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## Editor's Note: Social Action through Art

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Karen T. Keifer-Boyd

Many artists now conceive their roles with a different sense of purpose than current aesthetic models sanction, even though there is yet no comprehensive theory or framework to encompass what they are doing. . . . A more participatory, socially interactive framework for art [is emerging]. . . . [This] new paradigm thinking involves a significant shift from objects to relationships. (Gablik, 1991, p. 7)

Continuing the tradition, begun with *JSTAE 14, The Gallery* features visual research, actions, and art that contribute to social change. Nine artists/activists/art educators, many serving as facilitators of projects involving diverse communities, have contributed images for *The Gallery*. The images direct our attention to issues of racism, exploitation, intolerance, war, world relations, joblessness, homelessness, a damaged infrastructure, women's health, equal rights, and peace.

I thank Elizabeth Hoffman, Don Krug, and the artists for writing descriptions to accompany the images. One image may communicate more than a treatise of words, but the descriptions help us to understand the context of these images. They represent actions situated in an experience.

Even the more personal experiences have global ramifications. Joan Bonnette creates torsos from her own body and then scars them with the wounds from her mother's surgeries. She honors her mother's endurance for over 25 years as she continues to survive the attack of cancer. What is this cancer that is ravaging so many humans? Not one of us can isolate ourselves from this destruction. Both my parents have cancer. My dear friend who received his doctorate with me died recently of cancer. This imbalance in our bodies is life threatening. The chemicals we have placed in our food, air, and water are the likely agents that activate the carcinous monopoly. Bonnette's image of endurance and survival, also evokes a message that cancer affects us all. While cancer research may make medical breakthroughs we must suspect what we eat, breathe, and drink-and perhaps make changes in our daily consumption.

In the 1980s I worked for Eugene, Oregon's, *Council for Human Rights in Latin America*. Since then I have introduced Chilean Arpilleras in art lessons about transformative power or social action through art. Each semester as I introduce non-art majors to the arpilleras and ask them to create an artwork that presents a social or personal injustice that they have experienced, (using the "scraps of life" that surround them), many express surprise that art can serve such a purpose. One woman asked, "you mean I can communicate my views on breastfeeding through art?" Another was concerned that her view that women should be allowed to read the Torah was not an "art" topic. When we discussed their art and the controversial issues that the art expressed ranging from abortion, to legalization of marijuana, to gun control, child abuse, and society "as puppets of the clock"; there were tears, opposing opinions, and engaging discussion. I asked in the midst of the passion: "Should discussion such as we are having be a part of art education?" They answered with a unanimous, YES!" These elementary education majors who were taking the required art class as part of their teaching certification program, many of whom will be in schools without art specialists, felt that the dialogue that their images stimulated was educational, necessary, and helped them to examine the social role of art. As Suzi Gablik writes: "Vision is not purely cognitive or purely aesthetic but vision is a social practice" (1991, p. 100). The JSTAE Gallery presents art as a social practice.

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## The Gallery

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Robert Bersson  
 Boise Peace Quilt Project  
 Joan Bonnette  
 Vaughn Clay  
 Dipti Desai  
 Olivia Gude  
 Drea Howenstein  
 Rick Lowe's Project Row House, Inc.  
 Kristin Rauch