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# ART Politics in art

by John Pantalone

Artists know only too well how much politics there is in art. It's the same as any other human endeavor--who you know, what you intend to do, how well you can rub the right palms makes all the difference in the economic world of art. What's odd about today's art climate is how little politics there is in the art itself. Twentieth century art has seen wave after wave of art movements that have dealt either directly or by theory with politics and sociology a basic impetus coming from the notion that art could indeed change the world.

The 1960's and early 1970's evocation of that was as performance art, the avant garde business of confrontation. So much of that early performance work concerned the Vietnam War and social issues, but it eventually evolved into a commentary on the nature of art as just as so much other art did in the twilight of Modernism and the nascence of post Modernism, if you will. The artist who will directly address a political or social concern in his work is a rare bird indeed even more so the performance artist. Providence artist: Bob Rizzo, who has made a career of mixed media presentations built around performance, has planned to show just how rare a species he is when he presents "Something Frightening. But Not Inherently Dangerous" at the Lincoln campus of the Community College of Rhode. Island. Beginning October 1- and extending over a two-week period. Rizzo will build scarecrows which will ring around the pond at the school, the scarecrow was standing in for prisoners of conscience, "the disappeared' worldwide.

Rizzo, a recent R I. State Council on the Arts grant-in-aid recipient, will conclude the installation of the scarecrows with an outdoor performance, the full scope of which he hasn't entirely determined. "The idea for the tree limbs came from something I'd done in 1975 with tree limbs, Rizzo explained. I've been interested for some time in doing something with scarecrows and this worked out fine. The Arts Council grant sort of freed me up to say what I wanted, without jeopardizing my situation. I wanted to deal with the Central American--South American problem in an artistic way without going back to the 60's craziness. I wanted to do a 1980's piece"

After reading some material published by Amnesty International, Rizzo decided on the prisoners of conscience motif and decided further to extend the subject worldwide. I contacted Amnesty International and they agreed to collaborate with me on this, " he said. 'I just felt it was time someone did something about this issue.

Artists just aren't political things anymore. That troubles me. The sense that art has nothing to do with politics just amazes' me. " As the installation of the scarecrows is proceeding, Rizzo will document them with polaroid photographs, which he will mount in the CCRI gallery along with text on the subject of political prisoners published by Amnesty International. ' 'I'm thinking that some of the scarecrows might disappear because that happens a lot with outdoor installations of this nature," he said. ' 'But that's okay, because then all I'll have left of their existence is the photo documentation. and that's quite like what happens to families of prisoners of conscience. All they have left is a photograph. "

Rizzo will install five scarecrows a day for 10 days. 'What I can tell you about the performance now is that

I will put red flairs in front of each scarecrow, and they'll stay lit for 15 minutes, then go- out. The scarecrows will disappear. There will also be audio tapes of released prisoners."

Rizzo said he thinks artists have turned away from inherently political and social subjects to a great degree because art scene "has become a bigger hustle than ever with people trying to make a buck. The loss of much of the National Endowment money has been a cause for that. It really affected the nature of the art being produced. He thinks his installation and performance piece at CCRI will have high visibility in the art community because of his Arts Council grant. 'I may reach people who are interested in seeing what the grant-in-aid guy is doing," he said. ". All I'm trying to do is get people to look and think about political things."