Josh Kline, *Blood on the Hands* (foreground), installation view, Modern Art Oxford, 2016.
Courtesy of 47 Canal, New York. photograph by Ben Westoby.

Josh Kline: Freedom
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Review by Jaime Marie Davis

Political speech has become incredibly flexible, in an effort to absorb broader constituent readings and project collective desires. In parallel, ambiguity of media authorship, sources, and influence pervades streaming coverage, further compromising what we understand as truth. Uncertain systems of representation are becoming empty of any real meaning. And so, "The politics of the future are pre-verbal desires," begins Josh Kline's poignant text for his current presentation at Modern Art Oxford. Titled 'Freedom', the exhibition is an expansion of Kline's contribution to the recent Whitney Biennial 'Surround Audience', and a continued strand of work being developed in the forthcoming years.

In a small gallery space, the video 'Crying Games' (2015) vengefully stages actors as Bush, Rumsfeld, Rice, and other US administration in anguish within the Brutalist structure of prison cells, lamenting their previous injustices. The claustrophobic installation and voyeuristic perspective is affecting - recalling videos of the Guantanamo prisoners. The middle gallery space houses a series of donut-shaped sculptures titled 'Police States', 2015, which might at first appear as a knee-jerk retort on the serial figures' insatiable appetite. However, cast with materials such as duck tape, razor blades, asphalt, bullets and dollar bills, the sculptural materials are an effective reminder of the cyclical chain and state of criminal action itself.

In the main gallery, viewers are presented with a dark, sci-fi environment mimicking Zuccoti Park, the privately owned public space and location of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Two large screens flank the space, lit by rows of florescent tubes embedded within the floor that mimic the architecture of the corporate park and create a digital code like path. 'Some Trees Breathe in Despair' (2015) and 'Imbalance Transfer' (2015) are two of several looming, arborous masts littered with credit cards and zip tie riot handcuffs, standing as telecommunications agents. Anthropogenic nature, regardless of assumed connectivity and fluidity, is suggested here to alienate and bind.

Another series of figurative sculptures dressed in SWAT gear resemble Teletubbies and are embedded with small monitors playing 'Privacy' (2015). Sourcing public social media feeds of contested events retold by former police officers, the videos use the artist's signature facial replacement technology to combine these opposing subjective perspectives. The layering of media within the figurative form becomes an uncanny confrontation with an Orwellian proposition once feared – now willingly internalised and circulated as entertainment.

The script for the video 'Hope and Change' (2015) is a rewrite of Obama's televised 2009 inaugural speech. As a 'defining moment of change', the president's democratic election was promised to embrace difference: 'this time must be different'. Using facial replacement technology, the video presents an irreconcilable figure speaking with agency and conviction. The animation urges power to action on climate change, gun control, and to 'repair the damage of the past, extinguish fears of the present'. By holding those who 'profit on misery' accountable, it's suggested that things can indeed finally be different.

If the politics of the future is of pre-verbal desires, Kline has succinctly traced a terse list of claims for the increasingly self-digitised future that has yet to be publicly voiced by elected figures.

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