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Bridgette M. Redman, "Art brings two artists together at Night Gallery," *The Los Angeles Downtown News*, May 5, 2021.

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"The Tenth, 2019" by Chaz Guest depicts the 10th Cavalry, who were the first of six all-Black peacetime regiments that Congress created after the Civil War.

Photo courtesy of the Night Gallery

ARTS & CULTURE

Art brings two artists together at Night Gallery

By Bridgette M. Redman

LA Downtown News Contributing Writer

Chaz Guest and Josh Callaghan didn't know each other until Davida Nemeroff married their works in an exhibition called "The Promised Land" at Los Angeles' Night Gallery through May 15. However, they found instant camaraderie in their art's stories and the way they make art.

Guest's two-panel painting, "The Tenth, 2019," depicts the 10th Cavalry in action. The 10th Cavalry was the first of six all-Black peacetime regiments that Congress created after the Civil War. The "Buffalo Soldiers" were used during the Westward Expansion to help eliminate Native Americans.

"This painting is 1856, and it's a cyclical thing — we're always trying to fix stuff," Guest said, explaining how his painting belongs to our current era. "Can you imagine this time? These gentlemen were pit against the Native Americans by the oppressor of two peoples."

Callaghan's sculptures, "Flagpole People," are marching to demand a better America. Caught midstep, they are made of institutional, aluminum flagpoles that have been both figuratively and metaphorically dis-

mantled.

"What we are processing in this last era we've been in, it's going to be an ongoing processing," Callaghan said. "There are so many complex issues."

The two met on opening night of "The Promised Land" exhibit, and both walked away with a new appreciation for the other. Guest said it took him a few days to process it.

"Seeing a photograph was one thing," Guest said. "But seeing it in person — after about a day or two the brilliance was so poignant and so exact. I remember saying to myself, 'Wow, that was really brilliant bringing those two together.'"

Callaghan described a similar experience of how seeing the two works put together was very different than reading about it or looking at the pictures.

"These works, there is something about the way of making art that I think is really similar, even if the outcomes are very different."

Callaghan said, "It's about a kind of process, and the artwork is an outcome of the process. I think there is a lot of interest in the human body and capturing that living spirit of the human body. It's a representation of a human energy that I see in both



Josh Callaghan's sculptures, "Flagpole People," are caught mid-step marching to demand a better future.

Photo courtesy of the Night Gallery

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"Flagpole People" and "The Tenth, 2019" are on display within "The Promise Land" exhibit at The Night Gallery through May 15.

Photo courtesy of the Night Gallery

of these pieces, and then I also think both have a political agenda that is really interesting."

Seeking stories

Guest is not overly fond of talking about what narratives are contained in his paintings. He wants that to come across in the work itself.

"I will be honest with you," he said. "I put all of that energy into the art, into creating what it is that I'm trying to convey. It's my personal narrative and journey. I am going about it with all of the human gifts I've been given by the universe. I think when someone sees it, they're going to be able to register it because we're all human."

Guest's work has been exhibited around the world, from Santa Monica to Paris. His work has been purchased by Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Herbie Hancock and the Rennie Collection. He's painted pictures of enslaved African Americans on cotton flags from Georgia and created a graphic novel superhero, Buffalo Warrior, which is about to be made into a movie.

Right before the pandemic, he spent some time in Japan, creating work there and learning about Japanese painting styles. He said he has a real appreciation for Akira Kurosawa, a Japanese film director whose work inspired "The Tenth."

"I love history, period," Guest said. "But I really love my personal history as an African American. It's very underserved. I chose to create this narrative, this painting, this tableau of the Buffalo Soldiers, and I used Asian ink and real fast lines. So, you take two cultures and merge them together —

sort of like appreciating our likenesses instead of our differences."

Guest puts a lot of thought into what he paints on, and it often becomes a part of the work itself. He's painted on sand, leaves, shoes and paint tubes. When he first became a painter in 1987, he started studying painting from the Dutch to the Renaissance. He learned about traditional ways of making primer for his canvases.

"I used to take 13 hours to make rabbit skin glue until I discovered PBA," Guest said.

Every canvas he chose was related to what he wanted to do. For "The Tenth," he picked a linen canvas upon which he painted with oil paints.

"There is an authenticity to the canvas before I even put the first mark on it," Guest said. "And the paint as well. I was so unattracted to acrylic. I think I used it once in my entire life. Oil breathes. Oil has a life to it."

He points out that every artist has their own idiosyncrasies, habits or processes that help them create. For him, it begins with trying to translate his subject's spirit into their images. He often starts with the mouth and eyes so they can tell him their story.

"I conjure these people in my head, in my imagination," Guest said. "I paint their eyes, their mouth — how many teeth are missing? How do you talk? Finally, what do you want to say? I conjure imagery and then I try to put the DNA in there."

Callaghan was also moved by his fellow artist's work.

"Let's put this painting in the library or in city hall or in Congress," Callaghan said. "This is the kind of art that can help us un-

derstand what America really is."

Inspirations

Callaghan has exhibited at the Night Gallery several times, including inaugurating its outdoor space this past summer with a sculptural work that invited interaction during social distancing.

The three "Flagpole People" were born in his studio. Many years ago, he had used flagpoles as part of the structure of another public project he'd been working on, and the flagpoles were in his workspace along with other materials.

"I thought they were interesting objects to look at critically, but also structurally they're very interesting," Callaghan said. "They're very lightweight and aluminum. I had these in my environment for several years between using them and creating this."

One day, while he was working, one of the pieces caught his eye and inspired him to think differently about it.

"I saw the volume of a leg or a thigh — just in that tapering shape of the aluminum," Callaghan said. "This is an idea I've touched on in other artworks — a certain tube or tubular thing being like a human shape."

He cut up the flagpoles and then pieced them together to see how close he could get to a human form.

"At a certain point, I realized I wanted to make them a standing figure that was actually walking," Callaghan said. "Just tinkering away, I started to make that happen. And then the walking figure was a great commentary on the flagpole in terms of what it represents in our society."

He was further inspired by the marches in the streets calling for justice. He wanted to combine a challenge to what government was with his process of making art.

He also likes that they aren't attached to the floor but that they have to balance on their own.

"There is no illusion," Callaghan said. "I like that in a sculpture. They're playing by the same rules as the rest of us."

A former gymnast, Guest found the way Callaghan articulated the movement to be brilliant.

"They have a language," Guest said. "Put alongside this painting? It's just a surreal and poignant message, and I love it."

It's a conversation that Los Angeles art lovers can witness at the Night Gallery through scheduled appointments, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday through May 15.

"The Promised Land" with Chaz Guest and Josh Callaghan

WHEN: Through May 15

WHERE: The Night Gallery, 2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles

COST: Call for appointment

INFO: 323-589-1135, nightgallery.ca