

NEWS

Framingham exhibit aims to spotlight residents, spark conversation

Framingham exhibit aims to expand interest, spark conversation

Lillian Eden MetroWest Daily News

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FRAMINGHAM — Fiona Burke said she jumped at the chance to work on a new photo exhibit that would highlight people who have "made Framingham a better place."

"Framingham: City of Dreams," is one of three new exhibits at The Mill Contemporary Art at Saxonville studios on Central Street. The exhibit, running through June 7, features photographs of Framingham residents made by high school students who also interviewed their subjects.

"I was just excited to get the chance to be able to talk to new people. I was really surprised by just how many really cool people there are in Framingham," said Burke, a junior at Framingham High. "A lot of the people that I interviewed, I just wasn't really aware of all the great work that they were doing."

Burke said artist and curator Claudia Ruiz Gustafson was a helpful guide on the project.

"Everyone who lives in Framingham should know about these people featured because they are really amazing, outstanding people doing great things," Gustafson said. "This is just an excerpt, the 16 people that we are featuring. There are so many more that we didn't feature because of time and space."

Gustafson gave Burke a list of people to interview. "Then I did the rest," Burke said. Burke said she wants to go into law and anticipates writing being a part of that career, so interviewing and writing about Framingham residents for the project was part of the appeal of getting involved.

"I've always enjoyed writing. It's always something I've done on the side," Burke said. "I'd say every person that I interviewed superseded my expectations. The interviews, they gave such

thoughtful responses that it felt less like an interview and more just like a conversation,” Burke said. “It just made me feel a lot more connected to Framingham.”

The project began before the pandemic but the exhibit was canceled a few days before it was set to be installed last March. The delay meant that the "City of Dreams" project was able to expand the number of people featured and to include people doing good work in Framingham during the pandemic. The expansion also allowed the project to and incorporate contemporary issues like Black Lives Matter.

“It was a very good experience for high-schoolers. They met new people, they learned new things, I think it exceeded what it was supposed to do,” Gustafson said of the project, which was sponsored by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and Avidia Bank.

A second exhibit, “Under the Same Flag,” is a multidisciplinary show featuring work from 15 different artists exploring concepts such as identity and community in America. Gustafson said she was glad to get the diverse group of artists to return after last year's cancellation. Angela Ackerman, a teacher and artist, also helped select the works featured in this exhibit.

“I wish more people would step up and create more things for our community because that’s what makes us a city that would be a place to come together and forget about our differences and think about what unites us,” Gustafson said.

Gustafson also said she hoped the art would spark conversation at a May 14 reception, and encouraged those that don’t feel safe attending to share their thoughts and reactions on the third part of the exhibit: an interactive "community wall" where people can write and leave notes.

Gustafson said she wants the "City of Dreams" exhibit to expand and travel, and that she thinks a good way to bring more of the community into an art gallery is to focus on the community through art.

“I’m hoping more young people participate, and also not only participate passively, but actively, like creating the art and putting it out,” Gustafson said. “How do we bring people—like the owner of a coffee shop — to our art gallery? This is, for me, the way to do it.”

The high school photographers for the "City of Dreams" exhibit are Anton Bica, Fiona Burke, Casey Corcoran and Lucas Gustafson. The artists featured as part of the "Under the Same Flag" exhibit are Alan Strassman, Bayda Asbridge, Lynn Simons, Cathy Weaver Taylor, Iris Grimm, Joni Lohr, Maria Servellon, Marissa Burns, Melvin Markowitz, Neil Horsky, Nicci Meador, Niley Meekhala, Paul Anzillo, Siddhant Choudhary and Zanna

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If you go

WHAT: "Framingham: City of Dreams"; "Under the Same Flag" and "Community Write-in"

WHEN: Through June 7.

WHERE: Project B Gallery at The Mill Contemporary Art, 2 Central St., Saxonville Mill #1, Framingham.

ADMISSION: Free

MORE INFORMATION: 508-665-0614; <https://www.facebook.com/ProjBGallery/>