

SVETLANA

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BLACKMAIL

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Gallery hours: Saturdays, 2-6pm
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Svetlana is pleased to present Blackmail, a group exhibition on view through October 22. About twelve years ago, a powerful New Jersey real estate developer was under investigation for campaign finance contributions which may have violated state laws. He grew the company his father started into a billion-dollar empire that included 25,000 apartments and offices. He was a middle-aged pillar of his community. In his employ were many relatives and extended family members. In his favor were countless politicians and public officials, as well as the charities and nonprofits that depended on his largess. He was one of the Democratic Party's top private donors.

When he witnessed a previously undetected adversary emerge in his midst, a fury seemingly incongruous with his generous public profile took hold of him. To blackmail a family member (and company employee) who was cooperating with federal investigators, the developer paid an escort to seduce this adversary. Their encounter precipitated a rendezvous in a hotel room where a hidden camera recorded the affair. A copy of the sex tape was mailed to the adversary's wife on the day of a family party. It was shortly thereafter turned over to federal authorities.

It has been several years since the real estate developer finished serving the two year prison term that was levied against him for this and other crimes. But today his family is in the news again. Though they have for decades been generous Democratic Party donors, the real estate mogul's elder son has become the Republican presidential nominee's de facto campaign manager. Wow.

Today, a sex tape has the kind of social influence that most art works will never command. They ruin companies, precipitate millions in revenue, and create sustained celebrity and wealth. That's not an affirmation of sex tapes by the way. This exhibition started with a work that exercises that particular form, though it has nothing to do with the story above. The chaos which that form inspires guides the rest of the show.

