

Nanette's New Life - Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes

Just when I was thinking the title of this blog was outdated, I up and changed my latitude -- a bit -- with a move to Sarasota. Now I'm much more in the thick of the Southwest Florida arts scene. Hope you enjoy my musings!

Embracing Our Differences Exhibit 2021



"Psychoanalysis" by Leyla Emektar from Turkey

The mission of Embracing Our Differences is to educate and inspire the creation of a better world through the transformative power of the arts. The program includes reading days in kindergarten-third grade classrooms (so much fun!), team-building workshops for high school students, and an annual outdoor art exhibit featuring images and quotes promoting diversity and acceptance. In these divisive times, this year's exhibit was more welcome and inspiring than ever.

The exhibit in Sarasota's Bayfront Park contains 50 billboards that pair larger-than-life art and quotes. Selecting the works for the exhibit can't have been an easy task. This year's call for artwork and quotes resulted in 15,912 entries from 128 countries and 48 states. Students from 412 schools around the world submitted their work. It's hard to wrap my mind around the selection process.



"Unity" by Evelyn Homewood, 12th grader - U.K.

While I always enjoy the exhibit, the selections seemed more artistically sophisticated than in some years. Case in point: Evelyn Homewood's painting entitled "Unity." It's flat out beautiful, and the comparison between the classical Greek goddess with her hair piled atop her head and a woman wearing traditional Nigerian clothing and headdress is rather brilliant. Homewood says in her artist statement, "The image of a woman of an underrepresented ethnicity stands as an equal counterpart [to women typically seen in European Renaissance paintings], challenging our traditional views of art and demonstrating the interdependence and unity of society today." To hear the artist speak about her work, click [here](#).



"Contrast of Life" by Teody Boylie Perez, Phillipines

Then there was "Contrast of Life" by Teody Boylie Perez from Davao City in the Phillipines. The colors are so striking that it took me a moment to realize what I was looking at. The towering luxury high rises (not dissimilar to what we see in Sarasota) stand in stark contrast to the precarious stilt houses. A man and his son sit on the shore taking it all in. Perez hopes his painting illuminates the widening division between the rich and the poor. The quote selected to accompany this work is by Clifford McDonald of Sarasota and simply states, "We are not remembered for what we have in life, but for what we have given."



"Small Struggles" by Emily N., 7th grader, Sarasota

Best in Show awards are given each year in the categories of adult image, student image and quote. This year's winning student work was "Small Struggles" by Sarasota seventh grader Emily N. Emily's artist statement says, in part, "My piece depicts a little girl standing in front of an aisle of dolls advertised to look like the person buying them. Through my work, I attempt to highlight the little struggles people of color go through every day." I'm impressed by the empathy of this middle schooler. The companion quote by Kimberly Boyd of Georgia seems tailor-made for this work: "Social equality cannot be achieved if the folks making the decisions all look alike."



"Stand in My Shoes" by Wayne Ramirez, Venice, FL

Best in Show - Quote went to Temilola Aderemi of Nigeria for, "If we were to exchange shoes, would you be willing to walk in mine?" The perfect piece of art presented itself for a pairing in Wayne Ramirez' "Stand in My Shoes." The image immediately calls to mind the photograph of six-year old Ruby Bridges integrating a New Orleans elementary school in 1960. Its power is in its simplicity. In his artist statement, Ramirez notes that Mary Janes have traditionally been marketed to little white girls and that "manufacturers have only recently begun to acknowledge their role in perpetuating institutionalized racism in advertising." Think Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben. To see the photo of the young Ruby Bridges -- as well as the iconic Norman Rockwell painting commemorating her bravery -- click [here](#).



"Liberty Enlightening the World"
By Arya Badiyan of Lake Oswego, Oregon

There are many other works in the exhibit I'd like to highlight, but I'll leave you with the work that won the award for Best in Show by an adult -- Arya Badiyan's "Liberty Enlightening the World." In her painting, Badiyan shows a Black Lady Liberty in front of millions of Black people whose lives have been lost to slavery and injustice. Badiyan's artist statement reminds us that in the original version of the statue, Lady Liberty held not a tablet, but chains representing the end of slavery. The visual didn't appeal to American financiers, though, so a switch was made. (Chains do still lie on the ground at Lady Liberty's feet.) Interestingly, the complete name of the Statue of Liberty is the same as that of the painting -- Liberty Enlightening the World.

If you're in the area, there's plenty of time to enjoy the exhibit, which runs through April 1. Or you can view it virtually by clicking [here](#). To get to the artist statements and paired quotes, just click on an image. Kudos to Embracing Our Differences for once again putting together an uplifting and aspirational exhibit.

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