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Carmen Lozar on Two Special Art Exhibitions at IWU

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WGLT Interview with Carmen Lozar, January 28, 2021

Laura Kennedy: WGLT.org I'm Laura Kennedy with this WGLT date book. An exhibition of posters featuring challenging imagery makes a return visit to the galleries at Illinois Wesleyan University. Women's rights are human rights features posters that tackle gender inequality, violence, women's empowerment and more. This is the second time this collection has been shown at IWU curator Carmen Lozar says the powerful messages on the posters makes this show deeply impactful and the pandemic has had it's influence too. Lozar says with the main gallery closed the atrium gallery allowed enough space to safely display the works from both the pandemic and security standpoint.

Carmen Lozar: So I couldn't have artwork that couldn't be locked and closed. So this had to be these reprintable posters that are you know we have the files we can always reprint them if they get damaged or taken.

Kennedy: That was wonderful serendipity that you were actually able to do that but also do you feel that the timing of being able to put this up right now it just sort of jives with the cultural zeitgeist.

Lozar: yeah and I think this is serving as a great reminder uh to always causing us to be aware. Sometimes we let things slip through our consciousness and say im not gonna talk about that or im not gonna think about that these posters do a wonderful you know job theyre highlighting issues of domestic violence, wage disparity, voting rights, these posters are from around the world and from cultures that we don't necessarily interact with or see on a daily basis so our problems with maybe wage disparity or domestic abuse might be different from other cultures womens rights issues so I think that that widens our global perspective looking at these other problems from around the world. I was looking through them walking through this morning it's really nice theyre very bright and eye catching posters which are nice in Illinois at this time and I think graphic designers if you think about graphic designers theyre solving problems right artists and graphic designers are always solving problems so graphic designers have taken this problem of you know these womens rights issues and portrayed them in some colors that would draw you in and then you look at the message. One of the posters I love the most is it is of it's called the abused goddess and it's actually a series of Indian goddesses that have suffered domestic abuse yet theyre in full regalia still of sitting on a lotus or in this kind of serene way and those are from a design company called Taproot Dentsu in Mumbai India and those to look at the absolute gorgeous colors and the flourishes of artistic creativity on those draws you in and then you notice that the goddess has a black eye you know so they are very powerful posters.

Kennedy: So are visuals just as impactful as speech do you think

Lozar: ah I think that visuals are to me we live in a now a visual culture you look at facebook and Instagram we are looking at images all day long so I to me many of these posters have text but we are living this visual culture right now and so posters that have these images that are very eye catching yes theyre speaking theyre making us stop and think.

Kennedy: How influential can these posters be on human behavior?

Lozar: They should have an impact some of the posters even I have hanging from the last show in my office and there's actually right behind me and I think there really wonderful simple icons. So it says it's of a wheelbarrow that's kind of hybrid with a baby carriage right and the title above it is double work and it's the simplest images but its telling the viewer that woman who are mothers who are working there's often inequality in those areas there's under appreciation or people are doing just you know exerting them so much more themselves in certain areas. To me these simple graphics tell huge stories.

Kennedy: Tell me about the reaction from the students at Illinois Wesleyan and folks coming in. Tell me about what you've been hearing.

Lozar: I think it creates a great amount of dialog you know we just reinstalled these posters last weekend with my student crew and I really count on my crew to they're all young artists and they work on the gallery crew and they choose things very carefully I often let them work on the layout. So we had 70 posters to choose from they had to narrow it down to 32. So it was very interesting to watch a young group of students go through and find the posters that they felt were most important to speak of right now and the posters they chose to hang.

Kennedy: was there a particular pattern or a particular something that you were seeing coming over a theme?

Lozar: So yes I felt that they choose many posters that were the hardest hitting posters so I felt that they were choosing the posters that were possibly the most hard for me to look at or deal with and they put those posters in really prominent displays which tells me this is a group of students who are hanging a show that don't want us to look away from these things they're ready to confront these things and acknowledge them and try and work. And that makes a huge difference to me and I'm proud that they chose the posters they did.

Kennedy: That's Carmen Lozar gallery director at Illinois Wesleyan University. Women's rights are human rights is up and will continue in the Atrium gallery. I'm Laura Kennedy.

The audio below was an extra, which did not air with the original interview.

Lozar: These prints are about 200 years old. Our librarians recently went through our permanent collection and they labeled everything and they got it online into a database. It was a huge project my hats off to our librarians because all these things that have sat in storage for so long have now you can look them up and see what our actual art collection is. Within that art collection um there are about 26 of these Japanese prints that are woodblock prints by Hiroshige who's one of the last great masters of this type of print making of this woodblock print making and these pieces you just fall into them they're these small pieces that have some of them have an indigo sky there's so much detail and you walk through these 23 that we have up in the gallery and they just are calming and they're just (laughs) it's just serene it takes you away so I highly encourage people to come visit that exhibit as well.