

‘What Can I Say?’ Small group show at Montserrat gives artists the chance to answer

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Jan 18, 2018 at 2:05 PM

Updated Jan 18, 2018 at 2:06 PM

If you go...

WHAT: “What Can I Say?” art exhibit

WHERE: Montserrat’s 301 Gallery, 301 Cabot St, Beverly

WHEN: through March 3

ADMISSION: Free. Visit www.montserrat.edu or call 978-921-4242

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Ask nine people what they think and you get nine different responses. Ask nine artists what they think and you get a million ideas.

“What Can I Say?” is a small group show at Montserrat’s storefront 301 Gallery. Using the written word in multiple ways — spoken, projected, implied, even in neon lights — these artists explore what’s on their minds.

Queer history. Trans pain, and experience. Politics, of course. Irony. Racism. These ideas find a home in each artist’s creativity, and get pulled out of their day-to-day context into more universal discussion.

Ryan Arthurs’s “De/Briefing” greets visitors in the spare gallery. The title gets superimposed as a cutout over a huge vintage photograph: a 1944 Navy Battalion, captured as a smiling ensemble in dress uniform at a training facility. It’s part of a series by the Boston-based photographer to “re-queer military history,” as he puts it.

Additional works in the series superimpose military catch-phrases over similar vintage photographs — Man the Guns, One of the Boys, Rules of Engagement — all of which become spectacular double entendres when placed over group photos of smiling, youthful men. The work tackles “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the summary dismissal of LGBT soldiers with easy but trenchant insights.

Pat Falco shows one neon marquee, just one small part of last season’s installation of Luxury Waters, a hoax condominium project “built” in Boston’s Fort Point Channel. The complete installation (visit www.illfalco.com/#/luxurywaters) wades its way into issues of affordable housing (this isn’t), climate change (“eight underwater units and room for more”) and diversity in Boston — and elsewhere, for that matter.

A video of standup artist Alok Vaid-Menon captures the inexplicable pain of growing up trans in Bible Belt Texas, simply by having one honest person, placed in front of a brick wall and talking about it into a microphone. Vaid-Menon does nothing more than calmly discuss his experiences — some hair-raising, including what seems to be a suicide attempt.

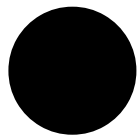
In doing so he explains that he is not explainable — and without theatrics, brings drama to his story. “I’m in pain because of the norm,” he says at one point, forcing the viewer to nod as if they understand, but to understand that they don’t really understand.

Andy Li’s text-based embroideries — triangle flags — Daisy Parris’s rough oils on paper — mostly the word “No” — and John Richey’s blocks of simple aphorisms (they have the same strange effect as Babson’s stones, set in Cape Ann’s Dogtown woods) all take a direct, but simultaneously enigmatic approach: simple words, far-reaching thoughts.

Johan Deckmann’s self-help books — really just book covers, unadorned except for their titles, displayed in a case — bring humor to the enterprise. “The Incomplete Truth about Everything” is just one of hundreds of mock titles from the Copenhagen-based psychotherapist/artist (visit www.deckmann.com/books), like “The Disadvantages of Non-existence,” and “How to Say Every Day I Will Change Tomorrow.”

“What Can I Say?” runs through March 3 at Montserrat College of Art’s 301 Gallery. For more information visit www.montserrat.edu or call 978-921-4242.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR’s ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com



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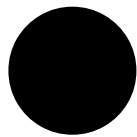
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