

Insurrection: A Film by Andres Serrano

Debuting January 2022

Press kit: molly.nyc/serrano

PRESS CONTACT

Molly Krause, krause co.

molly@molly.nyc

"I don't want to brag, but I think this is one of the most violent and controversial movies ever made:" Andres Serrano to release his first-ever film, a 75-minute narrative compilation set to the instrumental interludes and title card framework of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)

Combining poignant historical footage of the past 150 years; news segments from the past five years; and dozens of first-person recordings posted to online forums like Parler, *Insurrection* is an unflinchingly graphic narrative film that chronicles the events culminating on January 6, 2021

The film prioritizes narrative objectivity in an effort to be "appreciated by both sides," with overarching themes including the American wartime cultural ethos and the jarring ubiquity of Americans' persistent marriage of Christianity and war

Washington, DC — January 2022 — London-based arts organization a/political, in collaboration with DC-based arts nonprofit CulturalDC, is pleased to debut *Insurrection*, the first-ever film by artist-provocateur Andres Serrano (b. 1950, New York).

An opening sequence set to Bob Dylan's *You Ain't Goin' Nowhere* (1971) sets the stage for something highly personal to the artist yet cross-generationally resonant. "I grew up on Dylan," said Serrano. "For me, he was like the Bible, his songs were proverbs." With diverse historical footage spanning 150 years, we see a foreshadowing of the January 6 events with riots from the Great Depression, as well as hate crimes juxtaposed with jubilant "support our troops" performances of the same eras.

Score is a key element of the film, and in addition to the narrative framework provided by the instrumental interludes of *The Birth of A Nation*, songs used were selected for their illustration of the persistent belief – one that was particularly present on January 6 – that "American patriots" will always be victorious because God and Jesus are on their side; the paradox of Americans' longtime marriage of Christianity and war.

Integrated music includes a Civil War-era children's rendition of *Battle Hymn of the Republic* (*Glory, Glory Hallelujah*) as an overlay to the Capitol Rioters preparing to invade the building ("the mob overlay strikes an ominous chord that maybe they were praying to the wrong god," remarked Serrano); the saccharine "USA Freedom Kids" song made famous in a viral video of young girls

singing about “crushing the enemies” at a Donald Trump rally in 2016; and, paired with footage of insurrectionists being arrested toward the end of the film, a 1947 recording of *I’m Goin’ Home*, from the Alan Lomax Collection of Prison Songs, sung by a prisoner named “Bama” at the maximum-security Parchman Farm (Mississippi State Penitentiary). Immediately following that, the final piece of film score is a recording of an emotional, scripture-charged speech delivered by a preacher from inside the Capitol rotunda during the insurrection.

“I use the historical recordings [archival video, as well as archival audio paired with contemporary video and vice versa] to viscerally remind the viewer, again and again, that history repeats itself in specific ways. When I photographed the Klan in Georgia in 1990, the Imperial Wizard said to me, ‘any n**** in this country has more rights than a white man.’ Same attitude, different century. If [those leading the Capitol Riots] were Black, they would have been shot down like dogs. Black people have been killed for a lot less than futzing around the Capitol.”

“Serrano’s *Insurrection* highlights some of the most traumatic and disturbing moments of American history,” said Kristi Maiselman, executive director of CulturalDC. Commented Becky Haghpanah-Shirwan, the director of *a/political*: “I don’t think the film should be taken as a piece of entertainment - but rather a sincere reflection of that moment in history. The humor of some moments is countered by the overall dryness, a formal quality, and I think this is a really important technique. The tone of ambivalence is perfect - it taken be taken as pro or anti, depending on your political leaning.”

Haghpanah-Shirwan elaborated, regarding Serrano’s decision for the notable, mid-film ‘Breaching the Gates’ chapter to feature a long sequence of unedited footage of the Capitol Riot, without audio overlay or other artistic intervention:

“I was impressed by the courage of Andres to include this longer format scene. I felt as though I was there in the corridor; becoming familiar with individuals, their strategies and understanding the comradery. You experience tension, pain and suffering. Perversely, even if you are someone who dislikes Trump in the most visceral of ways, in the end, you take the side of his supporters. For me this is the crucial scene.”

Added Maiselman: “Serrano’s work has always shone a stark light on the most provocative topics within the American conversation—not to judge or issue a verdict, but simply to reveal them as they are. With his first-ever film work, Serrano not only questions the story we tell about ourselves, but makes it disturbingly clear how easily history can be subverted and weaponized, depending on what side of the barricade you find yourself on. In referencing *The Birth of a Nation*, as well as similar thematic imagery, Serrano places this destructive chapter within a larger history—one which is still unfolding. The haunting visuals he’s featured, such as of the insurrectionists perched in trees and scaling the walls of the People’s House, build upon a dark lineage of defining American imagery.”

Andres Serrano is represented in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), the National Portrait Gallery (Washington), the Art Institute of Chicago, the Baltimore

Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Israel Museum (Jerusalem), the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid), and dozens more.

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ABOUT A/POLITICAL

a/political explores radical knowledge through the principle of Cultural Terror. Working with artists and agitators, the collective platforms voices that undermine the dominant narratives of our time. a/political functions through interventions, commissions and a collection of modern and contemporary art. In 2019, in a former nightclub in New York City's Meatpacking District, a/political debuted an exhibition by Andres Serrano that Pulitzer Prize-winning art critic Jerry Saltz referred to as "the greatest portrait made of anybody by anybody in the 21st century." Entitled *The Game: All Things Trump*, the project and accompanying publication highlight a vast collection of items, amassed by Serrano, which visualized the rise of Donald Trump through objects branded or signed with his name.

ABOUT CULTURALDC

Established in 1998, CulturalDC supports innovative artists across all disciplines and makes their work accessible to diverse audiences. It provides unconventional space for relevant and challenging work that is essential to nurturing vibrant urban communities. In addition to supporting timely sociopolitical artworks such as Jennifer Rubell's *Ivanka Vacuuming* (2016), CulturalDC is host to an annual Capital Artists Residency that elevates the perspectives of interdisciplinary artists of color, and a one-of-a-kind "Mobile Art Gallery" – a shipping container retrofitted into a white-cube art gallery – a roving arts accessibility initiative that brings small, museum-quality presentations to communities outside of concentrated cultural districts.

ABOUT ANDRES SERRANO

"People confuse me and my work when they call me a photographer. I'm an artist and I could do other things, and now I've made a film." Andres Serrano is an artist who lives in New York City and is best known for his controversial 1987 work, *Piss Christ*, a photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine.