Curatorial Statement

'Snarky' best describes the type of art that I focus on in my research, exhibit in curatorial projects, and hang on the walls in my home. I appreciate how such work asks viewers to question their beliefs and interests, while at the same time provides the blush of laughter often needed for white cube exhibition spaces or daily life. Humor US hinges upon the value of snarkiness as requisite for the onslaught of anxieties my colleagues and I face following graduate school, and at the height of the election season. In the Bay Area especially, we find ourselves in an insurmountable amount of student debt, amongst a deficit of full time jobs with benefits, and at an impasse of affordable housing bigger than 100 square feet. **As we look towards the upcoming election to respond to these concerns, we encounter disparaging comments and questionable campaign tactics. It seems appropriate to respond to these actions with an equally startling nature: humor and wit.**

Through installations, videos, and photographs the artists exhibited in Humor US display personal experiences of disenfranchisement, criticisms of the American Dream, and platforms for positive social and political change made possible by the simplicity of listening to one another. Jin Zhu's video piece sets the tone for the exhibition by providing viewers with a historical context to the well-trodden path associated with Western politics——the disruption and marginalization of the 'other' by the white male. Douglas Angulo's video piece, and his deafening stare within it, builds on Zhu's concepts and asks us to take a hard look inward to consider how we form and project identity, and construct misconceptions of identity. The questions Angulo poses are especially relevant given the ebb and flow of the 2016 political candidates disingenuously siding with various specific communities of the American population to gain their trust and vote.

The work of France Viana and Hui Meng Wang questions what it means to step in and out of traditional and individual identity in the US, through a photographic exploration and video piece, respectively. Viana searches for answers in the neighborhoods of Filipino Americans and confronts their political values against her own. In a satirical commentary on the emerging Chinese middle class, Wang's video investigates the alarming disconnection between their idealized lifestyle and the actual reality that is increasingly shaped by the political and social interests of the West. Nathan Becka's objects and the installation of Kaitlin Trataris mock **the blind acceptance that follows campaign endorsements and empty promises given by both powerful figures and everyday citizens, all under the guise of chasing the American Dream.** Finally, it is Boris Scherbakov's sound installation that presents viewers with some answers to the question of how to grapple with the current political elections: to truly listen to our everyday surroundings and focus on conversations that lead to greater cultural and political understanding.

Although this exhibition will close just three weeks from Election Day, it is not meant to provide any presidential endorsements. It is here to recognize the social and political values held by Bay Area graduate students. Once we exit academia our dreams and goals shift regardless of what higher education or political leaders promise us. **We encounter a sudden and tough reality. What better way to face it than with a sly smile and biting quip?**

– Tanya Gayer

Guest curator and winner of our call for exhibition proposals.