

“THE STAND”

P!

Just in time for the inauguration of the forty-fifth president of the United States and the announcement from *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* that the Doomsday Clock had been moved forward from three minutes to midnight to two and a half,



P! staged a version of the apocalyptic nightmares many have been having of late. “The Stand,” curated by P! director Prem Krishnamurthy and artist-curator Anthony Marcellini, drew inspiration from Stephen King’s novel of the same title—a sprawling epic in which good and evil duke it out in the aftermath of a global epidemic. Featuring the work of twenty-five artists crammed into the mini storefront gallery, the exhibition was bewildering, cacophonous, and surprisingly odorous thanks to a curatorial decision to spread rubber mulch across the floor, dividing it diagonally into a blue section and a black section that loosely demarcated opposing sides of the struggle. Meant as a play on the sandbox Robert Smithson proposed in “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey”—in which the contents of two different-colored sections of sand would inevitably, irreversibly mix, due to forces of entropy—the floor installation undermined what already seemed an unstable boundary between light and dark, with the mulch being tracked back and forth over the course of the exhibition’s run.

Hung along the blurry borderline was Faheem Majeed’s *Fields of Our Fathers* (2016), a large piece of muslin crisscrossed by charcoal rubbings made from the surfaces of farmlands in Wisconsin, where the work was originally exhibited. This was one of several pieces making reference to the American landscape, whose depopulated locales take on weighty significance throughout King’s saga. Another such work, e-team’s *Artificial Traffic Jam* (2005), is a video made in the Nevada desert in collaboration with the people of Montello, a remote community of fewer than a hundred inhabitants. We watch a series of dusty automobiles gradually form a bumper-to-bumper traffic line along an otherwise abandoned dirt road, their drivers honking raucously as Willie Nelson’s “On the Road Again” plays on the soundtrack.

The familiar voice of the perpetually road-tripping country crooner lent an unsettling irony to the more macabre works on view. These included Xaviera Simmons’s *Whatever the Cost, I’ll Pay in Full* (2010), a black-and-white pigment print featuring a large owl with a mouse dangling helplessly from its beak, and Dana Schutz’s *Bird in Throat* (2011), a woodblock print depicting a man whose neck is agonizingly distended in the shape of a bird. In the company of these avian terrors, the American eagle

View of the exhibition “The Stand,” 2017, showing (center) Faheem Majeed’s *Fields of Our Fathers*, 2016, charcoal on muslin, at P!

represented in sculptural outline in Marcos Lutyens’s *Bird of a Feather* (2016–17) seemed a sinister national emblem, while a Trevor Paglen photograph of contrails left in restricted airspace above Nevada, presumably by military aircraft, reminded us that our skies are perpetually stalked by the most deadly birds of prey. Jonathan Bruce Williams’s *Reception Room* (2017), a blipping and bleeping chandelier made from 3D-printed materials, has a signal jammer nestled within it, evoking the “dark territory” not only of a world without wireless communication, but of a political moment in which much appears cloaked in secrecy.

The show also included a number of seeming counterpoints to these evocations of the state apparatus. The contribution by the collaborative group the Hinterlands from their larger work *The Radicalization Process* (2016) includes archival storage boxes filled with sticks of dynamite, presumably for seditious ends. Edgar A. Heap of Birds’s *Genocide and Democracy* (2016) comprises eight red-and-white monoprints resembling protest signs, which intermingle hollow patriotic sentiments with references to the opprobrious treatment of Native Americans.

Needless to say, most of the work on view seemed to amplify the anxieties of the present moment. But there were notable exceptions. Hanging inconspicuously on opposite walls of the space were two small, abstract compositions by Lisi Raskin, each tenderly constructed out of paper and slivers of glued-together wood. Although the titles, *Rise* and *Shine*, had ambiguous connotations in relation to the show’s larger themes, they read foremost as subtle allusions to a brighter dawn in this period of last stands.

—David Markus