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Camden Place: (e)merge preview

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Hillary Clinton is running for president.

This is the constructed reality according to Camden Place, a local artist whose fascination with the gap between perceived realities of the self and the actual self, inspired a mock Hillary 2016 campaign for presentation at the third annual (e)merge art fair.

“Obama has revolutionized the way presidents interact with us not as a president, but as a celebrity,” explained Camden, “What I’m trying to do, is increase the celebrity status of the president.”

The 2012 American University MFA graduate has recently been working on a series entitled, "Memories: 1985- 2000." In these digital collages, he superimposes images of himself in pictures with celebrities, finishing the work by framing the prints as if they were ordinary family photographs. Such constructions as a smirking young Camden wearing a pink YMCA shirt among the Sandlot boys are endearing, while other collages, like that of toddler Camden imitating the outstretched arms of Ace Ventura, evoke an undeniable sense of humor.

Camden plays on this sense of levity in his mock presidential campaign, but not for the sake of comedy. Instead, he seeks to challenge viewers and participants to question and consider what is presented to them.

"The viewer may distance himself. He may ignore it, or take a pin," said Camden.

The artist explained his interest in how people not only see themselves and others, but also how they respond to their perceptions, particularly when presented incongruous to reality.

"There's always been this element of doubt. People will have to ask questions," said Camden.

Buttons, flyers, pamphlets and other campaign paraphernalia, including an enormous, billboard-size poster, will constitute the mock advertising campaign.

Presenting a mock presidential campaign in Washington, DC is especially interesting, and one must wonder how Camden's artwork will be received during the (e)merge art fair, which although takes place in the nation's capital, draws crowds from many diverse locations worldwide.

"I want curiosity, I want disgust potentially, or for people to take it as offensive," explained Camden, "I want people to dig into it."

Hillary Clinton as a subject was not selected for the artist's political preferences, but instead because she already enjoys the celebrity status Camden seeks to augment.

"She's implicated herself," said Camden, "Like when there is a meme made about her, she reaches out to those people."

As Camden's installation slowly reveals itself as an art piece and not as an authentic campaign booth, it will have the potential to inspire viewers to expand their awareness and to consider the implications of the recent phenomenon of the president as celebrity.

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Roxanne Goldberg