“We the People” at 2001 A Space

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Excerpts from Karen Wilcox’s interview with Loretta Bebeau

“We the People” opens Friday, March 10, 7-10 p.m. with a reception at 2001 A Space, 2001 5th St. NE in the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District. Loretta Bebeau’s work, paintings on canvas and photo documentation of her community process, will be on view through March 31, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays noon-4 p.m. or by appointment, 612-462-3270.

“The paintings for ‘We the People’ evolved from earlier work that I’ve done with text, but also from my paintings. For those seeking to have a voice with many different types of people here,” Bebeau says. “In 2011, I received a Minnesota State Arts Board grant to create nine paintings using 27 languages. Since then, I’ve continued collecting and researching languages. Currently I have worked with 53 languages of Twin Cities residents.

“Two of my large paintings using the languages and hand tracings were exhibited in 2015 in Made Here,’ the store-front display project on Hennepin Avenue.

“I work between projects, using Sheetrock that is reclaimed. It is a marginal material. It has value and it has no value, it’s important for building shelter but not as home decoration. It offers duplicity, of attraction and repulsion, amazement and distrust, and it allows me to play with that tension in my art. I prime it, paint it, then stencil or draw on it. It allows me to experiment freely without the mental restrictions that arrive with clean canvas or clean paper. The experimentation often leads to new and interesting discoveries.”

Loretta Bebeau is a former President and Board Member of Northeast Minneapolis Arts Association. She exhibits her work locally and nationally, notably The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and The Armory Show in New York, NY. Bebeau participates in open studios on First Thursdays and Art-A-Whir. Visit her at the Northrup King Building #343 and at: http://lorettebebeau.com

Artists can point up political irony and history

by Josh Blanc

If you have been on social media in the last few months you will have noticed a huge uptick in political posting. Gone are cat videos and what your friends are having for dinner. We are at a serious time in our cultural history as Americans.

Politics and art have been intertwined for most of human history, documenting war, social experiences, love, suffering and religion. With social media’s skyrocketing success over the past 10 years, art expression has amplified too but it never gained consensus as a means of political expression.

While teaching art at an alternative school I met many immigrant teenagers who learned English in foreign refugee camps. They didn’t remember much of their original vernacular, and never learned how to write in their native language. Their experience reminded me of my family history. I was raised in a bilingual household. My family spoke a language based on German, combined with Yiddish and Russian.

“…My series of paintings include two Native languages and nine languages from Africa, along with several European languages. This spectrum corresponds to the settlement of Minnesota and to the heritage of the United States. Swahili, Somali, and Oromo were the first African languages I included, then I researched early colonial days to discover Yoruba and Zulu.

“I chose to interpret the word ‘health’ because it is a positive word, a word that we can unite around. I wanted the celebration of diversity that could be interpreted as a wish for the future.

“Each culture conveys the wish for health in a different manner. Many Native American languages don’t have the word ‘health;’ they use the word ‘wisdom.’ The Hmong language uses a phrase to communicate ‘health according to the situation.

“Beginning in 2013 during Open Streets NE, and for three consecutive summers, I set up a table on Central Avenue and invited people to trace their hands. At first, people were suspicious of me, but now most participants see it as an interesting project and want to contribute their written language, especially if they see it’s missing from my paintings.

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Aldo Moroni, left, and an accomplice, auctioned off the Statue of Liberty and other choice pieces of Triumophobia March 3. They then shook the table, tumbling more details. (Photo by Margo Ashmore)