

FEATURED TOP STORY

Pieces of resistance

Gallery exhibit in Tiverton is meant to be a conversation starter, not a protest of the Trump administration

By Marcia Pobzeznik | Correspondent Apr 1, 2017



Dave Hansen | Staff photos

Marika Van Vessem, above, owner of the Van Vessem Gallery at Sandywoods Farm in Tiverton, talks about the upcoming show 'RESIST: Exhibition of Artists' Responses to the Political Climate in the United States.' Below are two of the pieces that will be shown. At left is by Brooke Roberts of Newport. At right is 'KOP Restrepo #1' by Deborah Baronas of Warren.

TO GO

The Van Vessem Gallery, 63 Muse Way, in conjunction with the opening of the new exhibit "RESIST,"

TIVERTON — A new exhibit at Van Vessem Gallery is not meant to be a rally against the current administration, but instead its

will host a free event and fundraiser for the ACLU and other organizations on Sunday from 2:30-6:30 p.m.

The benefit event will feature an afternoon of music, poetry, speakers, including Steven Brown of the ACLU of Rhode Island. Some food and drinks will be available, but attendees are encouraged to bring their own beverages and food.

Donations will be accepted. For more information, visit facebook.com/vanvessemgallery.

intention is to get people talking and more involved in the political process.

"RESIST: An Exhibition of Artists' Responses to the Political Climate of the United States," which opens Sunday at the gallery at Sandywoods Farm, will feature works from 35 artists from different backgrounds. Each makes a statement.

"It addresses quite a myriad of issues," gallery owner Marika Van Vesse said.

"We didn't want it to be specifically about Trump," she said of the guidelines to artists not to use the new president's likeness in a work. "It's a bit of a bigger issue than what happened with the election. It has been happening all along, and people have been blinded by it."

She looks around the gallery at the photographs, sculptures, installations, paintings and collages, trying to explain the theme of the show.

"People have been a little blind and did not see this coming. People get too comfortable in their lives and do not get involved in politics and get run over. What we wanted from the artist was basically a statement," Van Vesse said.

"Resist is basically saying to yourself this is not right. I'm going to do my best to resist that and make it not happen. This is not a rally," Vesse said. "It's to get people together to talk about things."

Against a wall in the gallery is a miniature version of the Statue of Liberty on a pedestal, its right arm in a plaster cast.

The statue, which is missing an arm, was given to artist Bob Riz by a good friend years ago. He knew he would use it in a work some

day.

"She has sat in a box on a shelf in my studio for some time. It appears that her time is now. With a completely rebuilt and reinforced she once again raises her light to the sky," Rizzo writes of his piece which is entitled "Before Her Light Goes Out."

"This piece was created as a response to the unsettling times we presently live in," Rizzo said.

Artist Lasse Antonsen said he hesitated when Van Velsom invited him to be in the exhibit.

"I don't usually do political art, but we're all being challenged in ways we haven't been in a long time," Antonsen said. "In the U.S. something is being taken away, and we really don't know what it is."

His installation is of a lizard, high up on a wall, holding a black flag in its mouth that drapes down to the floor. The black flag symbolizes anarchy, Antonsen said, and the lizard is the subconscious, a creature of the imagination.

"Allegiance," a collage created by Mark Shehan, features a classroom-size portrait of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, like one you may remember looking at while pledging allegiance to the flag in grade school.

"It's sort of about contradiction," Shehan said of pictures of the Works Progress Administration workers he put in the foreground and in the background is a picture of a Japanese-American internment camp.

FDR did so much good by putting so many people to work in the WPA program that helped define his administration, but he also signed the order for internment camps for Japanese-American

"which is rather a contradiction for a guy that was supposed to doing so much for the little guy," Shehan said.

David Formanek inscribed poems on pieces of toxic lead.

"Lead is associated with the titan and planet Saturn, whose attribute is slow decay, as uranium becomes lead over geologic time," said Formanek, who writes in his artist statement that his ancestors from Europe endured totalitarian dictatorship after World War II. "People were poor and afraid. I value our tradition of freedom, inclusivity and self-government, one of the oldest in the world. I read history. I can recognize fascist dictatorships and c d'etat. I am horrified by the collapse of the American democratic system. I don't want to use toxic materials to make art, but I see I must."

Using offset press plates from The Newport Daily News, artist Brooke Roberts hammered the likenesses of prisoners from a book entitled "Pictures from a Drawer" into the aluminum sheets. Roberts writes in his artist statement that African-Americans in the U.S. are arrested and imprisoned at a rate that far exceeds any ethnic group.

Visitors to the exhibit will face Sally Mendzela's black-and-white photograph as they walk in the door of the gallery. It is of a man standing in front of a concrete wall with a sign so large that it covers the entire upper half of his body. "America, End the Human War" reads.

Next to it is a paper sculpture that looks like a monstrous jellyfish. Made out of discarded lottery tickets and long strings, artist Rebecca Siemering said in her artist statement that her "essential question for any of her work is this allegory of 'wanting the good life.' If we do not have what we want, then how can it be made with what we have at hand?"

The opening reception will take place Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m. a gallery at 63 Muse Way. A "Resist Information Event" will be held in conjunction next door at the community center and will feature poets, musicians and information tables and end with a drum and meditation session.

"Hopefully everyone will leave with a good feeling," Van Vessema said.

The exhibition runs through April 30. Gallery hours are Thursday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m.

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