



I APPROVE THIS MESSAGE DECODING POLITICAL ADS

TMA's "I Approve This Message: Decoding Political Ads" Begins in July

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How do political ads expressly appeal to the hopes and fears of voters during presidential election seasons? An art museum in a swing county, in a key battleground state, decided it was time to find out.

I Approve This Message: Decoding Political Ads is an eye-opening exhibition for all ages that debuts July 14 at the Toledo Museum of Art (TMA), just days before the Republican and Democratic national conventions. It continues through Election Day, Nov. 8.

The first-of-its-kind art museum exhibition explores in-depth this timely topic by examining how political ads combine images, music, effects and language to evoke specific emotions and capture votes. Using video, graphics and interactive media, the exhibition reflects recent behavioral studies and shows how emotional triggers may impact rational thinking.

As a thought-leader in the field of visual literacy – the ability to read images and decipher their meaning – encountered in everyday culture, not exclusively in the art museum, TMA is ideally positioned to provide a nonpartisan, insider's look at political advertising.

“This immersive exhibition is focused on how presidential ads are meant to make you feel,” said Adam Levine, co-curator of the exhibition and assistant director of the Toledo Museum of Art. “The goal is to increase awareness of the mechanisms campaigns utilize to capture your vote by pulling on the heartstrings. In the process, visitors will become more critical consumers of political advertising.”

The 7,000-square-foot exhibition is divided into theaters displaying ads that focus on particular emotions, such as fear, anger, enthusiasm and hope, as well as how appeals have changed for different constituencies. The approximately 50 ads date from 1952, when the first national presidential TV commercial was broadcast, up to 2012.

Among the classic commercials presented, some in frame-by-frame breakdowns, are the infamous Lyndon B. Johnson 1964 “Daisy Girl,” which begins gently with a little girl pulling petals from a flower and ends with nuclear annihilation; the 1984 Ronald Reagan ad many call “It’s Morning in America”; the George H.W. Bush 1988 “Willie Horton” ad; and the 1992 Clinton ad “Man from Hope.”

The perimeter walls of the gallery will incorporate diagrams that visually analyze the ads on view in the theaters. Two interior walls will display stills from, and a timeline of, iconic political ads. In the center of the exhibition, visitors will find a "Mood Room," a multimedia sensory experience designed to demonstrate how images and sounds stir emotion.

The second part of the exhibition features the Change Theater and an interactive zone with hands-on opportunities, including the ability for visitors to include themselves in an ad.

"Although the exhibition demonstrates the emotional power of political advertising, at its core it is about seeing, hearing and feeling, and how we digest and process information emotionally before cognition and memory kick in," said Brian Kennedy, director of the Toledo Museum of Art. "This concept is as applicable to visual art as it is to advertising, which is why TMA, as a leader in engaging its visitors through visual literacy, was so invested in developing the exhibition."

"I Approve This Message aims to draw back the curtain of presidential political advertising over the last 60 years to showcase and deconstruct those with the most persuasive emotional messages," said guest co-curator Harriett Levin Balkind, founder of HonestAds, a nonpartisan nonprofit working to bring people into-the-know about political advertising. "Presidential campaigns hire some of the savviest media minds around to develop their ads, and this exhibition represents the best of the best."

The nonpartisan exhibition is organized by the Toledo Museum of Art and HonestAds. TMA commissioned Thinc to design the exhibition.

HonestAds, based in New York, builds awareness about political advertising in innovative, compelling ways with organizations that care about political literacy and through its website HonestAds.org. HonestAds' purpose is to decrease deception, increase critical thinking and expand civility; thereby, motivating more people to vote. As a nonpartisan nonprofit, HonestAds has no connection to political parties, candidates, PACs, super PACs or their sponsors.

Located in New York, Thinc Design is a leading design firm serving clients in North America, Asia, Africa and Europe. For more than 20 years, Thinc has designed projects for a wide range of institutions, including museums, science centers, aquariums, zoos, theme parks, corporations and governments. Notable projects include the American Food 2.0. USA Pavilion, 2015 World Expo; exhibition design for the Smithsonian Institution; the National Sept. 11 Memorial Museum; and the California Academy of Sciences. To learn more visit thincdesign.com.

This exhibition is presented by Taylor Cadillac with additional support from ProMedica, the 2016 Exhibition Program Sponsor.

TMA exhibitions are also made possible by members of the Toledo Museum of Art and by a sustainability grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

General admission to the Museum is free; parking is free for Museum members and \$5 for others. For further information, visit <http://www.toledomuseum.org>.