

Friday November 13, 2015

By Leslie Katz

MoAD exhibits address history, racism and more



Three shows at the Museum of the African Diaspora exemplify the organization's re-imagined mission and emphasis on contemporary issues.

"All of you are part of the diaspora," executive director Linda Harrison said Tuesday at an event to preview the new exhibitions.

Vowing to share works by emerging and established artists and present provocative programming, she added, "We are committed to being socially and culturally relevant. Race and culture will be talked about openly and freely. We want Black Lives Matter discussions here."

"Alison Saar: Bearing," a collection of 26 pieces (mixed media, sculpture, woodcuts and drawings) by the Los Angeles-based artist on view through April clearly illustrates the new vision.

On hand for the show's opening, Saar said many of the works reflected her reaction to "horrific things" about race that came up in the media after President Barack Obama was elected.

"Weight," a large, charged 2012 work, has a life-sized young woman on a swing, attached to a cotton scale, balancing against a clustering of household objects — a skillet, iron, ladle, coal scuttle, and more. The point comes across clearly: Even today, the value of a woman is measured by the domestic work she does.

Image: "Weight" is among the evocative works on view in "Alison Saar: Bearing" at the Museum of the African Diaspora. (Courtesy L.A. Louver, Venice, Ca)

Saar's viewpoint is isn't entirely hopeless, however. A pair of boxing gloves is among the offsetting items, which Saar says she added to give the girl "a way out."

A sculpture, more than 7 feet tall, called "Thistle and Twitch" (or "Mombie," a cross between mother and zombie, Saar says) is commanding. Made mostly of rice paper and glue, it was inspired by the Greek tale of Persephone, who was stolen away to the underworld, sending her harvest goddess mother Demeter to search for her. Reflecting the goddess' fallow feeling, "Mombie" has brambles both inside (visitors can see them by looking through a hole in her abdomen) and painted outside, on vein-like markings across her surface.

Cotton, and its evocation of slavery, is featured in various works in the show, as is the notion of alchemy and distillery (of bigotry) in mixed media works with glass, rubber, copper and found objects such as buckets and water.

Complementary themes come to light in "Who Among Us ... The Art of Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle," an exhibit of 33 works (collages, paintings, drawings, sculptures) by the Los Angeles-based contemporary artist, and inspired by the late, admired African-American poet Lucille Clifton, who wrote: "Who among us can imagine ourselves unimagined? Who among us can speak with so fragile tongue and remain proud?" Also running through April, "Who Among Us" includes pieces from Hinkle's "The Uninvited Series," in which she dramatically reworks, and changes the meanings of, photos of West Africans taken by French colonists in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

'Four Themes," the third fall exhibit from MoAD's Emerging Artists program (running through Jan. 18) features digital work by Tim Roseborough, a San Francisco artist who created a new graphic language he calls "Englyph."

In his thought-provoking, colorful and fun show, he translates the museum's mission statement, which focuses on "origins, movement, adaptation and transformation," into his own visual language, which is based on the English alphabet. While he doesn't provide a key, astute observers (and kids) with time and patience may be able to break his code.

In January, works by another emerging artist, Oakland-based Cheryl P. Derricotte, will be on view in "Ghost/Ships," an exhibit addressing slavery drawn from images taken from the British Library.

IF YOU GO

Museum of the African Diaspora fall 2015 exhibitions

Where: 685 Mission St., S.F.

When: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays, noon to 5 p.m. Sundays

Admission: \$5 to \$10; free for children 12 and under

Contact: (415) 358-7200, www.moadsf.org

<http://www.sfexaminer.com/moad-exhibits-address-history-racism-and-more/>

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