

Arts center offers 'Exquisite Corpse' to raise money



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Artists from left, Su Limbert, Sean Russell and Alisha Kerlin pose with a work they made for the Contemporary Arts Center's "Exquisite Corpse" fundraiser. To create the work, one artist drew a body part, folded the paper and passed it to another artist, who added a new body part.

What: "Exquisite Corpse" VIP reception

When: 5 to 8 p.m. May 2

Where: Contemporary Arts Center, 107 E. Charleston Blvd., Suite 120

Admission: Free

By SONYA PADGETT Posted April 25, 2013 - 2:07am
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The figure in the drawing can only be called a monster.

A depiction of the American flag waves across the monster's bare chest — if you can call it a chest — which is made of rockets and a beer bottle. A pair of rainbows dangles below the torso, a colorful set of legs with clouds as feet. A wolf lying on its back protrudes from the monster's neck. It's a strange kind of head.

The whole thing is surreal, freaky and wondrous. And there are 19 others, not exactly like the wolf-headed creature, but each one depicting its own “Exquisite Corpse.” The drawings were done by 20 local artists and will be on display May 2 at the Contemporary Arts Center.

The exhibit kicks off the center’s 25th year celebration. Each piece will be sold for \$500, with proceeds benefiting the CAC. The idea came from Michele Quinn, co-president of the museum, which is dedicated to promoting modern and contemporary art.

CAC has long been considered an important part of the local art scene and a major supporter of local artists. Quinn would like it to continue in that role. To do so, it needs the stability of a full-time director. The money raised from the sale of the “Exquisite Corpse” drawings will help hire one.

Quinn, who owns MCQ Fine Art Advisory and curated CityCenter’s public art collection, wanted to do an “Exquisite Corpse” exhibit. When discussing fundraising opportunities for CAC, she realized it would be a great way to raise money. It’s something fresh and unusual, far different from the typical art fundraiser where artists paint an object to be auctioned off.

“Exquisite Corpse” would give artists a chance to showcase their own styles without the constraints of a specific form, such as a teapot or a skateboard.

The phrase “exquisite corpse” refers to a technique invented by surrealists, Quinn says. Its roots are in an old-fashioned parlor game called Consequences. In the game, players write a word or phrase, fold the paper to conceal their writing and then pass it to another player. Each person adds a phrase without knowing what previous players wrote. The end result is something amusing or wild.

The story goes that when a group of friends, who were surrealists, played the game, it resulted in the sentence: “The exquisite corpse shall drink the new wine.” The game eventually transferred to art.

That process works the same way: One person draws a part of a figure, either the head, torso or lower body. The drawing is folded and then passed to the next artist, who adds another part of the corpse.

Quinn recruited 20 local artists; each worked on three different pieces so they all had the opportunity to do one head, one torso and one lower body.

“I kind of thought of it as improv for artists,” says sculptor Justin Favela, 26. “This is kind of a way for artists to improv and work off each other. The fun part was we didn’t know who the other artists we were collaborating with.”

The result is 20 pieces that captivate in their surrealism. Artists drew from a variety of mediums, including pencil, watercolor and collage. Each drawing is done on 18-by-24-inch paper.

“The work is really incredible because it’s so varied,” Quinn says. She admits that people who aren’t familiar with the process might not get it. They may wonder, “Why is it so weird? Why is each section so different?”

But, Quinn says, that’s sort of the point.

“I think the idea of it alone draws some interest,” she says.

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