



Jenny Balisle, *PRO-CHOICE*; Karen Seneferu, *Not Another Flick of the Cloth*, below; and Jacinto Mingura, *ANTIOXIDANTES*, inset.

Five Richmond Risk-Takers

Group-curated show displays the breadth and diversity of the city's art scene.

By Lou Fancher

The Richmond Art Center's *Right Here, Right Now, Richmond* is evidence of the city's cultural breadth and of the art center's role as a safe haven in the art workspace-starved Bay Area.

The exhibit raises the flag of diversity without boasting; its 29 artists are people of color, white and biracial, multigenerational, female, male, non-binary gender specific and other identifiers. United as artists and activists, they are near-athletes in energized pursuit of multimedia techniques. Formally or self-trained, their aesthetics vary broadly in expression.

Presented in partnership with NIAD Art Center, a nonprofit organization with programs supporting artists with disabilities, the show runs at RAC through Jan. 25. It includes artwork by artists who all live or work in Richmond, include painting, fiber art, sculpture, mixed media, photography, and digital art.

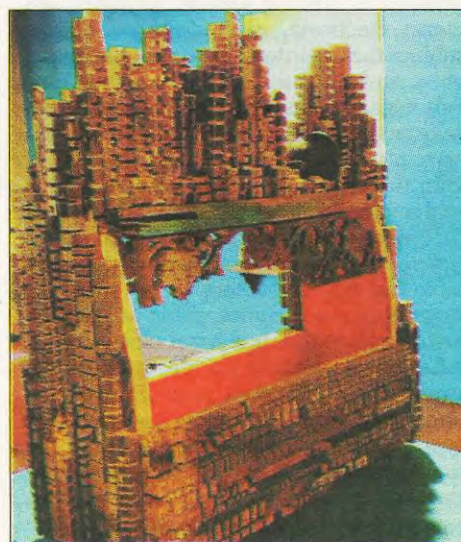
Perhaps due to diversity in the curation committee, a complete description of the styles and techniques represented would require thousands of words. "This exhibition was organized via a group review process," Exhibitions Director Amy Spencer wrote in an email. "The artists were selected by program staff at the Richmond Art Center, so in a sense, it has seven different curators."

But an overview that shines the spotlight on five artists reveals the excellence of the broad-reaching work and demonstrates that

risk-taking, contemporary art in Richmond is thriving. Which is not to say enormous effort isn't involved in simply making or sharing art. The five artists said in separate interviews that finding consistent outreach opportunities and presentation platforms is difficult. Even so, the artists sensed in the community an enthusiasm and energy aimed at progressive change.

Karen Seneferu's *Portrait* reclaims Black female divinity in a gauche-and-acrylic self-portrait inspired by a photo of Harriet Tubman. Subverting Tubman's stern face, pulled-back hair style and pleated blouse, she added a subtle smile, head-wrap and blouse-less gown with exposed shoulders. A 3D piece, *Not Another Flick of the Cloth*, honors King David Carraway, Jr., her father. "I wanted to honor my father while simultaneously creating something that reflected on Black men's contribution to empire building through white men's polished shoes. The shine desired in the shoes represented the men who polished them and not the ones who wore them into the institutions they ran. It was through flicking the cloth that was often humiliating for Black men, (that) they honored their families and built legacy for them." Iconic imagery and saturated color — deep golds, bold reds — stretch in Seneferu's work to span generations and reference traditional African and American folk art and sensibilities of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Colleen Haraden-Gorski's day job in



water resources examines socially vulnerable populations impacted by limited access to water or exposure to poor water quality and flooding due to climate change. Based on maps, she created *Sea-level Rise and Social Vulnerability*, a worst-case scenario painting. The stylized map indicates rapid sea-level rise areas. Over-layers of fabric with silk gauze are quilted with roads and topographic details. "I (then) added the social vulnerability layers, red being the most vulnerable and orange the next level down." Haraden-Gorski said her involvement with RAC is partly an act of civic engagement modeled for young people to encourage their participation in making art intended "to counter the atrocities experienced by the Black community." Working with RAC's Social Justice Sewing Academy project, she saw kids gain voice. "As an artist, helping them visualize their concept without giving them the answer took dialog." Hearing their heartbreaking stories, connecting those

stories to larger social issues, encouraging kids to research, and making them feel seen and heard became priorities for her give-back as an artist in the community.

Tiffany Conway's *Sea Stars* was inspired by traditional West African hairstyles. "I was introduced to African Spirituality and made a new friend who called me 'Sister!' with a lot of enthusiasm," Conway said. The greeting and friendship translated for Conway into deep connections with African Diasporan people, inner dialogs centered on artwork as self-healing, and a self-reliant practice. A self-taught painter, she said resiliency is a way of living. "Painting helps me to gain my power back not through strength but vulnerability. During that time with the canvas, I'm working out whatever cannot be verbalized." *Sea Stars* shows two women" cheek-to-cheek, their turbanesque hair rises like elevated crowns above sculptured faces suggesting nobility. Their slightly averted gazes imply vulnerability; observing and aware of being observed.

Jacinto Mingura claims he trained in the barrio and under street lamps to become a graffiti artist and muralist. Drawing on Chicano roots, inspired by artist like Lauren Ys, he creates large, attention-grabbing murals and paintings. His *Antioxidantes*, spray paint on wood, bursts with effusive hyper-color. The aggressive magenta, rich emerald green and purple-black-blues of stylized fruits and vegetables in the piece are backed by a hot pink under-layer. "I wanted to show viewers that food is medicine," he said. "I have made it my mission to reawaken the way we see food, plants, and the world around us." Although he has seen rising appreciation for muralists and graffiti artists at festivals worldwide, the commercialization of the art form has him worried. "Graffiti used to be about getting up and remaining anonymous. Nowadays people can't wait to post their piece on Instagram. Murals used to tell stories and last (thousands) of years. Now people don't put too much thought into their work. While the appreciation is rising, the meaningfulness might be decreasing."

Jenny Balisle is a Richmond Arts & Culture Commissioner and Public Art Advisory committee member. With work on exhibit locally and worldwide and an artistic practice involving investigation of power symbols and patterns that influence public perception and social behavior, *PRO-CHOICE*, created with wood hanger and wire, brings women's rights to the forefront. In response to the stance on women's bodies and reproduction taken by President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, the hanger's looping wire crossbar inscribes the hyphenated word. Balisle said, "Women, not politicians, should control their bodies." Later, she added, "Alternative facts become tools of propaganda to distort reality. Last year, Donald J. Trump said: 'Stick with us. Don't believe the crap you see from these people, the fake news ... what you're seeing and reading is not what's happening.' I'm interested in how patterns and symbols of influence impact social behavior, history, and truth."

Contemporary art in Richmond is clearly not one thing. It is history in the making. Go see it.

Through March 6, hours vary, free, Richmond Art Center, 2540 Barrett Ave., Richmond, 510-620-6772, RichmondArtCenter.org

Editor@EastBayExpress.com