

Herald-Tribune

'Embracing Our Differences' Sarasota art exhibit vandalized



Steven Walker

Sarasota Herald-Tribune



An art exhibit at Bayfront Park organized by the Sarasota-based Embracing Our Differences nonprofit was vandalized late Tuesday evening.

The vandal attacked the “Women of the Bluest Eye” piece, a work created by Donna M. Richardson from Tampa, according to a release from the organization. The art was slashed, removed from the frame and knocked over with two other pieces of artwork amounting to about \$3,000 in damages, per the release. The artwork should be re-printed and back up at the bayfront early next week, Sarah Wertheimer, the organization's executive director, said.

Embracing Our Differences said it worked with the city of Sarasota and the Sarasota Police Department to interview witnesses and said a suspect was identified as of Wednesday.

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More: [Manatee County to push back against 'woke agenda' at new Lakewood Ranch library](#)

A report from SPD was requested but was not immediately available as of Thursday afternoon.

"Diversity is a reality, not a slogan. Human beings come in all shapes, sizes, colors, ethnic backgrounds, abilities, and sexual orientations. That's a fact," the organization's statement read. "...But the forces of reaction, hate, bigotry and prejudice haven't gone away."

The "Women of the Bluest Eye" piece celebrated the beauty and nature of people of indigenous descent and contemporary American culture, according to the release. It drew inspiration from "The Bluest Eye" by Toni Morrison, which depicts a young Black girl named Pecola who struggled to fit the typical standard of beauty and wished for blue eyes, equated with "whiteness."

The book has been the subject of several book-banning initiatives, [including in a dismissed lawsuit](#) against the Sarasota County School District. Wertheimer said she felt the attack on the artwork was targeted.

"Sadly, the subject matter in that piece of art is something that some individuals view as controversial. I personally do not," she said.

The organization was waiting on an update from SPD Thursday afternoon, she said, and the department might be able to use footage from cameras on boats at the marina to aid in an arrest.

More: [Judge dismisses lawsuit against Sarasota School Board over alleged sexual content in libraries](#)

The exhibit opened on Jan 18 and runs through March 12.

This is a developing story, please check back for updates.

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