

## Philadelphia's Freedom Artist Spotlight Campaign

### Tell us about yourself:

- How did you hear about the opportunity to participate in the Philadelphia's Freedom exhibition at NLM?
- \* I heard about the Philadelphia's Freedom exhibition through an email from the Liberty Museum.
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- What made you want to submit artwork to the exhibition?
- \* A large part of my body of work these past few years concerns exactly that::::: the concept of freedom, and, more broadly, how that freedom was fought for, and how many times our country has come close to destroying some of that freedom. And of course, this leads to thoughts of what PERSONAL freedoms are...
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- How do you personally define freedom?
- \* Freedom for me is a double-edged sword..... On the one hand there is the framers' original concept:::::freedom from tyranny, which came from our Constitution and the Bill of Rights. On the other hand, there's individual freedom, which for ME translates into something more personal and specific - freedom to protest when those in power make great mistakes (like the Viet Nam War), and, more recently, freedom to fight against racism and police brutality, a cause that unfortunately only gained real momentum after the whole world was able to see with their own eyes an unarmed black man murdered with the casualness of a street corner chat.

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### Tell us about your work:

- How would you describe your art?

I compose in series, and often series within series, and all of my projects from the past couple of decades have dealt with social issues:

- In the '90s I found myself obsessed with gun violence - reading little stories buried in the back of the Philadelphia Inquirer about people being murdered for things like the theft of a pair of sunglasses. I began to wonder WHO in our country had the freedom to exist without becoming a victim of gun violence. Does your "right" to carry a firearm conflict with my "right" to walk the streets safely?
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- After my Mediterranean-looking husband was stopped at the airport for no reason, I began a series (The MARK Portraits) that focused on profiling and identity. Does our freedom depend on who we ARE and what we LOOK LIKE?
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- My next obsession was death (THE FINAL FRONTIER) The history of mourning, our fear, our vocabulary, architecture, death customs, methods of execution.... I also carved 30 tiny, decorative, caskets that commemorated various artists and scalawags.
- Then I began tackling the dysfunction of today's politics, as seen through an historical perspective (WHEEL, DEAL, STEAL, THEN SPIN). I read a lot of American history, and, perhaps for the first time, began questioning what our country stood for versus what it has done..... Individual pieces in this series were about early child labor laws, government-corporate bonding, and - especially loathsome - government-sponsored medical experiments on the mentally ill and the incarcerated. I believe what I learned from this long project was the amount of personal freedom one is blessed with has more to do with

power, money, and race, than it does with simply being an 'American'.

- How would you describe your process in making art?
  - The best way I can describe this is a loose translation of a quote from the French writer Romain Gary - "...when I encounter something that I am not able to change, that I cannot resolve, that I cannot straighten out, I dispose of it. I evacuate it into a book. Afterwards I no longer feel oppressed. I sleep better"
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  - What mediums do you primarily work with?
  - My usual process is Sgraffito (a process of layering wax and oil crayon and using various tools to scratch through) and mixed media on museum board, which allows me to have maximum textural and color effect, and, perhaps because I am a lapsed English major, I make liberal use of TEXT - everything from witty adages and philosophical commentary to poetry.
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- How does the concept of freedom in this exhibition influence how and what you create as an artist?

All my work relates to freedom: historically, currently, and personally.

Has the pandemic had an effect on your processes? If so, please elaborate how.

- How has the pandemic changed the way you perceive freedom?

For one thing, the pandemic has allowed me MORE time in my studio. For another, it raises the issues of personal freedom that we are all thinking about: To open for business or not? To protect

others and ourselves with masks? Social distancing? WHOSE freedom is being impinged? WHOSE freedom is more important?

How do we weigh the competing claims of justice, freedom, and need? Along with the renewed social justice movement, the question we need to address is: WHAT IS FREEDOM AND WHO GETS TO ENJOY IT?

- What inspirations tied to the ideals of freedom led you to the creation of the artwork you submitted?

The "ideals of freedom" that we all believe in have undergone some pretty grim challenges throughout our history. The inspiration that has been and will continue to inform my work, especially after learning of all the myths, misinformation and manipulation we have been exposed to, is learning about all the heroes AND ordinary people who have stepped up to the plate, at great risk to themselves, to honor those ideals.

What do you hope your audience will take away from this artwork?

I hope that my use of color and texture acts as a magnet to pull folks in close enough to read the quotations - some amusing, some disturbing - as well as notice all the small symbolic details reinforcing my presentation.

### Deep Cut

What are the requirements you believe need to exist for a country or individual to be indeed free?

(YIKES! This is a tough one!)

First and foremost, better education about American history - flaws, flim-flams and all!

Secondly, a way to teach children (probably too late for adults) to respect others, to listen, to be skeptical about, or at least question, ideas that just don't 'seem right' to them.

And lastly, stand up for what you know in your heart to be right; as the protests posters have been saying, "Silence is violence".

In sum: a greater AWARENESS, starting with education and spiced with empathy and introspection, that aims toward FDR's four freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

2. Have you ever had your freedom tested either personally or creatively? Please explain.

YES. Many many years ago, in a country far far away (France), I was returning from a trip to Amsterdam and had forgotten there was a wee bit of 'illegal substance' in my handbag. I found myself arrested at the Belgium-France border, and spent three weeks in prison before being released. Never in my life, up to that point, had I even thought about freedom. Until I suddenly didn't have it anymore.

I probably learned more about myself during that time than I EVER would have otherwise, and I actually find myself grateful for the experience.

3. What's the single greatest threat to freedom today?

We live in a time of TRIBALISM versus COMMUNITY, and until people somehow learn a bit of empathy, I don't seem much changing.....

4. How would you like to see this concept of freedom evolve in the future?

During periods of great turmoil (world wars, 9/11, etc.), our leaders have stood up to inspire us, and we, the people, HAVE come together to support our troops, our government, our neighbors. We have survived, and we have become better. As long as there is this wall of polarization, where the rights of "the other" is in question, how CAN there be real freedom for anyone?

5. Finally, when you think of someone who embodies the fight for freedom, who comes to mind and why?

The first person is Dr. Martin Luther King. But I also feel a need to highlight all of those parents, especially the mothers, who have lost children to gun violence, and who have tucked their pain deep inside so that they can come forth to fight for gun legislation, for better policing, for more community support.....

Btw - here is a little video, shot by John Thornton, a local videographer who is great at shooting artists. He did this several years ago before a show I was having, He interviews me about, and shows, various series, including my earlier work about gun violence, and the political series WHEEL, DEAL, STEAL THEN SPIN. (Feel free to edit it down!)

<https://youtu.be/3NruFGZ#CE53A2>