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Reflections on 'Then and Now'

An emotional 'listening show' at the Telluride
Gallery of Fine Art

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Published on: September 7th, 2021



Tragedy, conflict, resolve, defiance: they're all on display in 'Then and Now,' a group exhibit at the Telluride Gallery that employs photos and art works to reflect on the civil rights movement, intergenerational struggle, and themes of social justice, identity, and belonging.

The eras evoked by these images are well-known: here, for example, is an image of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., taken moments after his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech by photojournalist Dan Budnik, in 1963. Budnik's works have been long been cultural touchstones (the photographer has "documented social, political and cultural change for 55 years," an introduction to Budnik's 2015 solo exhibit at the Telluride Gallery points out). Budnik's images were taken "Then."

The photos that comprise the “Now” in the show’s title are six images shot in 2020 — the year Budnik also passed away, almost as if he were passing along a searing, human-rights-photography torch — by Sheila Pree Bright, “her response to police shootings in Atlanta, Ferguson, Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and Baton Rouge.” The images include #FXCK July 4, a scene from a rally “cultivating change from injustice and police brutality toward women and LGBTQ+” taken last summer.

And a photo of Representative Park Cannon — head bowed, arms raised in prayer, wearing a facemask that says, simply, “Stop Killing” — standing in solidarity with mothers “whose children have fallen to police brutality.” And a photo beautiful, decorative, unutterably sad of a young attendee at a gathering titled, simply, ‘Justice for Breonna Taylor.’

Also on display at the gallery are contemporary works by Alison Saar and Lezley Saar that invite the viewer to contemplate the past through highly personal takes on slavery and “biracial and transgender identities.” “This contemporary spin on figures from centuries past ties “Then” with “Now”XS in a way that reminds of us the generational struggles with these complex topics,” a statement from the Gallery reads. But what you’re really doing when you engage with these works isn’t merely thinking: these images conjure fraught times, and viewers find them emotional and provoking, according to gallery manager Allison Cannella. More than any show she can recall, “People have lingered in this space,” she said. “We’ve been recipients of so many shared stories. We call it our Listening Show. Everyone has different opinions on Black Lives Matter and the movements of today, and we welcome them all. This show has been an eye-opener, for sure. I don’t know when another has garnered this much emotion.”

Guests who've visited the gallery have included "older people, who were around in the 1960s, remembering those times," as well as those "from younger generations who may have taken part in those protests last year," Cannella added. No matter who is doing the looking, or what their age, "We've all been inundated with these images" — both iconic photos from history books and more-recent photos of protests from last year, Cannella pointed out. We carry these historic, emblematic impressions in our heads, in other words, and we can easily see the most recent ones "while scrolling through Instagram. Having this exhibit here, on the walls, has allowed people to move through it slowly and take it in" in a fresh new way.

Said Cannella: "It's been a beautiful thing to witness."

https://www.telluridenews.com/news/article_2cf669aa-102f-11ec-8221-57da384bec06.html