

ELECTIONS ART IN AMERICA

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Primary Colors

An artist takes aim at the never ending presidential campaign.

BY CATHY LEBOWITZ

Kenneth Tin-Kin Hung's first New York solo show, "Residential Erection," was the perfect antidote to the nonstop media drama surrounding the run-up to the presidential election. Born in 1976, Hung came to the U.S. from Hong Kong with his family before the 1997 handover to China.

At Postmasters, the viewer was greeted by 8-foot-square wood panels completely covered in digital collages of the candidates, party bigwigs and assorted partisan celebrities. The combinations range from the ridiculous to the outrageous. Hung calls his sculptural installation a pop-up book, but it was more like two giant greeting cards presented back to back. Foamcore cutouts provide the "pop-up" elements.

The Democrats are lampooned on one side and the Republicans on the other. In the former, Hillary Clinton's head sits atop a humanoid robot decorated with corporate logos. Barack Obama's smiling visage appears on a body, naked but for a bright green wrestling thong, standing amid a pile of money. They are identified as Borat Obama and Billary on the platform where they are perched. The motto "change we can cash in" appears below an eye over a pyramid (as on the dollar bill). The barrage of images on the board behind them includes Ben Bernanke dressed as Uncle Sam, Dennis Kucinich as Spock, John Edwards as Tinkerbell and a \$100 barrel of oil.

The Republicans are led by pop-ups of John McCain sporting a girl's cheerleader uniform with the Democrats' donkey on the chest and Mike Huckabee decked out as a heavy-metal rocker. Around them we see pictures of praying Guantánamo prisoners in orange jumpsuits under the rubric "freedom requires religion," as well as the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad next to Britney Spears dressed in her MTV-awards costume and holding a placard that reads "Iran: National Intelligence Estimate."

Everything in this 3-D farce reappears in a 5-minute video animation (2008) shown on a flat-screen monitor. The entire cast of characters bounces through comic playlets about the subprime mortgage debacle, rising oil prices and faulty voting machines, while a voiceover intones portentous pronouncements and doublespeak platitudes.

Another 5-minute video, *Gas Zappers* (2007), shown in the back room, is the groundwork for a video game of the same name that Hung is in the process of developing. Its subject is global warming and the attendant political actions, reactions, reversals and quick fixes. The video starts out in Venice, where we meet our avatar—the endangered polar bear—riding in a gondola threatened by increasingly high tides. The bear advances through the game's levels, each of which relates to a different environmental issue. The settings include a forest about to be leveled by a bulldozer and a field of cracked earth with an array of nuclear reactors.



View of Kenneth Tin-Kin Hung's *Ultra Donkey (Residential Erection: Pop-up Democrats)*, 2008, digital prints, wood panels, foam board, 8 by 8 by 8 feet.

Still from *Gas Zappers*, 2007, HD video, 5 minutes, music by Noah Vauter. Photos courtesy Postmasters, New York.



In the latter, the polar bear is armed with a wind turbine and battles smoke-spewing nations, which include the U.S. (represented by an eagle) and China (a dragon). The final scene takes place in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. George W. Bush (with his head connected to an oil derrick) grills the Kyoto Protocol over a barbecue made from part of a globe and shoots oil barrels from his mouth. The polar bear, now sporting the head of Al Gore, uses

solar panels as a shield while attempting to stuff an energy-saving lightbulb into Bush's mouth.

With this show, Hung has captured the frenzy and, ultimately, the degradation that have become an inescapable aspect of a presidential campaign. His satire and graphics pack a smart, powerful punch. □

"Residential Erection" appeared at Postmasters, New York [Apr. 5-May 10].