

Artists take shots at bailout

BY DAWN BAUMGARTNER VAUGHAN : The Herald-Sun
dvaughan@heraldsun.com
Jan 30, 2009

\$2,296.84. That's what artist Julie Thomson calculates each taxpayer will contribute to the \$700 billion federal bailout of financial institutions. Her piece in the "Bailout Biennial" exhibit now on display at Golden Belt is a voting machine case. Mini buttons that state the dollar amount are scattered on the voting machine next to a clipboard asking exhibit viewers to write down what \$2,296.84 means in their lives. Answers include "healthcare," "1/8 of what I make in a year" and "college." The name of Thomson's display is "How Much Am I Paying?"

Thomson is one of 26 artists from 10 states and four countries whose work is exhibited in Building 2 of the old textile mill turned artists' space downtown. Golden Belt owner Scientific Properties offered the space to exhibit organizers elin o'Hara slavick and Jeff Waites, who previously worked together on exhibits in Pittsboro. O'Hara slavick said she wanted to do something that a regular institution could not do, because they are scheduled so far in advance, and she wanted to respond and act now. "As a political artist and educator and artist, curator, critic, this makes perfect sense and is inspiring," said the UNC-Chapel Hill art professor, who also has a piece in the show.

The exhibit opened Jan. 16 and continues through March 15. Six pieces have already sold. Prices range from \$150 to \$1,000. O'Hara slavick said the word "biennial" in the show's title is part of the sarcasm of the show, but the organizers just might have another one.

The pieces are more thought-provoking than decorative.

Artist Cathryn Griffith's four ink jet photography prints show "New Development, Brunswick County, NC"



submitted/

Hiroshi Sunairi's "Maverick," part of the 'Bailout Biennial' exhibit at Golden Belt.

and "Undeveloped Gated Community, Brunswick County, NC," taken last June while she was on vacation nearby. In her artist's statement, Griffith said she was struck by the emptiness and quiet of the complexes.

Artist Severn Eaton's "Terror/Leisure" is an ink and charcoal drawing of a terrorist carrying both a rocket launcher and a case of Bud Light. He also has three currency portraits of Lincoln, Washington, and Franklin made from drops of blood on drywall.

Stacy-Lynn Waddell, whose work focuses on African-American life, submitted a piece called "To Her Last Berth," of a colonial masted ship of canvas and muslin being pulled into the air by glittery black birds. O'Hara slavick considers it the most beautiful piece in the show and called it poetic and open to interpretation.

Lauren Frances Adams contributed "Untitled Communist and Capitalist Plate Series," made of paper plates and gouache. Three of her plates, priced at \$300 each, have already sold.

Becca Albee simply framed AIG's invoice summary from a California resort, totalling more than \$40,000. Nearby, Andrew Johnson's "White Trash" is displayed. Two white trash bags hang from the ceiling, filled with shredded paper. "White trash transfers that pejorative term for an underclass to a more appropriate collection of refuse that includes junk bonds, bad credit, predatory lendings and unfair gains," Johnson said in his artist's statement.

Thomson's "How Much Am I Paying?," which invites viewers to take a button and share their comments, is not the only interactive piece in the show. Paul Valadez entered a stack of photocopies on a table labeled "Bailout Bond, Please Take One With You".

The \$1 billion "bond" says "Bail-Out Dollars Not Transferable." Valadez encourages exhibit viewers to make their own pile. "Don't bother to try to cash it out or redeem it, it's just like paper," he wrote in his statement. "You can print some more if you wish -- just like our real currency. Interact with this piece the way you think the government would. Keep reproducing it and eventually there will be so many of them, everyone will have one. Everyone will be bailed out! Bailouts for everyone!"

Artist statements are included in white binders available at the front table upon entering the exhibit space. The binders also include descriptions and prices of displayed pieces. O'Hara slavick said the space -- an empty floor with brick walls, tall windows and exposed beams -- is a perfect post-industrial context for the show.

© 2009 by The Durham Herald Company. All rights reserved.