

POPULAR SPOTLIGHT

'The Craftivist': Carol Williams makes art to make a statement

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Courtesy photo

Pewter pin-shaped buttons crawl onto the Capitol dome and sides of the building. The piece uses quilted fabric

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After her retirement and the 2016 election, Carol Williams, 71, started writing columns for The Martinsburg Journal and getting back into crafting, something she hadn't done in decades. She began making mixed-media statement pieces with fabric, buttons and other materials and compares her works to political cartoons, in that they tell a story and often address current issues, such as social justice, reproductive rights, pollution and politics.

A former musician and emergency room nurse Williams, aka "The Craftivist," exhibits her political artwork at her personal gallery, The Hot Button Gallery, in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

When she started crafting again, she arranged pop-up shows by renting out places in Shepherdstown and displaying her work. She also participated, and continues to participate, in exhibits at other galleries. About a year and a half ago, Williams had a solo show at the Delaplaine Arts Center, "the best thing that ever happened to me ever," she said.

Last Labor Day, Williams opened her permanent gallery, where plenty of her work is displayed, from textile-type pieces to posters.

Williams said all of her work is political.

"I'm not interested in abstract," she said. "I want people to know exactly what I think. That's why I do what I do. There's no wondering 'what's the message here.'"

The gallery is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays and by appointment. Most of the gallery's visitors are people visiting Shepherdstown from the surrounding region.

Although Williams sells a book with a compilation of her writing and artwork, she said her work is less about selling and more about being exhibited and making a statement. She said it acts like a billboard. People walk down the street of the gallery and might see in the window her piece titled "The Definitive Thorny Issue," a medical model of a uterus surrounded by spiky thorns, for instance.

Williams said people tell her she illustrates things they can't put into words.

"People like to come in and feel comfortable reading and looking at things that give them a sense of belonging with their own opinions, their own thoughts, their own feelings about the issues that we have right now, of which there are many, and they really feel a sense of ease and also, to a certain extent, peace," Williams said.

The artist's husband, Kimo Williams, helped her by printing the pieces and compiling the book, and he also manages her website and gives her feedback on her work.

She enjoys showing her work in exhibits, but having her own gallery is less work, since the pieces don't need to be sent off. That said, running a permanent gallery comes with its own struggles. "You do always feel judged," she admitted. "You always feel as if this weekend is going to be the last time anyone ever darkens your door."

Williams' textile piece "The Red Plague" is currently on exhibit in the "Over 70 Show" at the Delaplaine Center until Aug. 27. In November, she will show work in Gettysburg, and in the spring, her work will be shown in Cumberland, followed by another solo exhibition at the Delaplaine Center.

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