

St. Louis Galleries Put On an Art-Show Memorial for Michael Brown

November 25, 2014



Eva Sutton

Angry protests flared up across the country last night as a **grand jury decided not to indict Ferguson cop Darren Wilson for shooting Michael Brown in August** (<http://www.vice.com/read/the-ferguson-grand-jury-has-finally-reached-a-decision-1124>). Rage was the expected—and maybe appropriate

—response to the killing of a black teenager, but the resulting photos of burning cars didn't do justice to the emotions the Ferguson community has been feeling for these past few months.

...one of the reasons Freida L. Wheaton, founder of the Alliance of Black Art Galleries

(<http://14startcom.wix.com/14startcom#!the-alliance-of-black-art-galleries/c18wb>) in St. Louis,

conceived of *Hands Up, Don't Shoot: Artists Respond*, a multi-site, multi-disciplinary exhibition that invited more than 100 artists from around the world to weigh in on the tragedy and the accompanying issues of civil rights, community safety, police violence, trauma, and healing. Wheaton wanted to give voice to all sorts of responses—angry ones but also sad ones, reverent ones, and hopeful ones.



Najee Dorsey

The exhibition, which was organized by the Alliance of Black Art Galleries, included professional artists as well as Ferguson residents like Howard Barry, an Iraq war veteran with PTSD who was so traumatized by seeing police in combat gear in his neighborhood that he began drawing what he saw every day in the newspaper—on his actual newspapers.

In many ways, the visceral nature of Barry's work could stand as a metaphor for every kind of protest, from the creation of activist art to the violence in the streets last night: an unstoppable response to an unthinkable (yet all too common) tragedy.

To find out more, I talked Wheaton to talk about art, justice, and the community response to the show.

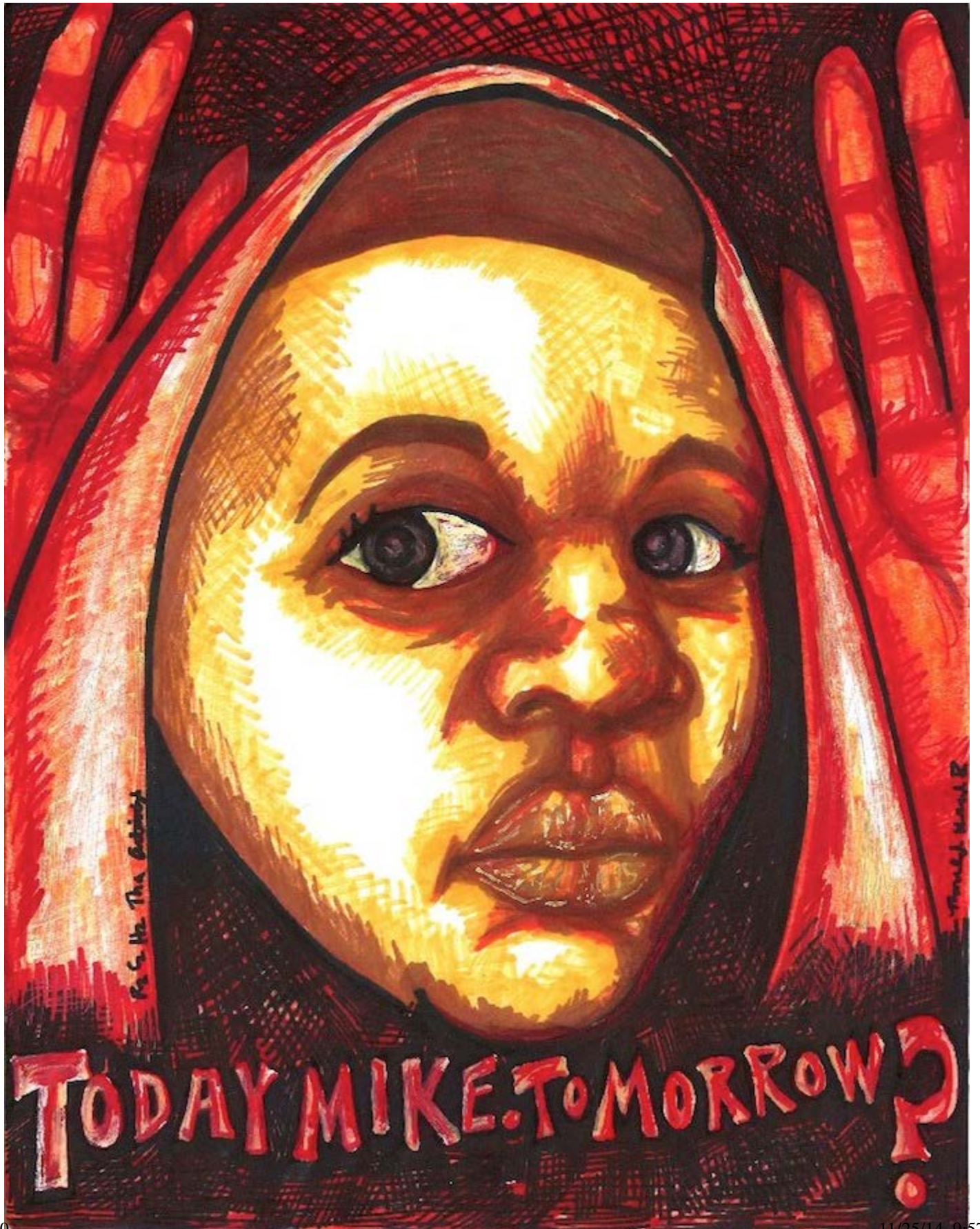
engaged in a personal-historical visit to some of the monuments and museums and places that were very prominent 50 years ago during the Civil Rights era. After two days of watching the news and being engaged in that respect, I went out to the Ferguson area to be a part of the protests, to witness what was going on—and also to just be there, because this was in my backyard, and I don't need to watch it on TV.

Then I started thinking about how the Alliance of Black Art Galleries could be effective in the movement that was clearly taking place on a national level. How could we document what was going on in Ferguson? How could we respond to Michael Brown's killing in the fashion that was done, for example, in the 60s, when a lot of artists started doing protest art?



Howard Barry

3 So we came up with a broad call that would make it easy for any artist to participate: no fee, no deep requirements. All you had to be was an artist, and make some work reflective of the issues: police 9/26/14 9:57 PM





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As you put the show together, were you imagining a particular audience?

The way I look at it, our audience is everybody. That's the reason I wanted to have multiple venues located in the city of St. Louis as well as in the county. Because we felt it was important for everybody to see the work. Particularly those people who were out in the streets—and those people who were afraid to go out in the streets. We wanted to have messaging for everybody. Also I hoped that it would encourage people to go to neighborhoods and venues that they probably would not otherwise go to, in order to see the full exhibition. So people from the city of St. Louis, who probably would never have gone to the Ferguson Public Library, had to go there if they wanted to see the two artists who were actually from Ferguson.





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People in the art world are often dismissive of "activist art." What do you see as the relationship between art and politics?

I think it is a very important for art to reflect what is happening today, or at any point in time to be reflective of what's happening in society. Some people are hesitant to be associated with art that has a social bent, but throughout history art has played that role. Hopefully it will stand the test of time and be used 20, 30 years in the future to reflect back to 2014 Missouri history. This art will be a part of this history.

ST. LOUIS AMERICAN

'We are liberators'

WE ASKED 4
TRUTH...
they GAVE US
TEAR GAS!!!



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Has the show been prompting the conversations you hoped it would? Has it been having an effect?

The reception of the general audiences has been great. During the opening weekend, we had to hire a bus to be able to take people to all the downtown venues! All of the openings were very full and well attended. At the St. Louis Public Library*, over 600 students have come to see the show with their high school classes. White-owned galleries have been very positively responsive.

The Philip Slein Gallery in particular, a very successful and impressive gallery in the St. Louis area, the state, the region, has asked me to curate essentially a show of African American artists for the gallery. This is a first. And I see a lot of interest now in expanding the momentum for black artists, for the black art galleries, for black people, and we're here to do that.

**EDIT 11/25: An earlier version of this article mistakenly referred to the Ferguson library instead of the St. Louis Public Library*

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