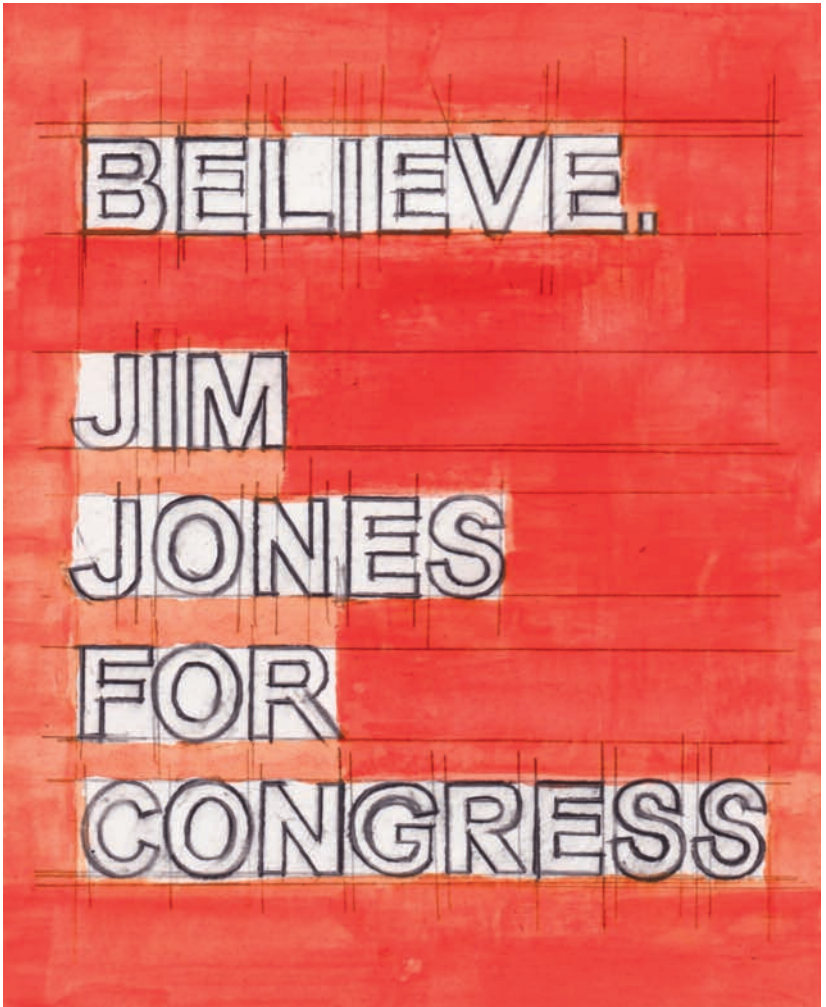


DEB SOKOLOW

MATRIX 166

SOME CONCERNS ABOUT THE CANDIDATE



FEBRUARY 7 - JUNE 30, 2013

WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

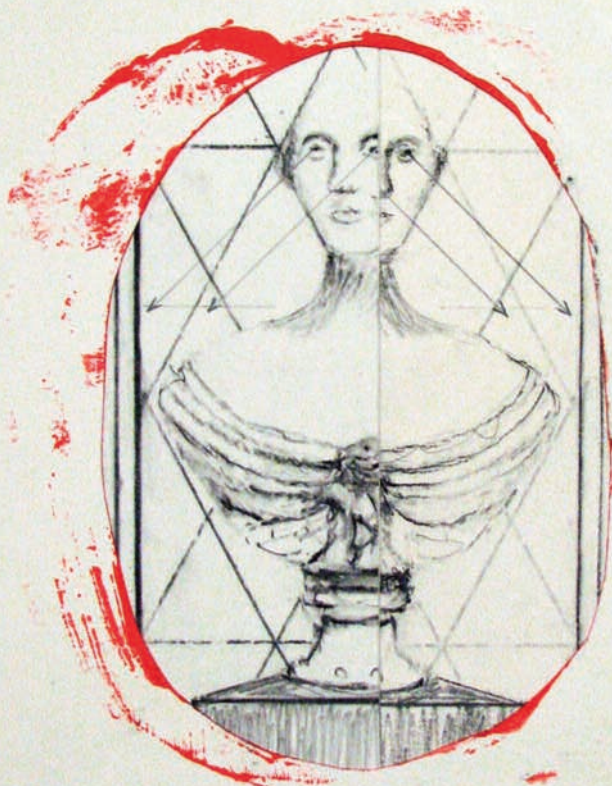
BELIEVE. JIM JONES FOR CONGRESS

Jim Jones visits Hartford, Connecticut, during his fictional run for Congress, in artist Deb Sokolow's MATRIX project titled *Some concerns about the candidate*. The title's sentiment seems warranted when invoking the name of Jim Jones, the notorious founder and leader of the People's Temple cult, who persuaded hundreds of his followers to commit mass suicide at their Jonestown, Guyana, commune in 1978. The popular adage "drinking the Kool-Aid"—or having blind obedience—originated from this unimaginable tragedy, resulting from the consumption of a grape-flavored beverage spiked with cyanide. The horrific event also marked the climactic end of Jones's life.

His troubling life has long fascinated Chicago-based artist Deb Sokolow. Her text-and-image-based narrative drawings often focus on well-known cultural figures, controversial subjects, and conspiracy theories. Furthermore, her biography indirectly links her to Jones. Sokolow grew up in Davis, California, also the hometown of several members of Jones's inner circle. Her mother was a writer and journalist, as well as a passionate reader of mysteries, thrillers, and spy novels. Her father was a professor of political science at the University of California, Davis. Among his students was Jackie Speier (now a U.S. Congresswoman), who would go on to serve as an aid to Leo Ryan, the U.S. Congressman shot and killed by Jones's men while on the fact-finding mission to Jonestown that precipitated the mass suicide. Speier was wounded in the same attack at the airstrip. Sokolow herself briefly worked for a U.S. Congressman in Washington, D.C. And the nation's capital is also the site of inspiration for Sokolow's signature subject matter.

At the age of twelve, while eating with her mother at a McDonald's in Washington, D.C., Sokolow witnessed a life-altering incident—the classic briefcase exchange featured in spy movies. Sokolow saw one man go into the restroom with a briefcase and a different man exit with it. Her world has never been the same. If a McDonald's can be the location for an undercover hand-off, such secret activities could take place virtually anywhere, and likely do. This actual briefcase exchange became the creative impulse for Sokolow's art.¹

Part truth, part fiction, and part comedy, Sokolow's complex visual tales are based on well-researched facts expanded by the fantastical mind of the narrator, who the artist identifies as "you," making the reader/viewer an active participant in the almost-convincing events. Sokolow presents the story on large panels or sheets of paper, like a super-size comic book that has been taken apart and spread across the walls of a gallery. Collaged and drawn images—including portraits, photographs, diagrams, and maps—accompany the awkward, handwritten text. The size of the text matters: the largest text, or "primary" narrative voice, tells the main story; the smaller "secondary" text conveys what you (as the paranoid or unreliable narrator) are thinking; and an even smaller "tertiary" text reveals what you are *really* thinking but



YOU PASS BY A STATUE OF A WOMAN
WHOSE EYES SEEM TO FOLLOW YOUR EVERY MOVE

would never dare verbalize. The artist's hand is intentionally imperfect, with the graphite smudged, covered with Wite-Out™, and even masked by black bars, mimicking declassified government documents.

Some of Sokolow's past projects provide context for this new work. In 2010, she created *You tell people you're working really hard on things these days*, a five-panel work documenting the activities in and around the Chicago building that houses the artist's studio, which happens to overlook a central office of the U.S. Postal Service. The story emanates from a highly detailed floor plan of the studio building and its environs. At all hours, from your studio window (while you are "working hard") you witness mysterious packages being loaded into the trunk of a red car, and not an official USPS vehicle. A postal worker patrolling the parking lot resembles Ismael Zambada García, the leader of the Sinaloan drug cartel, whom you recognize from the newspaper. These first-hand observations are combined with local news reports of Zambada's son being held in Chicago on drug trafficking charges and the discovery of a meth lab in your neighborhood. Is the Post Office involved in the transportation of drugs? From there, the plot thickens.

In *Notes on Denver International Airport and the New World Order* (2011), Sokolow investigates a long-held conspiracy theory that Denver's huge new airport, opened in 1995, included a covert project to construct an underground bunker to serve as the headquarters in the western hemisphere for the New World Order, a totalitarian one-world government. A sixteen-hour site visit to the airport by the artist (or "you" as the paranoid narrator in the art work) results in being tracked through the terminal as you take photographs, then followed into a restroom, and finally trailed in your rental car as you explore the airport's perimeter, confirming your many suspicions.

The narrator and timely subject of Sokolow's MATRIX project—*Some concerns about the candidate*—were inspired by the artist's site visit to Hartford, and the recent, contentious U.S. Presidential election. At the beginning of the project, the artist described the concept:

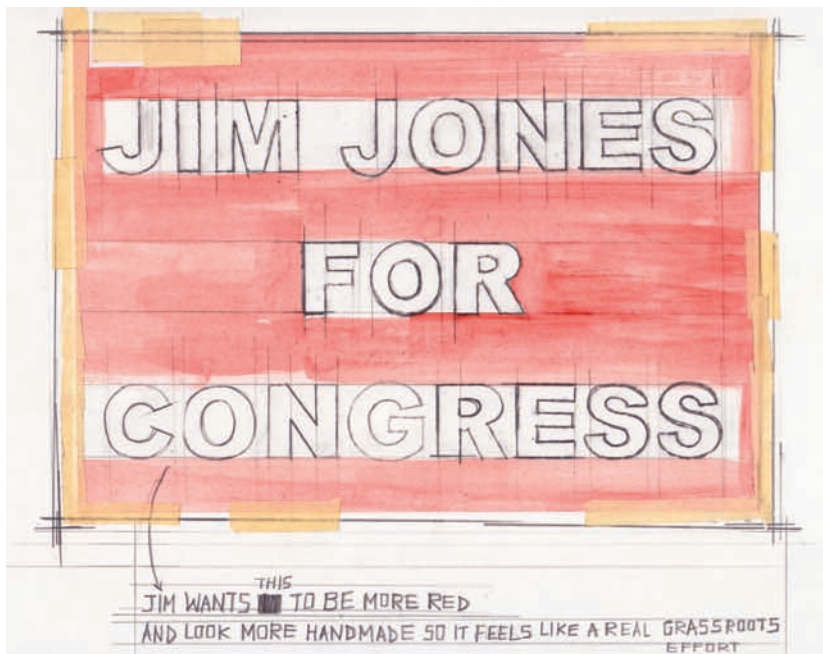
The author of this story (...only referred to as "you" throughout the narrative) is a naïve campaign worker who becomes increasingly concerned about the behavior of the candidate, Jim Jones, and the campaign's questionable tactics used to secure a win in an upcoming U.S. Congressional election. The story is fiction, but the character of the candidate—Jim Jones—will be based on real-life People's Temple cult leader Jim Jones, the mind control tactics he used on his followers and the great lengths he went to in order to exert influence over politicians and others in California in the 1960s and 1970s. Also, a fictional, illusion-making campaign consultant featured in the story, named David Copperfield, will be loosely based on the real-life master illusionist, David Copperfield.²



SEPTEMBER 2

YESTERDAY JIM STOPPED YOU IN THE HALLWAY, WHISPERED IN YOUR EAR
"YOU'RE ONE OF MY SPECIAL ONES. YOU GIVE THE CAMPAIGN
VERY, VERY SPECIAL."







(JIM'S NEW CAMPAIGN
CONSULTANT)

RUMOR AROUND
HEADQUARTERS IS
~~██████~~ COPPERFIELD
USED TO DO SOME
SORT OF MAGIC ACT
BEFORE HE
STARTED WORKING
FOR JIM

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[Set in the present day,] a portion of the story will take place inside and outside the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art when the campaign worker records how candidate Jim Jones journeys to Hartford to give a speech, as John F. Kennedy did on the eve of his U.S. Presidential election in 1960, on the terrace of The Hartford Times building. Before the speech, Jones, with delusions of grandeur, gazes up at the image of Kennedy in Robert Rauschenberg's iconic painting "Retroactive I" (1964), which prominently hangs in [the museum's] Morgan Great Hall.³

"Some concerns about the candidate" will be tangential, subjective and at times illogical, and will not be as much of a commentary on politics as it will be an exploration into human nature and the cult of personality phenomenon.⁴

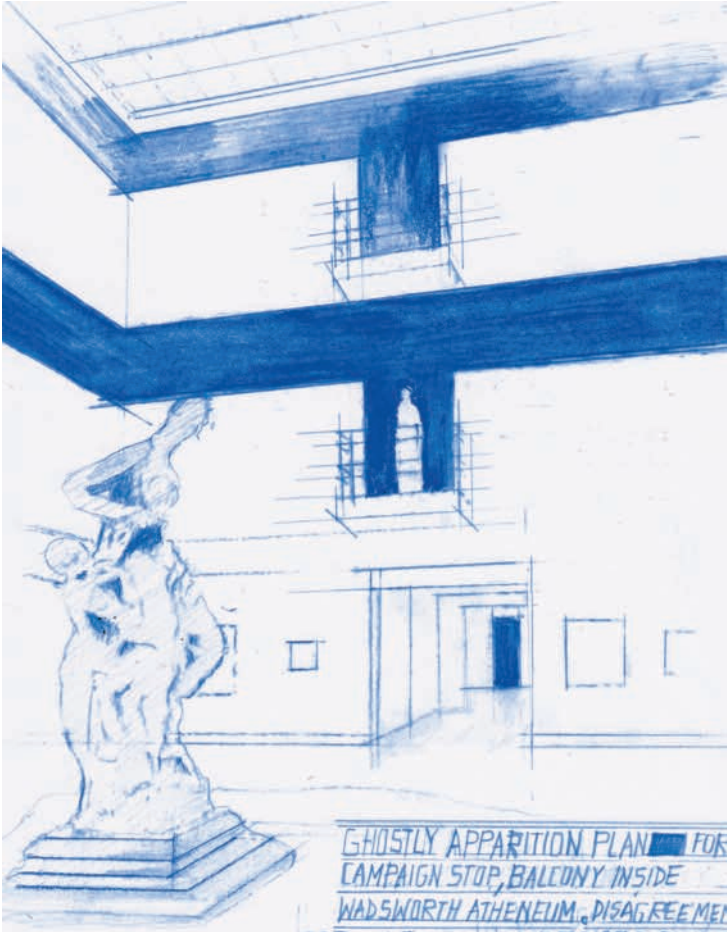


COPPERFIELD HAD ORGANIZED
YOU AND A BUNCH OF OTHER
CAMPAIGN WORKERS TO INFILTRATE
THE CROWD AT JIM'S OPPONENT'S RALLY,
AND WHISPER LIES ABOUT THE
OPPONENT TO HIS RANK AND FILE.

Sokolow's mixed-media drawings present ambitious visual tales on the order of the most entertaining mysteries and spy novels, with all the plot twists and turns. The accompanying imagery animates and heightens the drama, bringing to mind the most gripping scenes in film noir and political thrillers. But the books, with their depth and detail, are always better than the movie adaptations. And Deb Sokolow strikes the perfect balance as both a brilliant storyteller and innovative visual artist. She combines a great read with iconic pictorial moments and, in the process, delivers an exciting new vision for narrative drawing.

PATRICIA HICKSON

Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art



DEB SOKOLOW

EDUCATION

- 2004 MFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
1996 BFA, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 *Some concerns about the candidate / MATRIX 166*, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT
- 2012 *All Your Vulnerabilities Will Be Assessed*, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, PA
- 2011 *Notes on Denver International Airport and the New World Order*, Abrons Art Center, New York, NY
The Green Gallery West, Milwaukee, WI
- 2010 Western Exhibitions, Chicago, IL
- 2009 *Ground Level Projects: Deb Sokolow*, Spertus Museum, Chicago, IL
- 2008 *You are one step closer to learning the truth*, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO
The trouble with people you don't know, Inova [Institute of Visual Arts], Milwaukee, WI
- 2005 *Someone tell Mayor Daley, the pirates are coming*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 *Drawing Time, Reading Time*, The Drawing Center, New York, NY
- 2012 *Big Reality*, 319 Scholes, Brooklyn, NY, curated by Brian Droitcour
- 2011 *Artists tell stories (mostly about themselves)*, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ
Drawn to Disaster, Institute of Contemporary Art, Maine College of Art, Portland, ME
in- and outside - writing, Voorkamer, Lier, Belgium
Terminal Jest, co-curated by Stamatina Gregory and Michael Hall, Delaware County College, Media, PA
- 2010 *Production Site: The Artist's Studio Inside-Out*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
Party Crashers: Comic Book Culture Invades the Art World, Arlington Arts Center, Arlington, VA
- 2009 *Heartland*, Smart Museum, Chicago, IL
- 2008 *Heartland*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands
- 2007 *Mapping the Self*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
- 2006 *Drawn into the World*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

COMMISSIONS

- 2011 Cover, spread for *Paletten Art Magazine* (Sweden), guest-edited by Maria Lind
- 2010 Creative Time. Online comic strip. April 2010 <http://creativetime.org/comics/sokolow.html>
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.
Production Site: The Artist's Studio Inside-Out (commission for lobby)

American, born 1974, Davis, California
Lives and works in Chicago, Illinois

COLLECTIONS

Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art,
Scottsdale, AZ
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

Spertus Museum, Chicago, IL
The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender,
and Reproduction, Bloomington, IN

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2011 *Artforum.com*. Droitcour, Brian. "Deb Sokolow". August 8, 2011
- 2010 *Artforum.com*. Ise, Claudine. "Deb Sokolow" (review). December 2010
ArtSlant. Ritchie, Abraham. "Chicago's Best of 2010". December 27, 2010
Chicago Tribune. Waxman, Lori. "Deb Sokolow" (review). December 10, 2010
- 2009 *Chicago Tribune*. Viera, Lauren. "More Brilliance from Deb Sokolow" (review), May 29, 2009
- 2008 *Kansas City Star*. Thorson, Alice. "Kemper mystery exhibit is a you-dunit" (review)
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Schumacher, Mary Louise. "Miranda July meets Mark Lombardi"
Elms, Anthony. Exhibition Essay for *The trouble with people you don't know*
- 2006 *Art Papers*. Elms, Anthony. "Deb Sokolow" (review)

AWARDS, RESIDENCIES, AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2012 ARTADIA: The Fund for Art and Dialogue, Chicago grant cycle
Residency, Nordisk Kunstnarsenter Dalsåsen, Norwegian Ministry Of Culture, Norway
- 2010 *Residency*, Art Omi, Ghent, NY

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works courtesy the artist & Western Exhibitions, Chicago

Some concerns about the candidate, 2013
Mixed media on six panels
50 x 38 in. (each panel)

Jim Jones: A Man With A Vision For Your Future, 2013
Artist book; mixed media on paper
9 x 6 in. (closed)

The Truth About David Copperfield, 2013
Artist book; mixed media on paper
9 x 6 in. (closed)

Related ephemera: The briefcase of David Copperfield, suit scraps, pendant

WORKS ON VIEW IN THE AUERBACH ART LIBRARY AT THE WADSWORTH ATHENEUM

A Walk In Nature Or The Faces Of Former Bosses, 2013
Artist book; mixed media on paper
9 x 6 in. (closed)

Treasures Found Inside The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, 2013
Artist book; mixed media on paper
9 x 6 in. (closed)

ARTIST TALK

MATRIX Gallery Talk

Some concerns about the candidate

Deb Sokolow

Thursday, February 7

6 pm

Sokolow will discuss her MATRIX project in the

Eleanor H. Bunce Gallery.

MEMBER MORNING | CURATOR TALK

MATRIX Gallery Talk

Brainwashing and Magic Spells

Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art

Friday, February 15

9 – 11 am

After a complimentary continental breakfast, Hickson will discuss Sokolow's use of truth and fiction, comic book strategies, and conspiracy theories in her MATRIX project *Some concerns about the candidate*.

Members Only. Reservations Required.

Call 860.838.4171

MATRIX 166 is supported with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and The Dedalus Foundation, Inc.

The MATRIX program is also supported by the current and founding members of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's Contemporary Coalition.

Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign and the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development Office of the Arts, which also receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

The Wadsworth Atheneum film program is generously sponsored by the Mandell Family and Data-Mail.

FILM SERIES | "SPY THIS!"

Friday, February 15 – Saturday, March 30

Deb Sokolow's MATRIX project *Some concerns about the candidate* is a commentary on politics, mind control, and human nature. During February and March we explore nine thrillers that deal with politics, corruption, and the human condition. Film discussions follow screenings. Film admission includes admittance to the MATRIX exhibition.

For film titles and times, visit:

www.wadsworthatheneum.org



Wadsworth
Atheneum
Museum of Art

600 Main Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06103
(860) 278-2670

www.wadsworthatheneum.org



DEDALUS FOUNDATION, INC.



¹ Sokolow created an accordion-folded artist's book on the formative experience titled *Briefcase Exchange, McDonald's, Washington, DC, 1986* (2010) in a unique edition of five. See www.debsokolow.com for more information.

² Project proposal submitted via email by the artist to the author, 2 June 2012.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.