

New Gund exhibitions comment on injustice, inequality

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The Gund exhibition. | BRITTANY LIN

On Jan. 18, The Gund unveiled a broad range of new exhibitions, featuring the dynamic works of Nancy Spero, Naeem Mohaiemen and the collective of artists in the Art for Justice Fund. Incorporating sculpture, portraits, photography, antique quilts, short films and literary works, each exhibition offers a unique narrative on various social justice issues in society. Director and Chief Curator of The Gund Daisy Desrosiers perfectly describes what connects this complex group of artists: “Each exhibition prompts a nuanced reflection on the intersection of art, activism, social justice and intergenerational learning.”

After being greeted by the warm smiles of The Gund staff, the first piece that visitors will see is Spero’s large-scale sculpture, “Mayhole: Take No Prisoners.” Occupying nearly the entire room, this colossal installation portrays aluminum cutouts of decapitated heads, many of which are drenched in blood with their tongues sticking out, hanging from chains and red ribbons.

Although each head stands out individually, together they form a cohesive sculpture that dangles from a metal pole in the center of the room. The sculpture is a visceral and unsettling commentary on how war and violence disrupt humanity. Along with “Mayhole: Take No Prisoners,” Spero’s other conceptual pieces are known for tackling themes of gender, violence and war. Her thrilling and idiosyncratic artwork has made her a renowned figure in the conceptual, postmodern and feminist art movements. In an artist’s statement on the piece, Spero writes, “Maybe the strongest work I’ve done is because it was done with indignation.”

The second exhibit, “No Justice Without Love,” is a collection of artworks from artists and activists in the Art For Justice Fund. Each piece showcases a profound and intentional perspective of America’s criminal justice system. While each artist in the collection uses distinct visual elements, they all encourage critical examination of mass incarceration in their own unique ways. When the audience enters the exhibition, they immediately see their reflection in Marcus Manganni’s “Panoptes.” This piece, in the center of the room, is a curved prism-like surface that mirrors the audience, imploring individual reflection and accountability. Additionally, the exhibition provides more direct insights into criminal justice issues through its colossal selection of written works that occupy the entire left wall of the room. This includes poems, comics, essays and journal entries, many of which were written by incarcerated people. Each piece of writing touches on the realities and inequalities of the prison industrial complex. One anonymous writer in the collection reflected: “After the realization that we are different, and we are standing on the pavement of a world that starkly contrasts what we expected, how do we find quality of life?”

The final exhibition, the “Light at the End of the Tunnel,” displays both a digital video and a collection of silkscreen prints by Mohaiemen. Based in New York, Mohaiemen is critically acclaimed for his visual artwork that delves into issues of religion, race and sense of belonging in society. Instilling a sense of nostalgia in the audience, Mohaiemen’s short documentary, “Wooster Street” beautifully celebrates SoHo’s notorious artistic community with a series of videos taken between 1945 and 1970. The digital video is complemented by the audio of an interview between Mohaiemen and the SoHo-based artist Judy Blum Reddy as a way to commemorate a collective of New York City artists known as Fluxus. Audience members will have the opportunity to engage with Mohaiemen directly as the Gund anticipates him visiting Kenyon this semester. The Gund’s mission is to use art as a platform to strengthen educational opportunities. With this in mind, The Gund will integrate its new featured artists in the curricula of various academic disciplines at Kenyon with unique and interactive programs designed by Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs and Education Jodi Kovach. For example, in collaborating with Kenyon’s Gender and Sexuality Studies Department, students in this semester’s Gender and War Program Series will critically engage with Spero’s “Maypole: Take No Prisoners.” Kovach expresses how “these programs will open opportunities for dialogue on the deeply gendered social and political influences that shape war.” If your classes don’t include a visit to The Gund, set aside time to immerse yourself in the new spring exhibitions, which, as Desrosiers puts it, “invite inquiry and inspire action towards a better future.”