

**Sonja Baksa**

### **Introduction to 10 Commandments by Dina Goldstein**

Its grounding piece, Lincoln, depicts the 16th and most popular President in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. His towering figure barely fits in the otherwise empty school corridor littered with children's clothes, glass shards, bullet shells and blood stains. Yet the sense of mourning and loss emanating from the scene renders him small and defeated. By extension, the imagery renders small the constitutional principles on which The United States were founded. Coupled with the 6th Commandment "Thou shalt not kill", the piece evokes the President's own public assassination and further underlines the country's ongoing issues of gun violence and gun policy.

Using her established cinematic methodology, Goldstein blocks the Lincoln scene meticulously, each segment, each prop strategic and symbolic, coming together after a months-long pre-production process. All the while capturing in the singular still image a hint of the storyline that forms the greater narrative sequence of the series.

That narrative seeks to examine the socio-political makeup of America through its political icons - the presidential figures that mark the most notable and controversial chapters in American history. Each tableau features a President portrayed through the prism of their politics, popularity and/or notoriety, further contextualised by a contemporary backdrop, and assigned one of the moral and ethical postulates of the 10 Commandments. These, often humorous, narrative juxtapositions deconstruct the layers of political deceit, exposing latent hypocrisies and challenging the integrity of a system that is supposed to be a model of democracy and social progress. In the context of the series, Lincoln reaffirms the gravitas that lightness and humour in other pieces may inadvertently obscure.

The series draws entirely from the turmoil in contemporary American culture and the global ripple effect of its identity crisis. The election of President Donald Trump, a businessman and former reality star of questionable competency as a political leader, has revealed a daunting layer of decay in its societal values. So it is with tangible discomfort that the world has been observing the current state of American socio-political affairs, for many on the outside much more personal than would expect or imagine. In other words, the illusion is gone.

This is precisely Dina Goldstein's territory. With *10 Commandments*, she once again hones in on the subtleties of a greater cultural pretence, recreating the sense of disillusionment inherent to her oeuvre and voice as an artist.

Unlike Goldstein's other series, *10 Commandments* reads more immediate, more overtly activist. The artist is, more than ever, wearing her disillusionment on her sleeve, compelled to offer commentary as someone whose life and work have also been shadowed by the now fractured American ideal. As such, the series demonstrates a new facet of Dina Goldstein's artistic repertoire, one of political criticism.