

F.R.E.dom: Juneteenth art exhibit explores emancipation

Mike McGee | 6/23/2019, midnight



"Day of Jubilee 6" by Missy Burton PHOTO BY MIKE MCGEE

The Dallas Examiner

The phrase "freedom isn't free" may be a well-known saying to Americans of all backgrounds, but an art exhibition underscoring the significance of Juneteenth asks viewers to consider the nature of freedom.

The Goldmark Cultural Center in Richardson is presenting The Flagrant Rules of Ensued Emancipation (F.R.E.E.), which will run until July 12 in the John H. Milde Gallery, with an artist reception June 23 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. The group exhibition of new works featuring 11 African American artists from the Dallas area is curated by Goldmark resident artists Missy Burton and Evita Tezeno.

Since Juneteenth commemorates the June 19, 1865 announcement of the abolition of slavery in Texas – two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation had already been signed into law. Burton and Tezeno considered the facets that come with such history as they conceptualized the show.

"So Evita and I started tag teaming each other on how we would feel as slaves if we had found out two and a half years later that ... we could have been free for the last two and a half years," Burton said.

This also led to exploring how freedom could have even be exercised by African Americans who had never known it.

"Even if you were that slave standing in the field that just found out that you were declared free, what do you do? You don't have a house, you don't have money, you don't have anything and you've never been free before – because at this particular point, these slaves that have

been notified of their freedom had never been free before," the artist mused. "So what does it even mean, if you don't even have a concept for the state of what is free?"

What freedom meant and each artist's – and viewer's – perception of the idea became an even wider platform for the show to expand upon.

One installation is a participation piece. A red MAGA hat is physically repurposed into a vessel and guests are asked to write on slips of paper what they believe will make America great again. Burton noted that the phrase itself does not necessarily have a nefarious subtext.

"We hope that we are able to encourage people to question everything. That in this day and time especially, everything is not what it seems," the curator remarked on what she hoped visitors would take with them once they see the artwork. "You can't believe everything you hear, and you certainly cannot form your own opinions or belief systems based on what somebody told you." There are also questions posted on the glass of the gallery to assist visitors, Tezeno noted.

"You know, to question what freedom really is, and we have different quotes from different people about freedom as well."

"We just want people to come with an open mind," Burton voiced, and added an observation that caused the duo to break up with laughter.

"Trust me, if me and Evita could figure out a way that we could just have people come in and just visit the exhibition silently and leave with their own opinions, we would do that, but we haven't gotten that far yet."

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