



## PRESS RELEASE

### Contact

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### **DVAC presents *Breathing Deeply, Pushing Back:***

#### **An investigation of the artist as activist**

Featuring works by Dayton Regional STEM School students

DAYTON (August 14, 2017) – The Dayton Visual Arts Center (DVAC) is pleased to present *Breathing Deeply, Pushing Back*, a group exhibition featuring works by Dayton Regional STEM School (DRSS) students and a selection of local and regional artists whose work explores the theme of social justice. The exhibition, inspired by the 2016 removal of DRSS student artwork from the Dayton Convention Center due to its controversial nature, begins August 25<sup>th</sup> and continues through September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017. Michael Casselli, Assistant Professor of Sculpture and Installation at Antioch College, will be guest-curating the exhibition.



R.D., C.C.D., G.A., *Same People, Different Stereotypes*, 2016, collage, 36 x 48 in.

*Breathing Deeply, Pushing Back* features three components: the original DRSS student works; installations in response to the student work by three nationally recognized guest artists; and juried selections from an open call to the local art community.

The guest artists, Carris Adams, Juan-Si Gonzalez, and Christina Springer are each known for pushing political, gender, and racial boundaries with their work.

Carris Adams received her BFA from the University of Texas at Austin (2013) and MFA from the University of Chicago (2015).

Her practice consists of drawings and paintings that reference signs and signifiers in the landscape pointing to resilience and inequality.

Born in Santiago de Cuba, Juan-Si Gonzalez is an international interdisciplinary artist who studied at the Higher Institute of the Arts in Havana, Cuba. He currently lives in Dayton and has been awarded three Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Artist Fellowships.

Christina Springer is a text artist who uses poetry, dance, theatre, film, and other visual expressions in her national and international performances, most recently in New York, Greece, and India. Her educational outreach work included four site-specific, mixed media projects with youth at The Tower of London.

“DVAC is thrilled to present this incredibly powerful show,” said Eva Buttacavoli, DVAC’s Executive Director. “The student work alone is impressive, but when shown side-by-side with works created specifically in response to the student’s works by Adams, Gonzalez, and Springer, the show takes on an entirely new and vibrant energy. With undertones of race, gender, and inequality, these works present a visual conversation about the role of art and the artist in social activism. They not only speak to the viewer, but lure the viewer in to be a part of the dialogue.”

DVAC is also partnering with Welcome Dayton, a community initiative of the city’s Human Relations Council, to present the roundtable *One City, Many Voices: Stories of Commonality & Community*. This roundtable is open to the public and guests are invited to spend an afternoon exploring the American experience as we hear and share stories about marginalization, activism, and developing community. The discussion will be moderated by the show's guest curator, Michael Casselli, Assistant Professor, Antioch College, and include members of both the Welcome Dayton and the arts community. The Welcome Dayton Roundtable will take place on Saturday, August 26th, from 2:00-4:00 p.m. In addition, a Gallery Talk is scheduled for September 1st, with Michael Casselli and the exhibition artists from 5:30-8:00 p.m.

The opening reception for *Breathing Deeply, Pushing Back* will take place on August 25, 2017 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. at DVAC, located at 118 N. Jefferson St. in Downtown Dayton. Entry to the exhibition and public programs are free and open to the public.

For more information about DVAC or the *Breathing Deeply, Pushing Back* exhibition visit [www.daytonvisualarts.org](http://www.daytonvisualarts.org), and follow DVAC on Facebook (Dayton Visual Arts Center), Twitter (@DaytonVisArtCtr) and Instagram (daytonvisualartscenter).

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#### ABOUT DVAC

The Dayton Visual Arts Center (DVAC) helps sustain the arts community by providing a place to show, market, and sell work and also helps satisfy the needs and wants of art-lovers who have a place to see artists’ work and, often, meet the artists. At its core, DVAC advances art for the community and a community for artists. DVAC receives operating support from the Ohio Arts Council, Culture Works, Montgomery County Arts & Cultural District, The Dayton Power & Light Foundation and the Virginia W. Kettering Foundation, and Members. 2017-18 Corporate Members: Houser Asphalt & Concrete, LWC Inc., Premier Health, and Square One Salon & Spa.

#### Also On View:

*Back in the Day When We Used to Dance I* – a site-specific mural by Morris Howard

Dayton Printmakers Cooperative Spotlight: Jesse Karlsberger

Dayton Visual Arts Center | 118 N. Jefferson St. | Dayton, OH 45402

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Reduced Summer Gallery Hours: 11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., Tuesday–Thursday

11:00 – 3:00 p.m., Friday & Saturday

Closed Sunday & Monday | 5:00 – 8:00 p.m. on First Friday



## ***Breathing Deeply, Pushing Back:***

### The Story Behind the Exhibition

Beginning in early 2016, Dayton Regional Stem School art teacher Jenny Montgomery and history teacher Kevin Lydy began teaching a unit for their ninth-graders designed to examine the theme of marginalization and objectification of both African-Americans and women throughout history, while studying the attempts for atonement. The students wrote essays and created companion artworks in the style of contemporary mixed media artist Kara Walker, mirroring the racial and sexist climate from the past to today.

The project explored “U.S. History Through a Black Lens,” including repressions such as Jim Crow Laws and race riots from the Civil Rights Era, to recent controversies during the Black Lives Matter movement including the 2015 Baltimore Riots and 2014 shooting of John Crawford III at a Walmart in Beavercreek. In addition, the students illustrated “The Experience of Women,” including examples of objectification of women from the 19th century to today. Another piece portrays what magazine covers should represent, such as women empowerment and equality.

In February, 2016, the “U.S. History Through a Black Lens,” portion of the project was presented at the Dayton Convention Center as a showcase for Black History Month. Unfortunately, the Convention Center received complaints about their controversial matter from tenants and guests, and the works were removed two days later. “The Experience of Women” never debuted that March, Women’s History Month, as planned. Both the DRSS and the City of Dayton issued Press Releases stating their support of their actions, and the Dayton City Paper wrote a feature story on the controversy.

Within a few weeks, several art organizations offered their support of the display of the student works and DVAC Executive Director Eva Buttacavoli reached out to Montgomery and suggested a future exhibition, curated by and including the work of artists responding to the students’ artworks and experiences. Two years later, the result is *Breathing Deeply, Pushing Back*. The title of the show comes from an essay about the genesis of the exhibition by guest curator Michael Casselli which is published on DVAC’s website.