

'Resist' opening at Van Vessem Gallery

Thursday

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The art opening from 2 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, April 2, dovetails into a full slate of musical performances from 3 to 6 p.m.

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When Marika Van Vessem issued a call to artists for artwork in relation to the political climate in the country, the response was overwhelming, she said. Highly esteemed artists from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York and even France were eager to submit pieces for the exhibit, "Resist."

"Some really incredible people responded. I was totally flabbergasted at the people who said they wanted to be included — it was like people were screaming for an outlet," said Van Vessem of the cross-section of artists with international backgrounds.

"Resist," opening this Sunday at the gallery, is a group show featuring the work of 35 artists' perspectives on the rise of Donald Trump and the social/historical context of the country's political climate.

"We wanted work that seeks and advocates for political solutions heartier and more potent than the ever-nebulous entity of 'love.' Work with bark and bite. Work that celebrates bodies on the periphery, bodies in danger, bodies that might be deemed insufficiently human in a culture saturated with rightism," Van Vessem wrote in the press release for the exhibit.

Elizabeth Duffy, one of the artists whose work will be on display, has been working on a series of quilts based on aerial views of prisons. A Providence-based artist and art instructor at Roger Williams University, Duffy said she started researching aerial views of prisons after noticing a common quilt pattern in another artist's quilt of an aerial view of Guantanamo Bay.

"I found it so alarming: this juxtaposition (of prison layouts) with quilts, something we think of as an object of comfort. When I started looking, I found a lot of similarities in the geometries of prisons with common quilt patterns," she said.

The research led to her creating ten quilts of prison aeriels from across the country. The Rikers Island X-O patterned one in the exhibit was constructed in response to the story of Kalief Browder, a 16-year-old who was wrongly accused of stealing a fellow student's backpack. Browder refused to plead guilty to a crime he said he didn't commit and he was incarcerated for three years awaiting trial at Rikers Island. The subject of a documentary by Jay-Z, Browder was exonerated and released. He committed suicide at age 22. Duffy's skin-sized quilt is approximately the size of the solitary confinement cell where Browder was held for much of his time at Rikers.

Some of the other pieces that will be on display include Rebecca Siemering's mixed media piece of a traveling flag made out of dental floss and lottery tickets; Brooke Roberts' "Prison Series #5" with prisoner portraits painted on metal printing sheets, "confined" behind rebar; Duke Robillard's painting, "Resist"; and Mark Shehan's take on a schoolroom "Pledge of Allegiance" portrait of FDR.

A small-scale statue of Lady Liberty is the foundation for Bob Rizzo's piece, "Resist — Before Her Light Goes Out." Rizzo, founder and curator of the Convergence Festival of Arts in Providence, has exhibited his pieces nationally and internationally. "This piece was created in response to the troubling times we are presently living in," said Rizzo in his artist statement.

An accompanying wall painting, he wrote, "carries but a few suggestions on resistance. It seems that we must work on many levels to RESIST all the ill will and political evil that is surfacing if we are to survive as the country Lady Liberty represents."

In addition to those artists, the exhibit features work by Lasse Antonsen, David Barnes, Deborah Baronas, Linda Brown, John Buron, Beth Claverie, Diana Cole, Tom Culora, Lynne de Beer, Tom Deininger, David Formanek, Tayo Heuser, Marc Kehoe, Nermin Kura, Saberah Malik, Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Sally Mendzela, Jessica Nissen, Elin Noble, Marcus Reichert, Carol Scavotto, Nancy Shand, Anna Shapiro, Susan Strauss, Kristin Street, Susannah Strong, Mark Wholey, Coral Woodbury and Kelly Zelen.

The gallery and all of the artists will donate a portion of the sale proceeds to organizations such as the ACLU.

The art opening from 2 to 5 p.m. dovetails into a full slate of musical performances, storytellers and live poetry from 3 to 6 p.m. in the main building at Sandywoods. Those scheduled to appear include storyteller Len Cabral, Annie Geisinger (drums); Joanne Friday (meditation); musical acts Quahog Quire, Jon Campbell and Butch McCarthy; and poets Bella Noka, Cheryl Voisinet and Christopher Johnson.

“Resist” will be on display Sunday, April 2 to Sunday, April 30 at the Van Vessem Gallery, 63 Muse Way, Tiverton. The opening reception from 2 to 5 p.m. on April 2 is free and open to the public. The live performances, from 3 to 6 p.m. in the main building at Sandywoods, is free and open to the public as well. Donations will be accepted.

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