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## The Party's Over

D-L Alvarez, Patrick Charles Brown, Diana Cherbuliez, Mary Beth Edelson, Marisol Escobar, Mores McWreath, Nyeema Morgan, Jill Poyourow

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Grant Wahlquist Gallery is pleased to announce “The Party’s Over,” an exhibition of paintings, works on paper, sculpture, and video spanning the past four decades of contemporary art. Coming at the close of what countless headlines have described as a “year like no other,” it casts a backward-looking glance at the promise and disappointment of American life fully conscious of Walter Benjamin’s declaration that “[t]he tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘emergency situation’ in which we live is the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight.”<sup>1</sup> By transforming, distorting, or subverting images and icons alternately hopeful and oppressive, the works featured in “The Party’s Over” share a spirit of art making as critique, reclamation, survival, and joy.

The exhibition takes its title from a work by [Diana Cherbuliez](#) (Vinalhaven, ME), an approximately eight by five-foot American flag constructed from the artist’s retired black and white party clothes in 2005. An act of political and personal mourning in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the work gains new charge in a time similarly plagued by catastrophe, racism, and political cronyism and incompetence. Works by [D-L Alvarez](#) (San Francisco, CA) and [Nyeema Morgan](#) (Chicago, IL) likewise adopt American icons and iconography in a predominantly black and white palette. Alvarez’s drawing *Voice*, 2005, presents an image of Black Panthers Communications Secretary Kathleen Cleaver speaking at a 1969 rally, her likeness distorted through Alvarez’s gridded, quasi-pixelated treatment of his source. Morgan’s *horror horror (II)*, 2019, is a screenprint layering images of white attendants to a lynching, two near-vertical red boxes, a figure from Picasso’s sculpture *The Bathers*, 1956, and fragmented typography alluding to the subjects of power and resistance. As in much of Morgan’s work, the unstable and shifting relationships between these four elements demand attention to representation’s entanglement with historical, social, and personal systems of categorization and recognition and of the real consequences of the repetition of categories and typologies throughout history.

Alvarez’s portrait of Cleaver uses distortion to gesture to the inability of categories such as “the law” to capture the nuances of human life (Cleaver has both lived in political exile *and* been a professor of law). [Patrick Charles Brown](#)’s *Untitled (Stroke Reagan)*, 1987, however, deforms its subject in an act of unambiguous counter-hegemonic protest. Created in another “year like no other”—a market crash, Robert Bork, Iran-Contra, AIDS—Brown (Grafton, MA) shifted a photograph of Reagan on the bed of a Xerox machine mid-copy and used it as the source for a painting on panel, repeatedly sanding down and repainting its layers to create a quietly ghoulish portrait of our first television star turned president. If appropriative strategies assumed a more political stance in the 1980s, particularly as images were more widely reduced to information as Xerox machines and personal computers became more common, they nonetheless are a continuation of the appropriative

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History VIII*, 1940.

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strategies of Pop, itself a product of more democratic image making technologies and the social upheaval of the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the democratization of image making and cultural transformation has only accelerated and intensified until today. “The Party’s Over” includes *Untitled*, 1979, a lithograph by Pop artist Marisol Escobar (b. Paris, France, 1930; d. New York, NY, 2016). *Untitled* is the exhibition’s most abstract, graphic representation of the human form, but also perhaps its most hopeful, its bright colors and overlapping hands and bodies suggesting a more optimistic and erotic mode of human interaction.

Two works from the 1990s by [Mary Beth Edelson](#) (New York, NY) and [Jill Poyourow](#) (Cape Neddick, ME) further combine Pop motifs and strategies with post-Pictures insights, as well as with feminist critique and a healthy dose of humor. Poyourow’s *Betty Crocker Centerfold (Bye Bye Miss American Pie)*, 1996, is a two-part painting of pies in a display case. Though clearly a nod to the work of Wayne Thiebaud, the work is part of Poyourow’s series “The Cookbook Paintings,” described by [Chris Kraus](#) as a study of “the mid-decade, mid-American fascination with food as fantasy, food as an artistic medium of expression for the culturally-deprived homebound Wife.” Edelson’s *Hanging Fire*, 1992, a silk screen on chiffon suspended on a coat hanger, features Gena Rowlands in John Cassavetes’ 1980 film *Gloria*, her gun raised and pointed at the camera. Like other works in the artist’s “Shooter” series, *Hanging Fire* reflects Edelson’s interest in the liberation of women from oppressive archetypes (the moll, the femme fatale, the housewife, etc.). “As she looks down the barrel of her gun there is no debate about who is in charge of the gaze... I am always on the lookout for the emergence of a fresh cultural construct that will release a more appropriate visual symbol of power for women. As it stands today, I’m sticking by my metaphorical guns.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally, “The Party’s Over” features a selection of “Spots” by [Mores McWreath](#) (Brooklyn, NY). A series of videos typically 15 to 30 seconds long, McWreath makes “Spots” to react quickly to events in the world as they unfold and subsequently uploads them to a number of social media platforms. Using up-to-the-minute forms and language from commercial advertising as well as his own body and voice, the “Spots” are funny, twisted, confusing, and occasionally grotesque; they mine, mock, and acknowledge complicity with consumerism, rage, and white heterosexual cis-male privilege, presenting them in all their absurdity to lure the viewer into a process of identification that might enable their deconstruction. In the artist’s own words, “Perhaps by excavating my own fears and desires I can help counteract the regressive politics of the moment.”

The gallery is located at 30 City Center, Portland, Maine. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm, and by appointment. **Please note the gallery is open by appointment only November 25 – 28 for the Thanksgiving holiday.** For more information, visit <http://grantwahlquist.com>, call 207.245.5732, or email [info@grantwahlquist.com](mailto:info@grantwahlquist.com).

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<sup>2</sup> My thanks to Nancy Kathryn Burns, curator of “[Photo Revolution: Andy Warhol to Cindy Sherman](#),” for her exhibition and many conversations about these issues.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Beth Edelson in “The Art of Mary Beth Edelson,” p. 130 (Seven Cycles, NY, NY 2002).