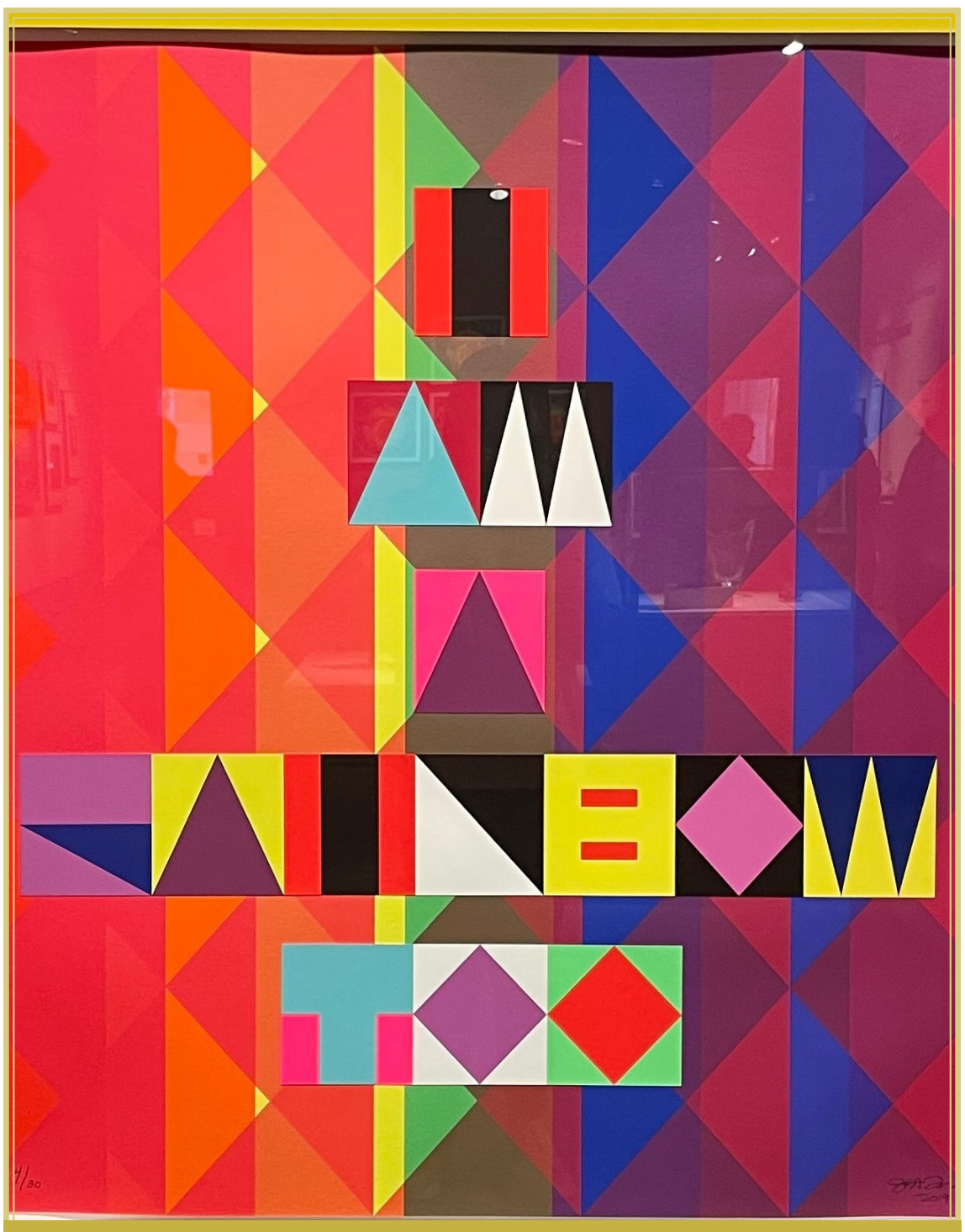
Daily Life

Celebrating President's Day with Exhibit 'Exploring America at 250' at the Benton Museum



Artwork at UConn's Benton museum of art. These pieces are designed to celebrate America's 250 year anniversary.

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This year marks the 250th anniversary of the United States' existence as a nation. To celebrate, the William Benton Museum of Art at the University of Connecticut established an exhibition called "Exploring America at 250." On Sunday, Feb. 15, curator Amanda Douberley led a walk-through of that exhibition.

"Exploring America at 250" features three sections that represent three ways of perceiving America. The sections are place, identity and an idea.

Before exploring the sections of the exhibition, Douberley presented artwork by Robert Indiana, an American artist. The work contained five photos that were mostly identical.

All five photos had a black and white circle with a red star engraved in them. Within the star were three golden fives engulfed within one another. The difference between the five photos was that each had different words on the border of the circle.

The borders read: "Die," "Err," "Eat," "Hug" and finally, "American Dream 1928 - 1963." Combined, all five photos contribute to the American Dream, which has long been a debated subject.

After the presentation of Indiana's piece, Douberley moved on to the first section of the exhibition, which describes America as a place. In this section, there are paintings and photographs that depict different places in the United States.

One piece that Douberley described was called "Cochetti's Fish Market," an oil on canvas by George Benjamin Luks. The artwork's a representation of immigrant communities in New York City in the early 20th century. Other notable works from the section included "Niagara Falls, NY" by Tseng Kwong Chi and "Louisiana" by Sarah Sense.

Douberley and the attendees then moved on to the second section of the exhibition, which held artwork that symbolizes America as an identity. Most of the artwork from the section contained people, including Marilyn Monroe.

However, there was one work that didn't have a person in it called "I am a Rainbow Too" by Jeffrey Gibson. The piece has a rainbow background that had the title of the work in it. The artwork was significant because it represented Gibson advocating for his homosexuality and his Native American identity.

The last section of the exhibition presented represents America as an idea. The exhibition has a variety of artwork that depicts different aspects of American life.

A memorable piece presented by Douberley was a painting of a World War I war bond. In the painting, numerous immigrants looked at a child that was holding an American flag. The purpose of that painting was to persuade people to look towards the future and think about the next generation of Americans.

Another art piece that was presented from the section was a photograph of students from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that attended the funeral of a group of girls who were murdered in a Baptist church bombing that took place in the 1960s.

At the end of the tour, Douberley shared that she doesn't just like to collect art that represents the past, but she also likes to collect art pieces that symbolize contemporary events.

"When we're looking to acquire things for the museum, one of the arguments that you have to make is how it relates to your collection," Douberley said. "And I'd say that I've also been interested in collecting artworks that kind of say something about art and history today. So, one of the pieces that we didn't talk about is that sculpture which is another recent acquisition by an artist called Valerie Hegarty, and it's from her Covid diaries. And so, I thought, wow. How great to be able to acquire something that talks about something that's so important but also of this moment and that you could help tell the story of the pandemic through the collection with that of the artworks."

Ruth Alejandro, a fourth-semester student double majoring in political science and journalism, said the tour was a very enjoyable experience.

"I really liked it," she said. "It was very insightful. It was also very cool because there were pieces from different ages, and I really liked how it had multiple perspectives."

The "America at 250" exhibition is not just a collection of art. It portrays a message on how America can be represented in numerous ways. Everyone has their own opinion on what America is, and these opinions are reflected in the exhibition, which is to remain in the William Benton Museum of Art until the beginning of August.