



Local Arts

Political, social, COVID-19 commentary on display with new Saskatoon art exhibition

Betsy Rosenwald and Dawna Rose's collaboration *Journal of the Plague Year* is on display at the 330g art gallery until the end of February.

Matt Olson

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Dawna Rose and Betsy Rosenwald have collaborated on an exhibition entitled *Journal of the Plague Year*, reflecting on the tumultuous time leading into, and during, the COVID-19 pandemic both here and in the United States. The exhibition is at 330g art gallery. PHOTO BY MICHELLE BERG /Saskatoon StarPhoenix

When artists Betsy Rosenwald and Dawna Rose visited the Women's March in New York City in 2017, it left a mark on both.

"It was an absolutely overwhelming and amazing event in my life," Rose said. "The demonstration was just incredible."

That powerful social movement in the United States, coupled with the "toxic politics" exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020, sparked their collaboration for their latest exhibition, *Journal of the Plague Year*.

On display at the small 330g art gallery in Saskatoon, *Journal of the Plague Year* features the varied works of Rosenwald and Rosen, joined by the overarching theme of responding to a socially rife 2020.

Rose's works consist mostly of painted signs, depicting images and phrases as a cacophony of rage and reaction to the social climate of the world. Inspired by a man carrying a sad sign showing a single hand-drawn banana during the 2017 march, her works are her own collection of protest signs targeting topics ranging from climate change to the world political landscape, she said.

"I just started to make all sorts of signs, about my feelings or stuff in politics. It became a thing I did daily ... and then when the pandemic hit, there was a lot of material."

Rosenwald's work, more muted in colour, plays on words and phrases from a vitriol-filled U.S. election year. Her works — all painted on pieces of cardboard, like Rose's — read like a combination of protest signs and political satire cartoons. Her first sign for what would become the *Journal of the Plague Year* collection was a bald eagle simply saying the word "enough."

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"That was sort of the impetus for me to carry on with making these image-and-word political statements, usually in response to a particular news cycle happening at the time," Rosenwald said.

A dual citizen of the United States and Canada, Rosenwald noted that seeing the government under Donald Trump and her previous home's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was difficult.

"On one hand, it was a joke, but then the joke was no longer funny ... it became a country that was unrecognizable to me," Rosenwald said.

The two artists have a long history of friendship and working together. They share a small studio space in Saskatoon, and they often consult each other for thoughts and advice. As Rose puts it, their styles and ideas are different, but their work creates a clear dialogue commenting on the past year.

COVID-19 restrictions are in place for visitors coming to see the small exhibition at 330g. As artists, Rose and Rosenwald said they felt something of a responsibility to reflect the "crisis" of the current world. The pieces on display in the small exhibition space certainly do that.

"You can never predict what people will see and what people will experience," Rose said. "I think it would be great for people to have a look and take something from it."

Journal of the Plague Year can be seen at the 330g art gallery in Saskatoon until Feb. 28.

maolson@postmedia.com

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