



Exhibit tells gutwrenching stories of homeless women

FLINT JOURNAL REVIEW

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Contributing writer

"Informative, soul-searching, heart-wrenching" - none of these words adequately describes "Telling My Story at the Edge of Recovery: Eight African-American Women's Journey from Homelessness in Detroit," on exhibit in the Auxiliary Gallery of the Visual Arts and Design Center at Mott Community College.

Grand Blanc artist Mara Jevera Fulmer has created a masterful conceptual visualization of the lives of eight African-American women who are making the journey out of homelessness.

Although the women are Detroiters, their stories are haunting reminders of what poverty, unemployment, health issues, isolation and lack of emotional support can do to the human spirit regardless of locale or station in life.

In close collaboration with a research project directed by Wayne State University researchers Olivia Washington of the College of Nursing and the Institute of Gerontology and David Moxley of the School of Social Work, Fulmer's exhibit attempts to educate the public about the seriousness of homelessness and to suggest potential solutions.

Her medium is eight huge, digital giclee prints - 28-by-112 inches each. They are informal, poignant story-portraits.

The prints are suspended between layers of Plexiglas in massive bentwood maple "frames." Each frame, 7 feet high by 12 feet long - created by the artist's husband, Keith - is gently curved. The curve acts as a kind of embrace of the viewer, enhancing the emotional effect.

To create the story-portraits, Fulmer, associate professor and program coordinator of graphic design at Mott Community College, went to the homes of the women, many of whom live in transitional housing. With the help of her daughter Sarah, she videotaped interviews, took still photos, and extracted audio recordings in order to get first-hand visual and auditory clues, and to more fully understand the hearts and minds of her subjects.

She amassed photos of objects the women treasured - items from their scrapbooks, pictures cut from magazines, photographs - symbols of all sorts that reflect the women's journeys. She scanned them into the computer and composed the prints.

QUICK TAKE

Review

"Telling My Story at the Edge of Recovery: Eight African-American Women's Journey from Homelessness in Detroit"

- WHERE: Mott Community College's Visual Arts and Design Center
- WHEN: Through August 17
- DETAILS: (810) 762-0443

The entire project, Fulmer said, was intense and emotionally wrenching.

Take, for instance, Gilda's story about losing custody of her daughter, shown in a ghostly wedding dress.

Or the woman "a.k.a. Joyce" and her story of five felony convictions. She's the only one of the eight women with a drug addiction. "Joyce" did not want her real name used or her face shown, but her own words in the faceless portrait tell her touching story of how she survived. On the portrait are the words, "I've changed, ya know."

Another subject, Dorothy, had suffered a mental breakdown, but now lived in an apartment filled with angels and Tweety Birds.

"Perhaps it's her panic room," Fulmer said.

Rita remained distant (symbolized by window shades), although her reconnection with her faith is suggested by a photo in her scrapbook of the Virgin Mary.

Dona, a poet and artist, lived in her car and washed herself in public restrooms. The words of her award-winning poem surround her.

In spite of overwhelming obstacles, the powerful stories these women tell through the images and words that Fulmer has selected to visualize, reveal the inner strengths, faith, and strong personal characteristics that make up their humanity - and ours.

The traveling exhibit premiered on June 13 in Detroit.

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