



Tom Block, Author & Artist

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Activision

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Art that grapples explicitly with political subject matter is rare in this postmodern age. Earnest engagement with the world is antithetical to the cool relativism that has pervaded Western art since Andy Warhol got chummy with the Shah of Iran. Yet if any age cried out for spirited political art, surely it's our own.

Tom Block, a Washington artist and self-described "wild-haired activist," agrees. He hopes to stir things up with "The Human Rights Painting Project" his traveling exhibit of politically charged paintings that just might be the most interesting show opening in Richmond on the second First Friday of the summer. Intended for both the masses and the cognoscenti, "Project" consists of expressionistic portraits of civil rights activists and victims of socio-political upheaval around the world. It opens Friday, July 2, at Artspace, 0 E. Fourth St., in Manchester.

Richmond is the ninth of 11 cities on its itinerary, and so far reviews of the exhibit have been positive. The profits from the exhibit are split evenly between the artist and a human-rights advocacy group, Amnesty International. Chris Slattery of the Maryland Gazette newspapers gushed, "Block opens a window through which the unhindered and unoppressed may gaze at their not-quite-so- fortunate brethren and recognize the humanity they share." During these dark days of prison torture and "preventative war," that sounds like a capital idea. Also on display will be computer art by Nancy Strube and oil pastels by Michael Pierce.

Steve Jones, Richmond, VA, June 30, 2004

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