

Two Striking Exhibits Highlight Fall Semester at SMC's Museum of Art

By A.K. Carroll



Eric Almanza

Art has the power to amuse, anger, intrigue and inspire. It can bind a community together or divide it in two, serve as a catalyst for conversation or the impetus of a movement. Exhibitions don't make it into galleries simply by chance, but through careful curation and arduous selection.

This fall the Saint Mary's College Museum of Art — a local gem tucked in the back of SMC's campus — will simultaneously house two professionally-curated exhibitions, "The American Soldier" (open through Dec. 18) and "Social Justice: It Happens to One, It Happens to All" (open through Dec. 11), both of which were selected with a nod toward the upcoming election. The exhibitions will kick off on Sunday, Sept. 18 with an opening reception (see sidebar). Other curators and artists will also be present.

According to Kyla Porter Tynes, gallery manager at SMC, the curatorial committee looks for exhibitions that are, "interesting, timely, and appropriate for the campus and community." Tynes believes that these two exhibitions will appeal as much to the local community as they will to the college campus. Both have the capacity to reframe common perceptions and serve as conversational catalysts.

"The art really speaks to the viewer," said Tynes. "(It) evokes

empathy or causes an impetus for change. Each piece stands on its own, and, viewed in their entirety, they speak to the (larger) topic."

"Social Justice: It Happens to One, It Happens to All"

For curators Karen Gutfreund and Sherri Cornett, that larger topic is social justice. Their exhibition, "Social Justice: It Happens to One, It Happens to All," raises the question of how we create a more just and free world for ourselves and future generations.

"Art and museum galleries give us a permissible venue in which to process and meditate on the tragedies around us and in the larger world," the curators write in their catalog. They wanted to create an exhibit that would present opportunities for reflection, dialog, connection and community engagement.

Following the incarceration of a Connecticut woman who had enrolled her son in an out-of-district kindergarten, Gutfreund and Cornett started brainstorming around artistic reactions to current social, economic and political issues. Tynes reached out to them with a proposition for an exhibition, and the women sent out national call for artwork. Two years later, the exhibition is debuting.

The show, which consists of 43 installed pieces and a looped slideshow of an additional 46 works, was created by a broad demographic of artists with diverse

backgrounds. The topics of the exhibition range from abuse, to education access, to race, immigration and homelessness.

"It's a lot to absorb," said Cornett, "Which is part of why it's up for three months."

As a special kick-off to the exhibition, over 15 of the artists will join a panel discussion on art and social justice from 2-2:45 p.m. on Sept. 18, prior to the opening reception in SMC's Soda Center. The discussion will include a video.

"It's going to be really powerful to have those artists in the room, answering questions of why they do what they do and how they go into social justice work," said Cornett.

"The American Soldier"

Tony- and Emmy-award winning curator, director, writer and producer Cyma Rubin, curator and producer of "The American Soldier," will also speak at the reception. An exhibition of 116 photographs that covers nine wars from the Civil War to Iraq, "The American Soldier" is both a visual progression and a tribute to US military.

The exhibition has been viewed by over a million people during its installations in presidential libraries, universities, museums and history centers.

... continued on page B5



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Opening Receptions

Visit "The American Soldier" and "Social Justice: It Happens to One, It Happens to All" at Saint Mary's College Museum of Art. Exhibits open at 11 a.m. Sunday, Sept. 18. The opening reception for "Social Justice" will be from 1:15-2 p.m. with a conversation with the artists. The opening reception for "The American Soldier" will be at 2 p.m. with a lecture by producer and curator Cyma Rubin. The museum is located at 1928 St. Mary's Rd. in Moraga and is open from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays. Admission is \$5 for all adults. Youth (K-12), military veterans, and SMC faculty, staff and students are free. For more information, visit www.stmarys-ca.edu/saint-marys-college-museum-of-art/come-visit.

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