

ARTFORUM

Josh Kline, 47 CANAL
by Laura Atallah
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View of "Josh Kline," 2016.

The scene is set in what looks like a futuristic cemetery, only it's today—we encounter 3-D-printed and CNC-carved bodies, based on real people, in see-through plastic bags. Of the four on display, one's a bookkeeper; another, a humble entrepreneur (Productivity Gains [Brandon/Accountant]; By Close of Business [Maura/Small-Business Owner], all works 2016).

They lie on the floor, shriveled in fetal positions. Expressions of loss—or is it peace?—appear on their synthetic faces, and their attire's tidy and wrinkle free. In Josh Kline's world, obsolescence is the law of the land, and humans are a passé fad . . . or just literal garbage. It's an entirely sinister and familiar display, and one that doesn't require much reading between the lines. Its grave humor is explicit—it's the death of the middle class, a wide swath of the country, rendered as expendable creatures ready for the discard pile.

Nearby is Universal Early Retirement, a fictional three-minute commercial for a federally subsidized income. Its spirit seems to ricochet off the many political campaign ads that have been assaulting our retinas of late. The tone is jovial, the music uplifting, and the American flag is blowing in the wind. People from different ethnic backgrounds laud a new kind of New Deal that would give them enough free time to pursue their true passions. This promise of a utopian kind of social reform is, alas, vaguely believable.

Since consumerism is the cornerstone of any capitalist economy, naturally, elimination is necessary for keeping such a system alive. The future belongs to those who can monetize expendability. And if you think otherwise, Kline's dark poetry suggests, the heap still awaits.