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Jonathan Horowitz: Occupy Greenwich at the Brant Foundation Art and Study Center
May to October, 2016

941 North Street (at Hurlingham Drive)
Greenwich, CT, 203 869-0611



Installation view, "Jonathan Horowitz: Occupy Greenwich," 2016 at the Brant Foundation. Photo by Tom Powel Imaging, Inc. Courtesy The Brant Foundation.

Go Vegan!: Jonathan Horowitz at the Brant Foundation

by Noah Dillon

"My body will not be a tomb for other creatures."

-Leonardo da Vinci

Guests to the opening of Jonathan Horowitz's "Occupy Greenwich," at the Brant Foundation, may have been very surprised: whereas the multimillionaire paper magnate Peter Brant and his wife, Stephanie, typically open the spring exhibition at their art and study center with a pig roast, the carcasses of dead animals forced open and staked on the grounds, this year's attendees were greeted with vegan catering. Horowitz is vegan, and dressing as a slaughterhouse the beautiful Connecticut estate surrounding his

show seems likely to have undermined his work, some which speaks to the politics of what people eat and why.

Even before it opened, the show embraced some surprising contradictions. It runs the gamut, in a way, speaking to a number of social and political problems. It was promoted with a full-page ad, reproducing Horowitz's print *Go Vegan! (Stephanie)* (2016), with the slogan underscoring the portrait of a seductive young woman. Horowitz is gay, but he also understands that pretty girls *sell* better than pictures of cute animals, which are often paired with that exhortation. (Though women are also often referred to with metaphors for penned animals, obviously.) At the bottom was the show's sardonic title, equating the carefully executed exhibition of expensive collectibles with an anarchist takeover of the exurban enclave.

"Occupy Greenwich" touches on a number of seemingly partisan themes, often with messages that are superficially evangelist but which also include a subtext of uncertainty or perhaps even irony. That's especially useful as America's political discourse has grown increasingly polarized, in spite of the fact that people don't lead polar lives and usually have beliefs and practices that differ radically from common stereotypes about, say, vegans, Republicans, working class voters, queer people, gun owners and so on.

Hillary Clinton is a Person Too (2008), staged in one early room, is a cartooned, life-sized bronze sculpture of a woman being crowned by a small boy standing on a chair, with the sculpture's title cast into the base, in a corny comic font. Next to it, a whole wall of similar figurines — the size of paperweights and cast in the style of 1970s Sillisculpt statues, titled *We the People are People Too* (2008) — are marked with affirmations that "Young Mothers Are People Too," "Socialist Medics Are People Too," "Donald Rumsfeld Is A Person Too," "Ellen And Portia Are People Too," "Fetuses Are People Too," and others. It's not at all obvious how sincere Horowitz is being in his parodic coronation of Mrs. Clinton and the insistence on a common humanity shared alike by working people and Rumsfeld et al. It is absolutely essential to remember that everyone is a person, but it's also important to recall that both of those politicians were

managers of *massive* death, and putting them on the same scale as mothers, doctors, and embryos, etc., is discomfiting.

A stairway leading to galleries downstairs is lined with *Go Vegan! (200 Celebrity Vegetarians Downloaded from the Internet)* (2002/10). Each low-resolution-pictured person eats (currently, formerly, occasionally) a vegan or vegetarian diet, including Vincent van Gogh, Prince and Franz Kafka, among many others. Similar mosaics are found in vegan restaurants, online, and on posters produced by PETA. But they're also dubious; Horowitz commends the plea and also slyly digs at its cheesy, superfluous celebrity endorsements, which seem to put animal-cruelty-free eating in the same basket as Coca-Cola and Nike.

Downstairs, a large room Downstairs, a large room recapitulates Horowitz's *November 4, 2008* (2008) installation, originally staged at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, wherein viewers watched live election returns in a room divided between red and blue, FOX News and CNN, on back-to-back LCD screens. Here is the same set up, balloons poised to drop from the ceiling. The TV monitors are still playing the '08 election, and all of 24-hour cable news' on-screen signs of urgent immediacy — rapidly moving graphics, breaking updates, a scrolling crawl at the bottom, and more — all this stuff that's meant to convey *nowness*, is, eight years later, manic, diminutive, impotent.

The last installation, *I, Hillary* (2016), is a room empty save for a spare white bench, desk and chair, and an ink-jet printed and framed low-res portrait of Mrs. Clinton. From a small PA system comes Horowitz's voice, giving a meandering, rational and sort of defensive account of the show and his support for Mrs. Clinton's candidacy. He describes how capable she is, and that her policy aims seem pragmatic and reasonable. Although Horowitz sounds like he's speaking extemporaneously, if haltingly, his remarks also seem canned, robotically parroted from Clinton surrogates, partisans and pundits. Many of the same claims were repeated at the Democratic National Convention in July and have been found in the opinion media for the past year — the thrust being basically that he's not crazy about her, but thinks she's capable and will do a good job and have you seen how *insane* the alternative is? Horowitz's

minimizations of Clinton's closeness to Wall Street money and influence are followed by preemptive defenses about working with the Brants at their ostentatious estate, drawing a sharp parallel between her compromises and his own.

"I guess I am not a big proponent in general of supposed ideological purity," says Horowitz in his monologue. Probably few people are. More than that, though, Horowitz seems deeply interested in apparent contradiction, performativity, appropriation and allusion, both in politics and culture, and in his own life. One can hope that poking at those conflicts and misconceptions might lead to better elections, or maybe more civility. Or perhaps even just a few more vegans.