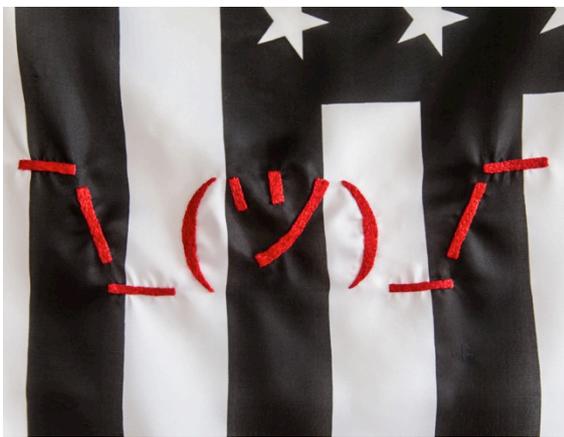


PRESS RELEASE

Online Exhibition: **CAN YOU HEAR ME?**
Talk: **ART, CULTURE + DEMOCRACY**



CAN YOU HEAR ME?

1 January – 31 December 2017

Anna Brownsted and Jessica Harby

www.fermywoods.co.uk/current-programme/open-online-seven

Some 17 million historically-significant photos - including Nelson Mandela's imprisonment and JFK Jr. saluting his father's coffin - were acquired in 1995 for commercial purposes from the Bettmann International Archive by Bill Gates. The rights were sold on again in 2016 to a Chinese stock photo and licensing company. To who does this heritage of data really belong? Inspired by the David Levi Strauss' essay of the same name, *Can You Hear Me?* asks what role artists can play in transmitting data of political or social importance and whether digital processes can reveal new perspectives.

Post-Truth ('relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief') was named as The

Oxford Dictionary's word of 2016. In light of recent referendum and election outcomes, we present artworks (selected by Gary Thomas) that reflect the current emotional climate in UK and American politics, the diminishing public trust in factual evidence and the shifting perceptions of the establishment.

Diplomat by Anna Brownsted, is a series of short films capturing unpredictable 'remixes' of a warped long-playing record. The record (from 1964) is a heat damaged memorial album for the then recently assassinated American president; John F. Kennedy and features several of his most famous speeches. Each time the album is played, the record player needle skips and bounces across the surface. What initially seems to be a single film are actually 100 short films – one for each of JFK's first 100 days in office – which have been captured through an unbroken recording session.

For *Referendum*, Jessica Harby has turned over her citizenship decision to members of the public by inviting them to vote. The artwork reduces the practical and legal arguments for citizenship to a flood of visuals concerning the country of her birth and the country she now calls home. These two animated GIFs rapidly cycle through images associated with the USA and the UK; will the visuals have an effect on the viewer's decision? Underneath is an interactive ballot where the viewer is invited to cast a vote that will influence Harby's choice of citizenship at the end of the year.

ART, CULTURE + DEMOCRACY

24 January 2017, 7pm-9pm GMT

Anna Brownsted, Jessica Harby, Fath Davis Ruffins

St James Church, Oundle Road, Thrapston, NN14 4NP

Thrapston has a famous historical link to George Washington, through his great-grand uncle, John Washington. This talk takes place in St James' Church, which bears the Washington family's Coat of Arms (thought to be the origination of the Stars and Stripes design of the American Flag) and will feature three American-born speakers discussing the role of democracy in art as well as human culture and society in general.

Editor's Notes:

Gary Thomas was previously Head of Moving Image for Arts Council England and is a Co-founder of Animate Projects.

Anna Brownsted works with sound, text, installation and encounters to make interventions to the public realm and she is fascinated by the dynamics of trust, uncertainty and possibility. Anna's recent work has been shown at the British Museum, The Old Vic Tunnels, Battersea Arts Centre, University College London, and Cambridge Junction. She trained at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, where she currently curates *Collisions*, the Research Degrees' annual festival of practice-based research.

Jessica Harby's practice encompasses drawing, installation, film and sound and mixes the delicate, the brutal the absurd and the serious, often using humour to address uncomfortable ideas. Jessica studied at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is co-creator of the zine *Tappa Tappa Tappa*. She is one of six artists selected by Contemporary Visual Arts Network East Midlands for their two-year project *Document* and her work will be included in NN Contemporary Art's *Five Years Season* in 2017.

Fath Davis Ruffins is Curator at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. She is a specialist in ethnic imagery in popular culture and African-American cultural history. Ruffins has curated major exhibitions dealing with the African-American experience, including Tavis Smiley's *America I AM* and *From Slavery to Freedom*, at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Centre (Cincinnati), and most recently *Our American Journey: Many Voices, One Nation*, National Museum of American History.

To book for the talk: www.art-culture-democracy.eventbrite.co.uk

Live Stream: <http://www.fermynewoods.co.uk/current-programme/free-exchange/live-stream>

Fermynewoods Contemporary Art commissions innovative and meaningful ways for artists to engage with audiences, in public spaces across Northamptonshire and online. For further information please contact Sam Read on 01832 731257, info@fermynewoods.co.uk.



Images: Album sleeve from *John F. Kennedy 1917-1963 (A Memorial Album)*; *Your Reluctant Diplomat (detail)*, Jessica Harby, 2016