

Joe Biden Wants to Make Sure Americans Know He Cares About the Arts

By [Helen Holmes](#) · 11/10/20 8:00am



A still from Joe Biden's "America The Beautiful" video. Joe Biden / YouTube

Within the past four years of the Trump presidency, conversations about the importance and vitality of the arts and culture have undeniably fallen by the wayside as citizens have been forced to focus on matters of life and death. The pandemic only worsened things, and now one third of all American museums may close for good due to lack of federal support. With a celebratory video released over the weekend, however, President-elect Joe Biden is actively signaling to the American people that the arts are something he cares about. How? The visual language of the video directly references the 1983 work *Art is...* by the artist Lorraine O'Grady.

For *Art is...*, O'Grady hired actors and dancers to dress in white and ride on a float in the midst of the African American Day Parade in Harlem in New York City. Throughout the parade, O'Grady's charges would approach people in the crowd with golden frames, thereby capturing candid moments that were then photographed by the artist's friends and by random spectators in attendance. Biden's video expands on this idea: Americans are shown across the country holding up gold picture frames in front of their children, carrying the frames through farmers' fields and towing the frames with them as they snorkel under the water. As O'Grady did with her work celebrating and spotlighting the residents of Harlem, Biden's video sends message about the people, from many walks of life, whom he puts quite literally in the frame: you deserve to be recognized.

“The parade idea came from wanting to expose the avant-garde to the largest number of Black people I could find at one time—that was it,” O’Grady said during a talk at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2015. “A woman had recently said to me that avant-garde art doesn’t have anything to do with Black people. That was so infuriating to me. It’s where the whole idea for the piece came from—to do something that would prove this woman wrong, a piece about art in front of a million people.” Born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1934, Lorraine O’Grady’s conceptual art spans decades and involves inhabiting multiple personas and countless exhibitions across the United States and Europe.

The Biden campaign directly approached O’Grady and her gallery, Alexander Gray Associates, in order to get permission to make their video while using her piece as a direct reference. “I gave to them and they gave to me,” the artist reportedly said. This choice by Biden signifies several things: that the campaign respects artists enough in order to approach using their work in the proper fashion, and that Biden’s vision for America going forward is inherently artful, and has the arts in mind.