Gettin' off the Ground: Contemporary Stories from an American Community

In her book, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston writes: "There is a basin in the mind where words float around on thought and thought on sound and sight. Then there is a depth of thought untouched by words, and deeper still a gulf of formless feelings untouched by thought." (Hurston, p.23). It is in the “gulf of formless feelings”, where layers of consciousness move from fantastical to real and from sensory to literary, that communities create fables, parables, myths and folktales to connect with each other and understand the super/natural elements that exist in our world. These stories, told and retold, shape our perceptions regarding ourselves in relationship to identity, culture, place and fellowship. Collectively, these perceptions shape how we exchange ideas and engage with each other, in addition to defining our communities’ beliefs and moral systems.

As dynamic social media platforms continue to emerge, our ability to share stories has also changed. Suddenly, notions of community and "coming together" have shifted as people turn to the nebulous territory of the Internet to exchange personal information with friends and strangers (i.e. Facebook, Vine, and YouTube). On these sites we tell stories that often blend reality and fiction. We learn intimate details about strangers and loved ones that occasionally challenge us and sometimes reinforce unconscious bias we already hold.

For the next few years, Angels Gate Cultural Center's (AGCC) gallery invites the community to share their stories with us. We are interested in how these stories shape the collective consciousness in San Pedro and the South Bay area. AGCC will partner with local organizations to produce short-term artist residencies that capture the stories of different people in the community. The residencies will culminate in exhibitions in the Main Gallery. The Main Gallery serves as an anchor for the supporting galleries that will delve into issues such as loss, migration, love, immigration, location, and port culture through participatory art making stations; curated roundtable style conversations featuring artwork by emerging and mid career artists primarily from the Los Angeles area; solicited community-based projects; and a film reel that features interviews with people in the community sharing their stories.

Throughout the exhibitions visitors are asked to consider their lives, the lives of younger and older generations, and how a healthy community’s well-being is sustained through the quality of relationships individuals form in their community (Block, p.5).

Angels Gate Cultural Center hopes that by participating in the conversation, people in the community will create artwork in the gallery, submit artwork to be displayed in the galleries and return again to discover something new. As the community ‘gets off the ground’ and visits the galleries we hope they experience a slice of Americana that is unique within our nation and particular to Los Angeles.

Bibliography

Over the next two years artwork will be selected on an ongoing basis that employ storytelling techniques to encourage dialogue on issues relevant to the South Bay/Harbor community and/or shared history. The artworks encourage us to think about our lives and how we communicate our story with each other.

Work will be featured that ranges from video to sculpture and explores issues of representation, identity and personal responsibility and continues to explore stories relevant to the local community. The artists include: Mwangi Hutter, Michele Jaquis, Jessica Wimbley and Eve Wood. Visitors will be able to tell their own story through interactive art stations in the gallery.

**MAIN GALLERY**

**Supporting Structures: A Community Arts Project**

February 9, 2014 - January 9, 2015

Fausto Fernandez with members of the Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters and the Pile Drivers, Bridge, Dock and Wharf Builders Local Union 2375

**COMMUNITY GALLERY**

**Artists in Classroom: Symbiosis**

February 9 - April 11, 2014

Karena Massengill with Jankarlo Castenada, Jerrie Chavez, Toughna Chim, Estrella Cisneros, Rochelle Galitta, Jaime Maese, Jorge Matamoros, Edwin Sanchez, Janeth Toro & Biu Xiong

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