



Brooklyn Daily Eagle

**Donate Your Car!
Help a Sick Child!**
www.songsoflove.org

As Seen On:
60 Minutes!

You are not logged in. [Register now.](#)

March 17, 2008

Daily Cover

Archives
Brooklyn Public
Library's
Brooklyn Daily Eagle
Online?
(1841-1902)

Archives
Brooklyn Eagle?
(2003-present)

Sign In

ID is your email

Password

For registration questions [click here](#)

- Categories**
- ▶ Main page
 - ▶ Atlantic Yards
 - ▶ Photo Galleries
 - ▶ Brooklyn Today

Features

Forum Set To Examine Controversial Brooklyn Art Exhibit

by Brooklyn Eagle (edit@brooklyneagle.net), published online 03-11-2008

Police Union Has Called for State, City To Stop Funding Museum

By Kenan Davis
Special to Brooklyn Daily Eagle

FORT GREENE -- Before the opening of a new exhibit called "Welcome to America," a survey of 19 years of work by Brooklyn artist Dread Scott, Laurie Cumbo sensed it would ruffle some feathers.

"The exhibition is going to get us into a load of trouble," said Cumbo, the executive director of the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts.

The day after the opening, Patrick Lynch, president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, denounced the exhibit in a New York Daily News article and called "on city and state



Weekly Cover

- Brooklyn People
- Brooklyn Cyclones
- Courthouse News & Cases
- Brooklyn SPACE
- Real Estate Listings
- Features
- Crime
- Sports
- Street Beat
- Brooklyn Inc
- Brooklyn KIDS
- Editorial viewpoint
- Brooklyn Woman
- Art
- Up & Coming
- Hills & Gardens
- Auction Advertiser
- On Food
- Health Care
- Get A LifeStyle
- On This Day in History
- Obituaries
- Community Boards
- Stars and stripes
- Community News

agencies to cut the museum's funding." A flood of media outlets including Newsday, Fox 5, WCBS, WABC and the Gothamist followed up on the story.

Cumbo said she did not expect such a firestorm of debate and has now organized a town hall meeting to discuss the issues. The Hanson Place 7th Day Adventist Church will host the open forum this Thursday, March 13 at 7 p.m.

But what brought on such a strong reaction from the police union to a small museum located in the BAM Cultural District of Fort Greene, Brooklyn? An installation called the "Blue Wall of Violence."

The piece depicts six FBI silhouette targets each with a protruding arm holding an object: a squeegee, house keys, a Three Musketeers Bar. The one holding a wallet is labeled with the date "FEBRUARY 4, 1999." This represents African immigrant Amadou Diallo, who was killed by four police officers who mistook the wallet he was pulling from his back pocket for a dangerous weapon.

According to Scott, 43, this particular piece intends to illustrate an "epidemic of police brutality in American society." Scott also emphasized that it was part of a package and that people should see the show as a whole, which "looks soberly at the horrors of this world and encourages people to imagine a better world."

The Patrolmen's Benevolent Association voiced its distaste with the exhibit, but has Lynch actually seen the show for himself? "He has not, nor has any of the executive board, and we have no intentions to go," said Al O'Leary, spokesman for the police union.

The association does not debate the artist's right to create his art, but it does dispute its display at a museum that is partially funded by taxpayer dollars. The museum receives about \$61,000 from the New York State Council on the Arts and the city's Department of Cultural Affairs, Cumbo said.

The Patrolmen's Benevolent Association heard about the show from the media. "The Daily News contacted us about it," O'Leary said.

The Daily News article framed the debate by saying that "A cop-bashing art exhibit at a taxpayer-funded museum in Brooklyn portrays the city's Finest as trigger-happy racists who have put bull's-eyes on the backs of black New Yorkers."

According to Cumbo, this experience has shown her "how the media can manipulate the public and create controversy."

Pushing the Boundaries of Art

This is not the first time that Scott has found himself in a maelstrom of controversy. In 1989, he created an installation called "What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?" It became an issue of national debate for its use of the American flag and resulted in President George Bush Sr. deeming it "disgraceful." The U.S. flag was placed on the floor beneath a shelf holding a book where the audience could write their responses to the question. In the meantime, people could stand on the flag.

This controversial artwork by artist Dread Scott, on exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary African Arts (MoCADA) in Fort Greene, represents people who have been shot by police. Eagle photo by Kenan Davis

1/1

<<first < previous next >> last>>

Contact Us

If you'd like to contact us [click here](#)

For registration questions [click here](#)

Read about Us [HERE](#)

The museum fully supports Scott's work. What he finds special about the museum is that, "the issues are not abstract to them. They see police brutality as a problem that affects them also, it's not just an intellectual idea to be discussed."

It's a conscious decision on the part of the museum to "directly address issues that affect the community," Cumbo said.

Bad Publicity Attracts an Audience

Scott acknowledged that the negative press about his work could be positive if it encourages people to take interest and come see the show for themselves.

This is exactly what brought Isis Sapp-Grant into the museum on a weekend afternoon. She was walking down Hanson Place on the way to Target with her two children when she saw the museum. She couldn't just walk by after hearing the recent news and decided she had to go in to view the exhibit.

She was met by Laurie Cumbo's father, Wilkins Cumbo, 70. With Sapp-Grant's permission, Wilkins Cumbo began to explain the meaning of a piece about the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. The installation featured a fish tank filled with water. At the bottom of the tank sat a brass trumpet. Floating at the top was a baby doll.

"This is the artist's way of showing how the hurricane took away the music and the culture of the New Orleans. It also shows how the people died and were left to float in the water," Cumbo bent over and told the young children.

As he took them to the last room and described a piece about the war in Afghanistan, Sapp-Grant said that her husband had recently taken them to the Museum of Modern Art. "They were so bored. They just couldn't relate. But here, they are just captivated. I can't believe it."

© **Brooklyn Daily Eagle 2008**

All materials posted on BrooklynEagle.com are protected by United States copyright law.

*Just a reminder, though -- It's not considered polite to paste **the entire story** on your blog. Most blogs post a summary or the first paragraph,(40 words) then post a link to the rest of the story. That helps increase click-throughs for everyone, and minimizes copyright issues. So please keep posting, but not the entire article. arturc at att.net*

Main Office 718 422 7400
