

Asha Iman Veal: So, Marissa says that we are live. But maybe we'll begin our conversation in two minutes. This is a live video and audio recording hosted by the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago.

Asha Iman Veal: For anyone tuning in. My name is Asha Iman Veal and I'm the curatorial fellow here at MoCP. Our group is gathered here tonight on zoom for Conversations with The Curators, "What Does Democracy Look Like?" Part two.

Asha Iman Veal: Let's see. I could actually, would you all like to say your names? And then maybe we'll start in two minutes. Introduce yourself just by name and your position at the school?

Onur Öztürk: Hi, my name is Onur Öztürk and I'm an assistant professor of Art History in the Art and Art History department. Thank you.

Ames Hawkins: Hi, I'm Ames Hawkins. I'm the Associate Provost for Faculty Research and Development, and I'm a Professor of English and Creative Writing here at Columbia College Chicago.

Josh Fisher: Hello, I'm Josh Fisher. I'm the Assistant Professor of Immersive Media and the Department of Interactive Arts and Media at Columbia College Chicago. Welcome, everyone.

Asha Iman Veal: Wonderful. It's good to see everyone tonight.

Asha Iman Veal: So, for the guests just coming into zoom, our current exhibition on view at the museum is titled, "What Does Democracy Look Like?"

Asha Iman Veal: The show is open through December the 23rd and first presented to the public on October the 1st.

Asha Iman Veal: So, for this democracy exhibition, it's coinciding very obviously with the presidential elections.

Asha Iman Veal: MoCP invited guest curators, faculty members from various departments at Columbia College Chicago, to mind the museum's permanent collection of 16,000 objects.

Asha Iman Veal: So, each of the curators here tonight, out of seven, three out of seven, has interpreted selections from the collection to consider what democracy means for them, as well as how photography records and shapes society's understanding of current and historical events.

Asha Iman Veal: So, I'd like to give it one more minute before we start with the presentations, just to make sure people are coming in the room, but in the chat, I'm seeing many, as I did, many comments on the bow ties tonight, which are stellar.

Asha Iman Veal: So, Onur, Ames, and Josh, where are you, where are you coming in tonight? Are you all at home? It seems like it. I'm a home to you. It feels good.

Ames Hawkins: Yeah, I am definitely at home. See my bookshelf.

Ames Hawkins: Yes. Great. Yes.

Asha Iman Veal: With cookies on the way?

Ames Hawkins: Cookies are on the way, somebody's making cookies.

Josh Fisher: The classic American tradition.

Asha Iman Veal: Yes.

Onur Öztürk: I can almost smell them Ames, you explained them so nicely. And I'm also from home in Oak Park.

Ames Hawkins: Oak park. Perfect.

Asha Iman Veal: I am downtown not terribly far from the museum. So, it's like I'm at work, even though I'm in my house.

Asha Iman Veal: Right. I think we can go ahead and continue. So, our first introduction will be from Onur Öztürk. So, to share a bit of your biography, you've received a master's degree in the history of architecture in the

Middle East Technical University and a PhD from the University of Texas in Austin.

Asha Iman Veal: Your academic research focuses on art and architecture as well as archaeology of ancient and medieval Asia, Minor, modern Turkey.

Asha Iman Veal: You teach courses related to the art of Islam and art and virtual and you build students critical thinking skills and increase awareness of the historical and cultural diversity of our world.

Asha Iman Veal: So, you and I only met last week for the first-time Onur and I love speaking with you, I thought it was so important. You have this passion that's amazing about what it is to really build critical thinking skills and increase this awareness and every time I watch the news, every time I have conversations, thinking about elections, thinking about democracy.

Asha Iman Veal: It's interesting to engage with people that have developed those skills and really taken the time and other people that are maybe just floating through. So, I think the work you're doing is so important and it just means so much so it's wonderful to talk to you today.

Onur Öztürk: Thank you Asha. Same here. It was such a delightful conversation with you and I wholeheartedly agree with you, critical thinking, is at the essence of my teaching.

Onur Öztürk: I always try to train myself to be a critical thinker and just today, we were talking with my students how to be critical thinkers and how to engage with the world around us with critical evidence, but also using our arguments with evidence which seems to be disappearing in recent years, unfortunately, especially in the political realm.

Onur Öztürk: So, I thought it would be really helpful to remind my students that when you are making an argument you need to support it with evidence. We need to support it with special case studies. I remember in 2007 when I first came to Chicago, I didn't know that many people and we moved to this neighborhood called Hyde Park and I didn't realize I was only living two blocks away from Mr. Obama and I was, I pretty much listened to every single speech he made on live TV and I was so fascinated with every speech being supported with evidence with a clear connection to reality. So, I wanted to remind that to my students this morning.

Onur Öztürk: So, thanks again for the wonderful invocation and I would like to use this opportunity also to tell my colleagues, all my colleagues at the MoCP, who've invited me to be a part of this wonderful exhibition. It's really a humbling experience to be a part of this wonderful team. I knew many of my colleagues before this, so, I was very excited to be a part of this wonderful group of seven, and I also thought the exhibition was very timely, so I was excited to be a part of that.

Onur Öztürk: As you indicated, I am a global art historian, global awareness is important for me and I would like our topics to be discussed in the global context. And I'm also a dual citizen, Turkish and American citizen. So, I wanted to provide a new perspective, hopefully from where I am standing. Obviously, my understanding is American and Turkish democracies are long democracies, they have a long history, are roughly a century in Turkey and three centuries here in the United States.

Onur Öztürk: However, they are also always in progress, right? There is always things that needs to be figured out and they're always interesting back and forth, so it was fascinating to be given a chance to think about those topics from the perspective of photography.

Onur Öztürk: So, right now, of course, quite understandably, as you said, there's a lot of emphasis on elections, and I want to be very clear that I'm a great supporter of elections, I think elections are amazing, elections are good. If they are really inclusive, everybody has access to voting, that's even better, because then we are getting closer to a true democracy. But it was important for me to emphasize that this is just a minimal part of a democracy, it is really important to keep our representatives accountable in a representative democracy.

Onur Öztürk: I work in various excavations, but my favorite ones were in ancient sites. I spent many summers in the ancient city of Aphrodisias, and then you go to the Bouleuterion of the Aphrodisias which, is basically a Senate House, there's an inscription that says the people, the Demos of Aphrodisias. And that was very fascinating to me and I got excited with this idea of every single person being there and making decision, but then it became clear to me that it was never fully inclusive democracy, it was actually the democracy of the land-owning man, right. So, it is interesting to think about and I also remind my students about the origins of democracy, but also the limitations of democracy, from the very beginning.

Onur Öztürk: So, it is really important that especially in a representative democracy, in my opinion, we keep our representatives accountable. And there are many civil ways of doing that.

Onur Öztürk: And it is really important in that regard to support that activism. And photography, in my opinion, has a critical role in that, historically photographers sometimes jeopardize their own careers and lives to reveal the truth. And that's still happening today, right.

Onur Öztürk: In one way or another. We call this our global citizenship where even individual citizens use photography as an activist tool to keep everybody accountable to reveal the problems of the systems happening. So, my exhibition- my contribution to the exhibition- I'm not claiming the whole exhibition, is basically to celebrate this wonderful field that is so essential, that makes us see things we cannot see, makes us realize things we are not maybe ready to comprehend.

Onur Öztürk: So, it is a celebration of the contributions of photography, and it is also a celebration however, of the people. There is a Turkish description you may have noticed connecting multiple walls of the installation. And it is from my favorite poet Nâzım Hikmet and it is basically "yaşamak bir ağaç gibi tek ve hür," to live like a tree free and alone, "ve bir orman gibi kardeşçesine," but my brothers and sisters in a forest. And I really feel that there is basically the essence of my dream democracy where I can enjoy my freedoms, but also, I can enjoy the company of my fellow citizens who can also enjoy their lives and livelihoods. So, I wanted to emphasize that in the installation, where I focus on a series of photographs that combines in my opinion, lively people with some images of being livelihood. In that regard, bread, play a critical role because, as I indicated, I'm a Turkish citizen, so, we love our bread. We are obsessed with bread. So, I was very much excited when Chow and Lin photographs of bread came to me when I was looking through the catalog.

Onur Öztürk: And interestingly of course they were using that as a sign of poverty writings, you can actually afford to get very minimal amount of money. But from my point of view, it was also a celebration, or it is a celebration of our livelihood on this on fresh piece of bread.

Onur Öztürk: But also, people. People enjoying sustained labor, people enjoying each other's company. But also living together in harmony.

Onur Öztürk: So, in order to intertwine all of these together, I actually use an Islamic pattern, a very traditional one, but I recreated that in a digital format and utilizing some of the fabrication facilities we have at Columbia College Chicago we cut some laser cut stencils and with the wonderful team. Special thanks to Stephanie and her wonderful student team here. We actually used the stencils with a technique that combines this technology of the small handcrafted technique, as well as street art.

Onur Öztürk: And one of the reasons why I wanted to do that is because traditionally in recent years, these patterns have been used as a background of the important people, sometimes doing not really that democratic things, and creating that kind of historical connection was important for them. So, I wanted to give this pattern back to people.

Onur Öztürk: It is a celebration of the demos, the people, and the pattern also connected multiple walls into each other and celebrated the different, different efforts, we have, especially being an immigrant in the United States, I'm constantly reminded that different communities Muslims, Jews, Blacks, Hispanics, Latinx communities, different minority ethnicity communities, as well as American citizens in general, our lives all intertwine each other. I think we remember this, more than ever, the summer, especially with the overlapping crisis of Covid-19, and the police brutality reminding us about racial injustice. We cannot just simply ignore the lives and livelihoods of others and expect the same for us, right, that that's the main theme of that. So briefly, this is my installation is about. I'm sure we will have a chance to talk about, but I hope this gave our participants an understanding of the installation. Thank you.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you Onur, that was wonderful.

Asha Iman Veal: So, our next guest curator is Ames Hawkins, professor of English and Creative Writing. And a bit of bio information, Ames is Associate Provost for Faculty Research and Development and Professor of English and Creative Writing. Ames is the author of "These Are Love(d) Letters", a visual memoir and work of literary nonfiction. It explores the cultural, critical, rhetorical, and personal work of the love letter. Ames teaches and co-teaches courses in the first-year writing, cultural studies and literature programs.

Asha Iman Veal: Would you like to tell us a bit about your exhibition Ames?

Ames Hawkins: Of course! Well, welcome to everyone and thank you very much for being here and thanks to my colleagues, again, I want to echo what Onur says about just being so excited to have been included in this exhibition and to be among the, you know, seven folks who are working on this installation, which is really magnificent. I think it is exceeded everyone's personal and collective expectations in a way that we cannot explain. So, if you're able to, I encourage you to please make a reservation, come on down to the MoCP and check it out if you're within driving distance. And if you're not, I believe there are some videos and such from we, the curators, that you can peruse online at a later date.

Ames Hawkins: All right, so let's talk about my piece a little bit here. When I first heard the, the overall theme and title, "What Does Democracy Look

Like?" my initial thought was that I wanted to do something that would allow me to play a bit with the expectations of visual presentation in a museum, the politics of presentation in a museum, and also make use of the collection in a way where I could think about it as both data and artistic material.

Ames Hawkins: So, in other words, I wasn't approaching it in maybe a classic way where I was going to go and look at the images for what the images do and how the images speak to me specifically.

Ames Hawkins: Mostly because that's not my area of expertise. But I do think about ideas of repetition and accumulation and how we can make something whole lot of bits and pieces.

Ames Hawkins: So, I was thinking about when I was thinking about how I would want to communicate that, communicate an idea doing that, I immediately thought I'd like to make an infographic, because I don't know that we can make an infographic out of images, necessarily, but there's something really complicated and wonderful about giving that a shot.

Ames Hawkins: So, I thought that it would be really great to sort of challenge people who came to the exhibition to think about voter participation, right. So, what does democracy look like in terms of voter participation, and to make visible the fact that, on average 50, maybe a little more than 50, just shy of 60% of the eligible voters in any given presidential election will vote.

Ames Hawkins: So, my piece, red, void, and blue represents a visualization- I wouldn't call it like a super infographic cause I don't know what, well there's data at the bottom, but a visualization of the popular vote from the last 10 presidential elections which, when I think about it is kind of like contemporary elections, and if I think about that 1980 election, and I think about the relationship between the president who won, being a film star, and the president our current president, who is a reality TV show star, I think about this as an interesting arc and book ends for that.

Ames Hawkins: So anyway, I went to the collection. And I thought, well, let me, let me think about. I'm going to choose 25 red images and 25 blue images to represent Republican and Democratic parties, respectively. And these are, as you saw on the first slide laid out across the top of the wall and the bottom of the wall over Blue Fields of paint that are, in fact, sort of, percentage wise representations of the voting population at a time for all of those elections. Those hashtags or the sort of striped things are third party candidates who made an impact and effectively would have. So, the really the large ones in the center there that's Ross Perot, so Ross Perot effectively took from Republican, the Republican candidates in those years. So anyway,

just thinking about that, like, how it works, because we are still a two-party system.

Ames Hawkins: So, when I first thought about this without Whitefield, I was thinking about voter apathy and wanted to challenge it. And I suppose I was working from an assumption that those who didn't vote were disconnected and somehow or making a personal choice to not vote or to just say, well, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to participate.

Ames Hawkins: And the events of this year, made me realize that the void is not a matter of personal responsibility, only it's the result of systemic oppression, racism, sponsored, right, state sponsored white supremacist tactics, such as poll tax, literacy tax- literacy tests.

Ames Hawkins: They were also associated with the Jim Crow laws of the 19th and 20th centuries, and those who have evolved into 21st century voter suppression strategies, right. So, lawmakers have created complicated rules governing absentee ballots, discriminatory practices and like disingenuously framing them as measures to prevent nonexistent voter fraud. So, the void is the void by design, right.

Ames Hawkins: So, in bringing these pieces, this whole piece to fruition, I want to give a huge shout out to Stephanie and Karen and the staff of the MoCP for doing such an amazing job. And I was excited to note a couple of additional layers here.

Ames Hawkins: I, you know, I thought about the piece and then the piece comes to fruition and it shows us a couple more things. So, the couple few more things here are these. So, first of all, that void is so wide that it makes clear this ideological gap between the two Americas, and it makes me wonder what would it look like if we could get up to 75, 80 or even 90% vote- what would that really look like then, it would it be so even? I don't know. It would be great to find out.

Ames Hawkins: Secondly, when I chose these images, I did what I could to avoid choosing pieces that actually had, that were representational in a particular way that might be associated with blue or red values. So, staying away from things that specifically spoke in a particular way that was stereotypical but even so, when you look at these across the whole installation, you'll know that they collectively represent some of the more pressing issues of our moments. So, this slide that's up right now that's, it's like housing crisis.

Ames Hawkins: There are images about the value of scientific research, the environment, climate change, media manipulation, and capitalistic oppression, just to name a few.

Ames Hawkins: And my final, my final observation is that I was thinking about how to represent this last election at the time when this was all coming about before, before this moment. How to think about this as an unknown and now it's like a double deluxe unknown because the fact that we actually know what's going to happen, the fact that we have an outcome that's clear on November 4th is not super likely, right. So, but I chose to have the largest red and blue images in the collection, and they make an incredible diptych, and they draw our attention, not just to the stark difference in color, but the difference in texture and I'm not going to go into any metaphorical meanings and what those differences in texture might be, though, that's kind of fun.

Ames Hawkins: I just want to say that there was an unexpected pleasure in this pairing that makes me that much more grateful about the opportunity to have been invited to participate in this wonderful exhibition and to really kind of bring pieces that we may not have thought went together, together. And that's kind of like the magic and beauty of the whole thing. So, I'm just going to stop there. And thank you very much for listening.

Asha Iman Veal: That's wonderful. Thank you, Ames.

Asha Iman Veal: So next up we have Joshua Fisher. Joshua is Assistant Professor of Immersive Media, Interactive Arts and Media. Josh has researched and written extensively on how augmented and mixed reality is an emerging media practice that is reshaping how we interact with our neighbors and communities. Josh's research also explores, not just the design of XR platforms, but also the ethics behind producing immersive media.

Asha Iman Veal: Josh, you also have an amazing new book coming out in the spring that I'm super excited to have heard about a little bit and excited to read. Can you tell us a tiny bit about it before we start looking at your, your slides?

Josh Fisher: Sure. Now I want to start by thanking the museum for having us and my colleagues here to present as a new professor, it was an absolute joy to get to know everybody in the space and to meet my colleagues in this kind of creative effort. It was absolutely wonderful.

Josh Fisher: The book that's coming out is about mixed and augmented reality in communities and it's an edited collection and anthology from scholars, designers, and practitioners all over the world who have engaged with designing these kinds of experiences in order to sort of extend the reality of our communities and our neighborhood.

Josh Fisher: Everything from Pokémon Go for social justice activities, to ways of driving sort of civic engagement and voter turnout. So, the book will be out this spring by Taylor and Francis. So, thanks for bringing that up and I'll kind of just, I guess, launch right into the to the piece here.

Josh Fisher: So, one thing that has been bothering me since the last election is what Mark Graham, a scholar at Harvard has referred to as code power. And code power is an invisible form of power that sits in the algorithms that control and direct in many ways, our behavior in the digital realm.

Josh Fisher: For example, many people are aware that when you do a Google search, you are, the most, the majority of users only look at the first page. But few people take a second to realize how that page gets composed. The way in which money, data, and big data is all crunched together to make particular information available at any one time.

Josh Fisher: In the last election. I think we saw, and there's been plenty of popular media about how various corporations, social media groups, technologists are complicit in many ways in the corruption and co-opting of our democratic language and institutions.

Josh Fisher: This kind of co-opting has happened, even as we've been blinded by the light of the enhanced capacity for communication and connection that they provide.

Josh Fisher: And so, one of the things that this exhibit attempts to do is it attempts to make visible these invisible structures and corruption that is happening.

Josh Fisher: And in the space, you have an iPad that we see on the screen right now. And through this iPad you see this augmented reality, holographic bodies. These bodies are procedurally generated by an algorithm, their voices are procedurally generated by an algorithm. So, each one of them is individual and unique.

Josh Fisher: The phrases that they speak are phrases that individuals who come to the to the installation record in response to the images that you see here on the screen.

Josh Fisher: Those images- those phrases are then corrupted by a pretty snarky algorithm that then sort of gives the corrupted phrase a body and that body then walks around the space. So, for example, on October, the 3rd, we have a few Donald Trump has coronavirus entries and those have been turned into Julia Stiles has freedom, nonsense, corrupted. We have hi, I'm here and ready to eat some ice cream. Hi, I'm here ready to celebrate freedom. We have people on earth, we are here, corrupted into consumers of Murfreesboro, we are here. Why don't I eat some more vegetables, Why don't I eat some more freedom. I care about people, I care about consumers. I'm sorry for your pain, I'm sorry for your freedom. And so, as these statements-oh and this last one that showed up today which I love, I love lasagna, I love freedom. So as the election has continued and as the campaigns have become more sort chaotic with disinformation and misinformation. The space in the installation also becomes chaotic and full of these sorts of nonsensical phrases, which makes understanding the discourse in our communities, even more difficult.

Josh Fisher: So, on one side of the exhibit are some photos from social justice and civil rights activist pieces by Danny Lyon, Omar Imam, and others that are showcasing the fight for equal rights for equity for human rights is just generally. And on the other side of the exhibit are these sorts of, call it photos of diverse Americans cutting their lawns by Greg Stimac. And this is a, this dichotomy exists in America today, right? We have these, we have in our communities, individuals who were able to mow their lawns on the weekend without a care in the world and others who can't even dream of living through that reality and experiencing that reality.

Josh Fisher: And large technology and big corporations and capitalistic oppression has put themselves in the middle of this discourse and as co-opted, as Americans, we do not own our data. The data we produce produces profits for large corporations in Silicon Valley.

Josh Fisher: And this is something that we have to be mindful of as these corporations and these entities direct the ways in which we elect our officials and engage in our democracy.

Josh Fisher: So augmented reality in this instance takes those invisible structures and gives them a body. Shows you exactly what happens when your phrase gets corrupted and puts into a space.

Josh Fisher: And then you can see as it continues how the space grows and becomes more chaotic and I love that Asha you put this picture together at the last, as the last one because this is John Lewis right here.

Josh Fisher: And I think, you know, one of the things that I'm trying to get people to take a second to consider with my pieces, to have a little bit of a critical reflection on how these structures in power are working against them, and I hope that people leave the exhibit hoping to get into some good trouble and I'm looking forward to talking through with that with all of you.

Asha Iman Veal: That's amazing. Thank you, Josh.

Josh Fisher: Thank you.

Asha Iman Veal: Alright, so I have many questions for each of you perhaps out of order from the presentations, but something that's coming to my mind right now that I think has been across all three is thinking about portraiture, people, and representation, and connections across fragmentation.

Asha Iman Veal: It seems like you're all thinking about these things and maybe hoping that your audiences will think about them differently than mass media, corporate media, political rhetoric, and I'm just wondering. Especially thinking about Onur and the tree, we have the lines of data from Ames, and then Josh, you were just showing these dichotomies as well. What do you think about the power of exhibition and curatorial practice, and photography, to really remind people of those links between humans, that we're not supposed to remember, I think, as a political tactic?

Ames Hawkins: Being super polite. I was gonna be like Onur, you got this first man, go.

Onur Öztürk: Thank you Ames.

Onur Öztürk: This would be a perfect discussion of course for my wonderful colleague, Amy Mooney, who specializes in portraiture. But I will be brave, and I will mention little bit about the importance of our visibility, right.

Onur Öztürk: And if you remember last year there was this wonderful exhibition, curated by Teju Cole. And I'm still in love with that exhibition, I'm still reading him more. And I'm trying to explore more, and of course of

one of the things in his scholarship, is emphasizing on the preference to be invisible, when you want to do it.

Onur Öztürk: But on the other side of the token, there is also this visibility that was rejected to different groups of people for centuries. And art was always at the center of it and of course developments like printmaking and photography had a critical role in that, making these kinds of images, particularly portraits accessible, available for a much larger audience and it changed the dynamics, right?

Onur Öztürk: And it fundamentally shook this elitist look at portraiture and being able to see into a larger audience. And I think in that regard, that's, that's really important.

Onur Öztürk: But even because obviously the people behind the camera had control of it and it only gradually changed. It was a long-time struggle for everyone to be able to see and American family is presented as, you know, as very much constructed, it's been super whitewash for a long time. So absolutely, it is something in progress. And I think this kind of curatorial interventions are always important. And these kinds of discussions need to happen. And with that, I'm going to let Ames kick the next round.

Ames Hawkins: Thanks, Onur. I think that question of... goes back to my desire to do what I could to not choose images that were highly representational. So, there are many fine art photographers but, let's just say the, you know, regular person- It's a popular medium, right? It's a popularized medium, it's accessible to everyone. And so, it becomes, you, we start to understand how it is highly representational, although Onur is talking about the politics of I'm still constructing the image that you see based on who I am, and the frame and everything else.

Ames Hawkins: Thinking about really trying very hard to choose things that weren't representational in the way that we commonly think about it, had me thinking about representation very differently than I might usually, and I was, I'll be honest, I was kind of really super pleasantly surprised by the collection that I was able to come up with as many- with the images. There're actually more than 25 I was just calling and calling because, you know, you just have this sense that they're going to be just pictures of people or pictures of landscapes, or whatever. So, I kind of lost the thread of the original giant question that you were asking because it was so great and just so large.

Ames Hawkins: But I hope that that maybe adds to some of the complexity of what we're talking about with, how and why and sort of the big picture to me is the value of the MoCP as an institution and its complete commitment to

diversity, equity, and inclusion, that is that is so visible in- and like I said unexpectedly visible in the collection now.

Ames Hawkins: Whereas you can still see that history of the stuff you expect to see in a collection. I'm gonna stop there.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you.

Josh Fisher: I think it's, the question about portraiture is really interesting in terms of representation. I think you know portraiture has been, you know, just static, it has been until very recently, a static form, but then with the advent of selfies and deep fakes and other sort of modifications to portraiture what these mean for representation and how portraiture is performative now in ways that they haven't been before.

Josh Fisher: Whereas you can sort of... even when we think of Snapchat filters and Instagram filters in which we are consistently modifying and reshaping the way that faces look for a particular audience at any one time. And what does this say about the core of our sort of our selfhood and what we hope to represent to others in our communities.

Ames Hawkins: To tag on that really quickly. So, Josh's response just made me think, like, of all the images, I don't think that there are any portraits except the penny of Lincoln, which is like a portrait of a portrait, which is interesting as a double reference. Just saying, like I stayed away from portraits because of the usual politics.

Asha Iman Veal: I liked what you were what everyone was just saying when Josh brought up performativity. I feel like we have such a nice moment together in this group to really just speak truth.

Asha Iman Veal: And I'm curious to hear from each of you based on your exhibitions and themes and ideas. We can talk a little bit about, and Onur brought this up, how democracy and elections are sometimes maneuvered as tools for authoritarianism and also the fallacies and failures, honestly, of the two-party system, we can see on Ames's as well. So again, just these beliefs and values and mythologies again Josh is calling that out in his work as well, with society's processes in the US, also global, if you can talk a little bit about it. What are these fallacies, we're all living on, and why are these narratives of nationhood pushed upon us and how in this work are you wanting people to think against that, or think for themselves?

Josh Fisher: Wow, what a question, that's fantastic. Um, I think I want to just like attack a piece of it. And I think, you know, leave it, leave it for other, other colleagues here on the panel to jump in with.

Josh Fisher: You know, in many ways, we have these structures because they ensure stability for those that are in power. And the way in which ideology has been woven into every single fabric of the, the election cycle, you know, the way in which big money and now dark money is now sort of directing in so many ways the efforts of these of these institutions and structures, does fill one with a sense of anxiety and dread, especially when you're watching these hearings that are happening at any one time. And it seems rather transparent who is funding who and why. And there are I think many myths in our society that are incredibly damaging and that have continued to wreak havoc on communities. That and whether you know just communities all around the country in different kinds of ways.

Josh Fisher: But in any case, it's the cause of us all to sink. We're not rising together, which has been critically unnecessarily laid bare by the various movements around the country over the last few months, years.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you.

Onur Öztürk: If I may, um, I just want to first start, how powerful Ames installation is with this huge gap in the middle. And that has always been my fascination coming to this country because 45, 50% participation rate completely boggles my mind. I can't believe it. Because in Turkey when it is like around 75% everybody's like what happened, people stayed home. I can't believe is 75%, because we vote like our lives depend on it, and our lives do depend on it. And I think it is fascinating.

Onur Öztürk: Right now, I'm very close to Oak Park village and right now, I'm seeing that happening, finally in United States. Because people realize how a very simple decision like an election may actually change your individual life fundamentally.

Onur Öztürk: Of course, the problem for me is if you look at some of the history of presidents in the United States there are also cases where the American voters' decision had very serious consequences, but the consequences were not feared or we didn't feel the pressure, and most of us did not have a loss from our family members. But on the other side of the token, some decisions that were taken based on some really shady evidence, shaky and shady evidence ended up in the loss of hundred thousand civilian lives in Iraq and now when people want to talk about how lovely Bush was, he wasn't, right? I think it is kind of important to understand that every decision we make has an impact. So that's why I am saying that elections are important,

and they matter. I never underestimate their importance. On the other hand, of the token though, there is a hidden thing we are not really talking about here, very much connected to what Josh was wonderfully exploring in his work, and that's global capitalism.

Onur Öztürk: Global capitalism has some wonderful perks for all of us, right? Especially in the covid-19 era when we need goodies to appear at our doors, but it does have a direct impact on democracy at so many levels because global capitalism is constantly looking for stabilized economies. Stabilized economies, unfortunately, happen in many other parts of the world where there is a one single party that is in charge and that's continues and whenever there is some surge of some wider representation of the voters in terms of governing that particular country, like in the shape of a coalition government, that is seen by the big money is a weakness, right? Big companies see that as a weakness, as some bureaucratic target that that will make it difficult for them. So, they basically switch, right now it is much easier in a globally capitalized world.

Onur Öztürk: So, there are direct connections I think in that regard. So, it is important to mention that our votes matter but also it is interesting to remember in a democracy that those kind of decisions support leaders who then don't really take into consideration of a wider audience. And in American election, it is ultimately at the end of the day, the person who's elected, is going to be the favorite of the best half of the voters.

Onur Öztürk: And that of course creates a problem in a sense, because we need leaders who would actually care about the entirety of the population, which was the standards at the back of the day, but unfortunately it is being challenged all different countries. It's not just in the United States, this is a global trend happening and connected with your connections, the nationhood is especially on the rise, because it is the best escape from all these realities, the financial instability, dealing with our beloved globe not handling all this consumption happening, the global warming that's happening, all of these ultimately are too complicated for leaders to challenge.

Onur Öztürk: However, in nationhood that also comes to the wonderful otherization. Whatever that otherization is, it changes in every country, but there is always a minority that could be otherized and then that becomes the perfect formula to avoid all those discussions.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you. I was thinking again about your exhibition Ames and the first time I saw it, it was this amazing way, again, noy just visualizing data, but I could see the numbers. There are no landslide victories in these elections that you're showing. And I think they love to say to us, you know, landslide victories, someone one by a huge margin.

That's not true. These things are all, they're so close. They're so tight and it's like Onur was saying, you have to participate, like your life depends on it. Because it really does, things can go one way or the other.

Asha Iman Veal: Can you tell us a little bit more what you were thinking again, just showing people those numbers?

Ames Hawkins: Yeah, I think it goes back to your question from before as well when you were asking about how and, you know, what do we do, like, what's the big picture here. And that question, sort of, it gets at this really complicated thing of the electoral college. So, when you look at the Electoral College there are landslides. There are crazy landslides, the popular vote is something else altogether. And to really understand politics and an election and the construction of what is our democracy, we have to we have to grapple with the Electoral College. And the Electoral College was never set up, never set up with the vision of equity justice. Never, Never. In fact, it was set up because the people in power didn't trust the regular Joe, and they wanted to make sure there was a representative that was trustworthy of the votes.

Ames Hawkins: It was also a complicated thing that this country because we stole it, is giant. So, they want, they were like, we have to have a way to understand how to count this, what are we going to do like put things in a satchel and send them by horse. We don't know. So, we're going to send human beings and these human beings are going to represent this many votes or people from this area and that person is going to be, because we are, we are going to trust that person because that person is elevated.

Ames Hawkins: So, it does. I mean, it's interesting. We're talking about what's happening now. It does come down to, you know, are you going to be a strict reader of these documents or you're going to look at the intention of the documents that were created in the moment that was the birth of the United States of America and say, you know, they couldn't have seen past their own prejudices, either. Most people can't see past their own prejudice in the moment that they're in. So, it's not about going and saying, oh, man, they're awful, terrible awful, that's, that's the moment that they were in, and they were trying to make measures that would preserve the democracy as they understood it. They were afraid that actually, flipping it around, they were afraid that if it was one man, and I mean that one man, one land owning man and one vote, one property owning man and one vote, that that would be, you would be much more easy to influence, than if you had a bunch of votes, kind of like attached to one person who was this upstanding person.

Ames Hawkins: There's a lot of problems with that, right? But we have to contend with our own system and start to look at ways to reconstruct the system around issues of equity. Not just, hey, how do we do the best we can

in the moment when it's 1774 and 1775 and 1776, which is what, what was, what we were doing at the time.

Josh Fisher: I just wanted to kind of jump in and just say, right, and in this is, you know, technology is my space, but for something like this technology I don't think is the answer. It's structural, its behavioral, it takes legislation, right? The law. Like Microsoft and Google isn't going to come out with the panacea for our democracy. It's not going to happen that way.

Ames Hawkins: Yeah, that and you know I voted on Tuesday. And, and here's the other thing, our country doesn't, like the way that it's set up now we only expect 50 or 60% of the people to vote. So, if we have an uptick then people, I mean pandemic whatever, you still have people waiting in line for hours and hours and hours and that is just not, that's not necessary, technology can address those kinds of things, right? There are ways to do that better, the systems aren't set up to actually make it hospitable for humans to do this and we could. This moment is pushing us into doing this better than we have ever done it and still people are waiting. And I, and I'm in a touchscreen thing and then the guy next to me brings us coffee and he spills it all over the unit. And I'm like, all right, that's fried. And so, because they don't have, they don't have rules like no coffee because who didn't come to vote in the past with their coffee and their donut, or whatever.

Ames Hawkins: There, that's all.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you Ames. We have just about 10 minutes left, so I wanted to see, and maybe Marissa, if there are any questions from the audience in the chat that we could work with?

Asha Iman Veal: Okay, so we had one question from curator Sharon Boyd-Peskin, has it become harder to document obstacles and obstructions to representative democracy in recent decades? Has it become harder to document obstacles and instructions to representative democracy in recent decades, once we could see individuals being denied the franchise? Is it more difficult to visualize today?

Asha Iman Veal: Meaning visually in photographs Sharon asks.

Asha Iman Veal: And then another question from the audience, how will this exhibition mobilize visitors to take action or vote? How do you think this exhibition could mobilize visitors to take action and vote?

Ames Hawkins: I'm going to go really quickly. So, I think that the New York Times has done a decent job in their images showing people waiting in line. And I think waiting in line is, is really powerful, no matter what era. And I, and I suppose I'm thinking of the most powerful lines that I've seen in my lifetime were of people waiting to vote in South Africa in 1994 I think, no 2004, no 1994 sorry, to elect Mandela and so- because I was there in 2000. Anyway, so I think and thinking about what our, our installation has done, just to go forward with that, is that, you know, yes, maybe in some ways it's late, right, it's timely, but it's late. For this to really do the work it was supposed to do, and this is no criticism at all, it would have been two years ago.

Ames Hawkins: How, you know, it would have been last year. How do we do things in a really, you know, it's timely, which is how we do a lot of art exhibitions, but how do we, how do we get the power that we have with art, which I think is like one of the most powerful tools to move humans, to think a little bit ahead of the curve instead of at the moment of the curve. So, it calls attention to a moment, but how do we get it to anticipate and move, move away forward. So, at this moment, it's late in the game, right? I can't get you to, we're too late. But is it powerful? Yeah. Might it move somebody in the future? Maybe. But how do we how do we think about that, ahead of the game. Thank you.

Josh Fisher: I'd love to, kind of, oh Onur, go ahead.

Onur Öztürk: Go ahead Josh.

Josh Fisher: Thanks

Josh Fisher: So, I want to just kind of go to, Sharon's question got me thinking about the fact that, you know, we have a plenitude of media right now.

Josh Fisher: Each with its own kind of orbit and gravitational pull. So, in many ways it's never been easier to see the denial of franchise. It's never been easier to see people who are not, who are not being able to live through their, their rights.

Josh Fisher: At the same time, because there is so much, and because the orbits and gravitational pull of media properties, which are what they are, there's a lot of noise.

Josh Fisher: So, while it's, while it's all present, the immensity of it makes it difficult to see what's actually happening. And there needs to be some, some, Ames I like what you said about it kind of being two years ago or a year ago you know, and I know that certainly after the last election, there was like a well, how do we deal with media literacy in regards educating the public about what's going on in our communities and in our, in our country. And we still don't have an answer to that. You know, hashtags only act as gravitational pull. They don't necessarily encourage someone to reach across the aisle and have a very necessary conversation.⁸

Onur Öztürk: I think going back to Sharon's question. I do agree that it became harder to document, some of the obstacles and obstructions in representative democracy, particularly because those are now done in the little tiny details that we don't always can photograph. It is not basically on something as powerful as the photographs of the Civil War era, for instance, right? We don't really see people outright deny it, but we do know in their recent reporting that significantly, people of color get their voted rejected for minor mistakes. And it is, it is interesting to see because you constantly see like, especially states worried about the voter turnout create much more complicated bureaucracy. And on paper, it is a rule for everybody, but in reality, we do know that they are creating obstacles and obstructions in a representative democracy that can be inclusive and equitable, so I absolutely agree. I think it is getting difficult.

Onur Öztürk: But on the other side. It is also interesting to see that now, we are all in our own ways photographers, we are all journalists, right, we can actually be citizens.

Onur Öztürk: To photograph and that's exactly the reason this summer, we were able to see the incredible injustice that was happening to multiple American citizens around the world.

Onur Öztürk: Because other citizens use their photographs, use their cameras to tell us what was happening. And this is not new. So that also happens. So, it is two things happening at the same time.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you.

Onur Öztürk: And in terms of exhibition moving. I don't know. I really hope so we really, I have no doubt that every single one of my colleagues and every member of MoCP, we really want people to be participating in democracy, but I'm also a great believer that ultimately every individual will make their meanings will get what they want to get from whatever they experience in life. So, I really hope they vote, but I cannot guarantee it.

Asha Iman Veal: I hope so too. Thank you, Onur.

Asha Iman Veal: Okay, so it appears, we have no more audience questions and about three minutes left, so just to close, something that you said in your first comment actually Onur, you use the phrase. What is your dream democracy, you said this is my dream democracy. And I feel like there's been so much criticality, and maybe just-Ames is like no-maybe just a couple of words from each of you on our way out. What is your dream democracy, I'll take one from another one in the exhibition, Raquel's piece in the show, Black Femme Joy, Black Femme Power. That's my dream democracy.

Onur Öztürk: Am I going first? I guess my dream democracy is when everyone feels comfortable what they want to say. And everyone feels comfortable to live where they live.

Onur Öztürk: Then, that is, is a real democracy. And when everyone feels they are not being judged in any form of shape based on their ethnic origin or visual appearance. Then that's a real democracy for me. And I do believe that American democracy made significant progress. I'm actually more hopeful than many of my colleagues, I believe.

Onur Öztürk: But at the same time, I also feel it is important for us to face with the historical problems so far, democracy. And if we don't do that those problems will only get worse, but he can actually address that, we just need to acknowledge and be ready to face it. Thank you.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you.

Josh Fisher: I would say equity and transparency and information equity and engagement and shared power. That's what it looks like for me.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you.

Ames Hawkins: Yeah, I wish I had something really quick, really cool like Rocky, I started with queer something, but whatever. I would say, for me, it has to do with understanding that power is not a limited resource. So, its internal it's in people and it's in people and their relations and so the democracy works best when we can empower everyone.

Ames Hawkins: And that empowerment is about engagement and not disengagement. And I think that that's the biggest gap we have right now and how we understand what democracy is, are we thinking about power is a limited resource that you have to protect and say, these people can't have it because then I can't have? it or is an unlimited resource that we all can participate in?

Ames Hawkins: And the flip side of that, to me, is now I'm getting squishy, but it's like its love. Love is an unlimited resource. Well, so that's my ideal democracy.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you, Ames. Thank you, Onur. Thank you, Josh.

Asha Iman Veal: I hope everyone comes to MoCP to see this amazing exhibition that will be up until December the 23rd. It was lovely to chat with all of you. And thank you everyone for coming and vote. Please vote.

Ames Hawkins: Thank you. And yes.

Josh Fisher: Thank you.

Ames Hawkins: Vote, vote, vote.

Josh Fisher: Vote.

Ames Hawkins: Well, don't do it three times, unless you're in Chicago. I guess but vote.

Ames Hawkins: Vote, and then get other people to vote. That's your multiple voting.

Ames Hawkins: Thank you all.

Asha Iman Veal: Thank you. Have a good night everyone.

Ames Hawkins: Ciao Ciao.

Josh Fisher: Bye bye.