

THE ESSENCE OF JUNETEENTH

13FOREST EXHIBITION GIVES BLACK ARTISTS VISIBILITY

“Essence” at 13FOREST Gallery in Arlington brings together 15 Boston-area artists in celebration of Juneteenth. Being the first year that Juneteenth is officially recognized on both state and federal levels, the show sends an especially powerful message about diversity to the wider art community. Curated by artist Cedric “Vise1” Douglas, “Essence” celebrates the joy, spirit and resilience of the Black community while simultaneously honoring the many Black artists who live and work here.

The artists in the show, who are all at different ages and stages of their careers, share a common bond: their friendship with Douglas. “I wanted to give these people a platform to showcase their artwork, because they are doing some really incredible stuff and deserve to be known,” Douglas explained. “They are also incredible people,” he added.

To Douglas, the aesthetic commonalities between the artworks in “Essence” are less important than the conceptual ones: the lingering wounds of history; the incessant struggle for an ever-elusive sense of justice; the natural diversity of artistic gifts. And while the show commemorates a new beginning for our nation, it is difficult to underappreciate the age-old tactic it uses to do so. By bringing together 15 artists under one roof, Douglas has built a community rooted in camaraderie, and proved that very little can hinder the raw potential of a people united by common goals.

REVIEW

ESSENCE

13FOREST GALLERY

167A MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE

ARLINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

THROUGH AUGUST 6



LEFT: Eku Holmes, *May We Forever Stand*, collage and acrylic on paper, 32" x 21" framed.

RIGHT: Barrington Edwards, *Codeswitch 1*, digital image of manipulated 3D model printed on canvas, acrylic, spray paint and gold leaf, 23 3/4" x 15 3/4".

For many of the artists showing in “Essence,” the show is a major step toward visibility within Boston’s art scene. The mere grouping of talent Douglas has achieved so brilliantly is alone enough to spark a new artistic movement. “What I love about these artists is their complementary styles. There is illustration, painting, comic books, graffiti,” Douglas said. “These are trailblazers, and my hope is that the audience walks away with a curiosity about who these people are.”

From artist Elisa H. Hamilton’s splashed, abstracted pastels to Barrington Edwards’ ethereal depictions of feminine beauty, “Essence” lives up to its name, only rarely – but necessarily – ruminating on the ills of American history in the context of Black life. This thematic contrast, when it appears, is effective at reminding us that human beings are wired for progress – and to celebrate victories.

In many ways, “Essence” feels like its own celebration at a time in great need of one. For that reason, it may be worth experiencing the show as less of a critique of American society, or of whiteness, and more so as a community all its own. As in every community, “Essence” is rich with the innumerable ideas, emotions, gratitudes and griefs that form the fabric of life.

KT Browne



Carl Benton-Straub, American, b. 1947, *Car's Path*, 2009, oil on canvas, 41 1/2 x 29 3/4 in.

CARL BENTON- STRAUB

HIS ENDURING LEGACY

JUNE 11 - OCTOBER 16

Organized by the Bates Museum of Art

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JOSEPH DELANEY

TAKING NOTICE

JUNE 11 - AUGUST 28

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Joseph Delaney, American, 1904-1991, *City Hall/Picket Line Jobs Not Guns*, 1936, pencil and gouache on paper, 19 x 13 in.

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