruined, and the year many tales were forgotten too quickly or discredited in too brutal a manor. The year of too much jumping on the bandwagon. The year of attempted payback, misguided payback and zero payback. The year of not enough follow-through and pitiful justice. The year women were taught that little has changed and they're still not safe. The year the words "F.B.I. investigation" elicited instant eye rolls and a crushing sense of déjà vu.

The year I became even more proud of so many of us — and remained ever unsurprised by the actions of so many more.

The year I learned some new tools, and was reminded of some old, forgotten ones. The year of triggers, and wounds unwound, and Nia Wilson, and Brett Kavanagh, and nausea.

Zoe Buckman is a British-born multidisciplinary artist whose work centers on issues of feminism, equality and mortality.

### **George Condo**

#### "Facebook" (2017-18)

Over the last couple of years, my work has been exhibited all over the world: Paris, Athens, Hong Kong, Denmark, Washington, D.C. During my travels, interviewers asked for my opinion on American politics. Everyone wanted to know what the problem was: Had America succumbed to fake news — had the fake become real?

In 1988 I wrote a short essay about my artistic theories. In it, I discussed something I called "Artificial Realism," an artistic style I employed in my own paintings, and one I defined in part as "the appearance of reality through the representation of the artificial."

In the 30 years since, Artificial Realism has moved beyond the realm of art to take over global politics, setting off a nuclear explosion in the realm of truth. In 2018, truth has been blown to smithereens.



"Facebook" (2017-18) by George Condo.CreditCourtesy of George Condo, Skarstedt, New York, and Spr Sprüth Magers, Berlin, London, Los Angeles

Social media is the main culprit for the rise of this artificial-realist politics. I created this painting, "Facebook," to exorcise the lies that I believe are inherent in a culture of friends who friend you and are not your friends — an agglomeration of bots, trolls and alien information.

The message of politics today is fear, and, unfortunately, fear is working. But we can take back control; we can simply stop being afraid. Art has emerged as one of our last truthful experiences. Artists must point their brushes at the government and say, "STOP LYING TO US!"

George Condo is an American visual artist whose abstract paintings and surreal portraits, primarily of fictional characters, draw on a variety of sources and styles. His work appears in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Tate Modern in London, among other institutions.

### Alfredo Jaar

#### "Shadows" (2014)

This image by the Dutch photojournalist Koen Wessing depicts one of the deepest expressions of grief I have ever seen. It was taken in Estelí, Nicaragua, in 1978 during the revolt against the Somoza regime — at the moment two sisters were informed of their father's death. Mr. Wessing's photograph served as the starting point for my 2014 installation "Shadows," the second work in a trilogy exploring the power and politics of iconic images.

Today, when I read about immigrant families being torn apart, I remember this photograph. When I read about babies being forcibly taken from their mothers, I remember this photograph. When I read about children being housed in cages, I remember this photograph. When I read about mothers imploring the return of their children, I remember this photograph.



"Shadows" (2014) by Alfredo Jaar.CreditKoen Wessing/Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, Netherlands

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As a young man, I survived Gen. Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile. Later, I traveled to Rwanda to witness the terrible aftermath of the genocide during which, in 1994, roughly 1 million people were killed in 100 days. And yet nothing can numb me to the cruelty, to the monstrosity, of the Trump administration's actions against innocent immigrant children in the United States.

In these dark times, I look for refuge in "Requiem," a poem by the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova:

I have a lot of work to do today; I need to slaughter memory, Turn my living soul to stone Then teach myself to live again.

Alfredo Jaar is a Chilean-born conceptual artist whose wide-ranging work tackles issues related to social injustice, inequality and sociopolitical division. His previous projects have addressed the Rwandan genocide and immigration in the United States, among other topics.

### Saba Khan

"Keep Your Hands to Yourself" ("Apne Haath, Apne Paas") (2018)

With the rise of the Pakistani middle class, steadily increasing numbers of women have joined the work force. Pakistani women now make up roughly 22 percent of the nation's workers, according to the World Bank. Though that number is lower than all of Pakistan's South Asian neighbors except for Afghanistan, it nonetheless represents a dramatic change for a country in which women traditionally worked in the home.

Accompanying the rise of the female worker has been an increased awareness of sexual harassment on the job. The 2010 passage of a law criminalizing workplace harassment helped pave the way for Pakistan's own #MeToo movement. Today, victims are fighting back and using social media as a tool to seek justice. Earlier this year, the director of the National College of Arts in Rawalpindi was removed after facing sexual harassment allegations. And in April, Meesha Shafi, a well-known Pakistani actress and singer, posted a tweet claiming that a former male colleague of hers who is a pop star and Bollywood actor had sexually harassed her — a charge he denied.



"Keep Your Hands to Yourself" ("Apne Haath, Apne Paas") (2018) by Saba Khan.CreditSaba Khan

My artwork — a tapestry of sequins and beads inspired by the covers of Urdu pulp novels — is an attempt to address the ways in which sexual assault continues to subjugate Pakistani women in 2018. The tapestry shows two pairs of "shalwar," trousers commonly worn by Pakistani men, in the upper left and right corners. These baggy pants — and the act of untying the garment's drawstring — have been used to symbolize dominance over women in Urdu literature and Pakistani films. A "dupatta," the traditional scarf representing female modesty, drapes down toward two women, neither of whom are free from society's patriarchal structures. The emblem in the middle of the tapestry tells the viewer to "keep your hands to yourself," or "apne haath, apne paas" in Urdu.

Saba Khan is a visual artist whose work engages with the interplay of social class, popular culture and religion in contemporary Pakistan. She is the founder of the artist-run Murree Museum Artist's Residency and teaches at the National College of Arts in Pakistan.

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### Hank Willis Thomas

"Freedom of Speech" (2018)

"Freedom of Worship" (2018)

"Freedom From Want" (2018)

"Freedom From Fear" (2018)

In his 1941 State of the Union address, President Franklin D. Roosevelt laid out his vision of a world based on "four essential human freedoms": freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear. Two years later, Norman Rockwell painted a series of oils illustrating Roosevelt's principles, published in successive issues of The Saturday Evening Post and later used to sell war bonds.



"Freedom of Speech" (2018) by Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur, in collaboration with For Freedoms.CreditHank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur, courtesy of For Freedoms

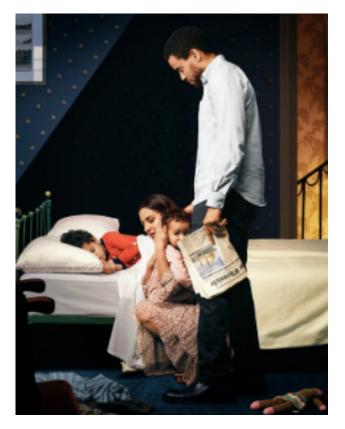


"Freedom of Worship" (2018) by Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur, in collaboration with For Freedoms.CreditHank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur, courtesy of For Freedoms



"Freedom From Want" (2018) by Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur, in collaboration with For Freedoms.CreditHank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur, courtesy of For Freedoms

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"Freedom From Fear" (2018) by Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur, in collaboration with For Freedoms.CreditHank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur, courtesy of For Freedoms

I came across Rockwell's iconic "Four Freedoms" a few years ago and was astounded by the beauty of the images and the power with which they represented the classic American values of family, faith, freedom and security. But I was also astounded by what was missing: America's ethnic and cultural diversity. It appeared that in Rockwell's vision, and perhaps Roosevelt's, those values were reserved for white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. All other Americans — Native, Latino, Asian, African, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, L.G.B.T. — were expected to enjoy those freedoms in the shadows, if at all. I asked myself: What would Rockwell's paintings look like if they were updated to reflect a more heterogeneous America?

With the help of my friend, the photographer Emily Shur, I've tried to answer that question. We've reproduced Rockwell's paintings as photographs, both to mark the 75th anniversary of the original works and to highlight the America we believe in — a country where everyone is represented and valued, regardless of their social status, faith or ethnic background. To reflect this multiplicity, we created multiple versions of Rockwell's paintings casting a diverse range of people. The images you see here are only four of the nearly 80 photographs we produced.

In 2018, the vibrant and diverse America represented by these photographs is arguably under greater threat than at any time since Rockwell produced his paintings. Now, more

than ever, it's worth remembering that progress is a journey, and that the road is always under construction.

Hank Willis Thomas is an American conceptual artist exploring the intersection of race, mass media and popular culture. He is the co-founder of For Freedoms, an organization dedicated to using art to increase civic engagement in the United States. In 2018, For Freedoms' 50 State Initiative produced art exhibitions, town hall events and artist-made billboards across the country to spur political debate ahead of the midterm elections.