

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

SMC Museum of Art opens two new exhibits



Mid-20th Century "spirit spouse" from Republic of Cote d'Ivoire "Blolo Bian"



Mid-20th Century fertility figure from Ghana "Akua Ba"

Photos Vera Kochan

By Vera Kochan

"Stock" and "Power & Purpose" are two new exhibits currently featured in the Saint Mary's College Museum of Art. Both installations are poles apart from each other in content, but like-minded in their thought provoking natures.

Artist Andrew Mount is an SMC faculty professor whose works make up the "Stock" exhibit. According to the museum, "The word 'stock' could be a product, an amount of something, or a constituent part of a corporation." Wordplay is a big part of this exhibit's running theme, and if words are not visible in the art itself, then symbols are scattered within it that subliminally remind the viewer of contemporary monetary institutions. If all of this sounds puzzling, keep in mind that aspects of the exhibit are meant to be analyzed and prove thought provoking.

"Stock is a solo exhibit about wealth and debt that invites the viewer to participate in how these symbols are cycled through time," Academic & Engagement Curator Britt Royer stated. Many of the hidden messages are obvious, as in the very first work, which is titled "Stocks," where words such as "default," "punish" and "debt" are allowed to be ink-stamped onto a wall by patrons through interactive methods.

"Real Property" is another "hidden meaning" type of exhibit that uses not only

words, but popular symbolism to represent corporate influence, all disguised as various medieval coats of arms. As is typical of most modern art, the intended meaning of this exhibit's pieces may not be overtly obvious, but they are fun once you get the gist of where he's headed.

The other exhibit in the art museum is "Power & Purpose: Reflections on the African Art Collection," the artifacts of which are part of SMC's permanent collection and displayed in honor of Black History Month. It is guest curated by Kathy Little, Ph.D., provost with California Institute of Integral Studies.

The installation is meant to highlight "the nearly 40 objects that speak to notions of beauty, hierarchy, motherhood, masculinity, spirituality, sustainability, rites of passage and diversity that permeates the continent in both its traditions and cultural practices."

Seventeen tribes are represented through the 18th, 19th and 20th century artifacts in the exhibit, and while they can be considered works of art, the original intent of many of the pieces was to serve a spiritual or medicinal purpose. One such piece from mid-20th century Ghana is a fertility statue ("Akua Ba" meaning Akua's Child) made of wood, glass and beads. Royer explained that it was commissioned by an infertile woman who was instructed by a priest to carry it on her back the way one

would carry a baby. Even though Akua was mocked by fellow villagers, eventually the woman did conceive a child. Other women of the tribe began to adopt the practice.

Another piece, from the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire is a wooden Blolo Bian (Male Figure), also from the mid-20th century. The Baule people believed in a "spirit spouse," a likeness that stood in for a deceased spouse. Anyone experiencing physical or emotional distress sought the advice of a diviner who might make a determination that a deceased partner is jealous of the living spouse. As such, a wooden replica of the deceased would be commissioned and offerings must be given to the spiritual partner with instructions that the figure must be cared for regularly.

There's also an interactive room with a large map of Africa that displays the tribal locations where each of the artifacts came from. Included in the room is some information on Restitution and the opportunity for patrons to post their views about the topic on a wall. The opposite wall has an "ancestral altar" dedicated to the memory of ancestors with mementos or meaningful tokens from their lives. The exhibit explains that many cultures have such altars where the grieving can take a moment to remember their loved ones with peace and love.

"Stock" closes May 8; "Power & Purpose" closes June 19.

High school musicals return to the stage this spring



Rehearsal for Campolindo's "Cinderella"

Photo Cindy Cattell

By Jenn Freedman

Full scale, live theatrical productions are back at Lamorinda high schools this spring, after two years of improvising (at recording studios, outdoor amphitheaters, and more) during COVID. However, while California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced on Feb. 28 the state will stop requiring masks in schools as of March 12, the date falls after many of these high school productions are

scheduled to begin. The Acalanes Union High School District is urgently requesting the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to allow the performers to take to the stage unmasked, similarly to what other extracurricular activities are already doing.

"We believe the change [to the public health guidance] would have significant and lasting benefit for California's students by allowing them to perform unmasked. Perform-

ing Arts has not had the strong and coordinated advocacy like sports has had through 'Let them Play,' organizations like CIF (California Interscholastic Federation), and professional athletes. These students deserve the same consideration and opportunities," Superintendent John Nickerson wrote in a letter to Dr. Sohil Sud, co-lead for Safe Schools with CDPH.

"Our job as theater artists is to tell a story," Miramonte's director Heather Cousins explains.

"Our storytelling is severely compromised if the audience cannot distinguish who is speaking and talking, not to mention the physical exertion required to dance in heavy costumes under hot lights."

Regardless of the decision to mask or unmask, the shows will go on ... and the music and theater departments are planning all-out productions, complete with large casts, full sets, costumes, student pit orchestras, props, lights, and more.

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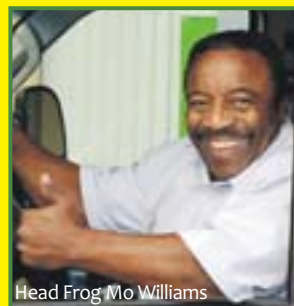
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