

SPOTLIGHT

Demonstrating Purpose

The Branch Museum of Art and Design hosts an exhibition on recent protests in the city.

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This image from from "(Re) framing Protest," shows preparations for a June 2020 march on Cary Street. The exhibition, which features work by photojournalists Regina H. Boone and Sandra Sellars, is at The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design.

PROFILE

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"(Re)Framing Protest" brings striking images from 2020 back to Monument Avenue

By Ale Egocheaga

Monument Avenue might be mistaken for just another tree-lined road in the city of Richmond ever since the removal of Confederate statues, but at The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design, evidence of the social-justice protests of 2020 lives on.

The exhibition "(Re)Framing Protest: Design and Hope" features work by Richmond Free Press photojournalists Regina H. Boone and Sandra Sellars. Both photographers captured visual records of social unrest as a response to collective trauma, systemic racism and the murder of George Floyd, the African American man whose murder while in police custody sparked 2020's protests.

The exhibition focuses on reimagining Monument Avenue itself as a welcoming place by including images that display

moments of art, design and creative forms of activism during the 2020 protests.

The Branch Museum's executive director, Sharon Aponte, says that she and other museum staff began talking with Boone and Sellars in September 2021 about the scope of the show and the narrative the images would tell.

The long gallery at the entrance to the exhibit features large-scale images showing people proudly holding signs demanding justice and acknowledgement along the avenue. Visitors can read about the relationship between design, protest, symbols and photojournalism on text panels alongside relevant pictures. A short video that features Richmond Free Press co-founder Jean Patterson Boone talking about the newspaper and its role in documenting history plays in a room to the right of the gallery.

The main gallery focuses on healing

and celebration, with dynamic photographs of people dancing, playing drums and protesting through performance. Other images show the projection of the faces of victims of racism onto the Robert E. Lee monument. Together, the pictures look to share the power and beauty of the community. Stacked cubes with pictures on each side at the center of the room create a pyramid.

"The idea behind this is a combination of all of these images that were monumental, and it gives you this idea of a monument," says Tarin Jones, the museum's programs and exhibition manager.

Seating is available as a place for processing emotions or ideas brought on by the images, and thoughts can be shared on panels of plywood at the back of the gallery.

"We wanted it to be experimental and participatory, since it's such a community-based exhibit," Jones says. He and the curatorial team thought of putting plywood that was often seen in the images of boarded-up buildings at the back wall for people to share what they saw.

"[It's] kind of re-creating that form of activism where you're putting things up on the wall and speaking your mind," Jones says.

Through the selection of images and participatory elements at the exhibit, guests are able to learn, process and heal. The compelling photographs by Boone and Sellars provide a perspective many may not have seen.

"My hope is that people who weren't actually there can see that there was something going on there other than the negatives of vandalism, looting and a lot of the other negative things that people hear about," Sellars says.

The photos show a community reimagining a space into something they can call their own.

"The creative voices, the musicians, the artists, all these different people who are doing these amazing things trying to push for justice, change and peace," Boone says. ■

A&E



SPOTLIGHT

Latin Lingo

Bio Ritmo celebrates more than three decades of salsa with a special show.

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COURTESY SHAMELESS RECORDS

Edited by CRAIG BELCHER

Bio Ritmo performs at Hardywood Park Craft Brewery on Sunday, Oct. 23, at 2 p.m. Free. hardywood.com



PROFILE

CAN'T STOP THE MUSIC

Celebrating more than three decades of salsa, Bio Ritmo throws a reunion party

By Don Harrison

For Bio Ritmo, it started 31 years ago, when a ragtag group of musicians assembled to perform after the screening of a documentary at the Science Museum of Virginia.

"The film was called 'Ring of Fire,' and it was all about volcanic rings around the world," says Jim Thomson, a founding member of the band, now recognized worldwide as one of salsa's most creative forces. "The museum wanted to feature music from a culture affected by volcanic formations." The percussionist admits that this first gig was "not really salsa — it was raw, experimental Latin-influenced music," but it was successful enough to start the band on its hot and fiery journey.

Postponed a year due to the pandemic lockdown, Bio Ritmo's 30th anniversary concert comes to Hardywood Park Craft Brewery on Oct. 27, a free daytime show that will feature more than a dozen former members of the band also known

as "The Salsa Machine."

"We are still in the planning stages as far as who is going to be onstage," says co-founder and lead singer Rei Alvarez. "But what happens onstage will come together — as it always does."

Opening the show will be the Richmond-based bomba ensemble Kadenica and a set by juggler Jonathan Austin, who performed routines to Ritmo's music in its earliest days. The event will also include an art show featuring Alvarez's distinctive album and flyer designs, with a portion of proceeds from merchandise sales benefiting Gallery5.

The concert will mark the first time that Jorge Negrón, Ritmo's first band leader ("El Presidente"), will join the group onstage since he left in 1996. He's traveling from Puerto Rico to participate. "We'll definitely feature Jorge on a couple of his old tunes," says Marlysse Simmons, who serves as El Presidente for today's Bio Ritmo. "Even though I don't think he's sung for a long time."

The event will also serve as an album release party for "Salsa System," an EP recorded in 2005 that band members call a turning point in the group's history. "I always look back on it as going to salsa school," says Alvarez of the sessions, which were helmed by producer John Fausty, who also produced for the legendary Fania label.

"Salsa System" is being released on 10-inch vinyl by Electric Cowbell, a record label founded by Thomson, who has remained a key collaborator, booking agent and benefactor for Bio Ritmo since leaving the band in 1999. "We're presenting it as if it's something new," Thomson says. "It's in a frequency range that is completely copacetic with salsa radio."

Over the years, Ritmo's members have become elder statesmen for a new generation of salsa musicians. "One article called us the old folks of salsa," Simmons says, laughing.

The Salsa Machine's persistent popularity and staying power still surprises some band members. "Who would have thought that the band would be around this long?" Thomson says. But far from being an anomaly, he thinks that Bio Ritmo's history represents the diversity and vitality of the Richmond music scene. "I mean, we practiced in the back of the GVAR space, the Slave Pit, for many years, and that says so much about Richmond, right there." **B**



PERFORMANCE | PODCAST

WEIRD OUT

Love learning about cults? How about vampires, werewolves or legendary hauntings? You're in luck — "The Last Podcast on the Left" is coming to The National. Hosts of the weekly show Ben Kissel (Fox News writer), Marcus Parks (musician and writer) and actor Henry Zebrowski discuss all things horror, ranging from true crime to the paranormal and conspiracy theories. With well-researched topics and plenty of comic relief to combat the darkness of humanity, this live show is for those who have a dark sense of humor and an open mind. Get weird with the trio on Jan. 26 and 27 at 8 p.m. \$27.50-\$48. thenationalva.com —MC

FROM LEFT: COURTESY THE LAST PODCAST NETWORK; ROBERT ECTOR

MUSIC | CONCERT

SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT

Few of the musicians who have influenced The Beatles are still performing. The Isley Brothers are. The family band has made immense contributions to American music since their 1959 debut, including the song "Shout" and their seminal version of "Twist and Shout," along with employing a young guitarist named Jimi Hendrix. Their career spans eight decades, with more than 30 albums and numerous revamps, comebacks and incarnations. The current group features lead singer Ron Isley and guitarist Ernie Isley, who released their latest single, "Family and Friends," last year. The soul/funk/rock legends come to the Virginia State University Multi-Purpose Center with Leela James at 7 p.m. on Jan. 14. vsumpc.com —Craig Belcher

