

Kenny Cole speaks about politics through art

Artist's statement

I have always been interested in how we humans define ourselves through color coding, whether it be through costumes, uniforms, flags or even commercial alignments. As an artist, color is my realm of expression, yet



"Vein Men," 80" x 62" acrylic on canvas, 2025

outside of my practice, the world at large, too, employs color, using it for an array of social, political, and utilitarian purposes. As an artist interested in exploring the larger social narratives, I am curious to experiment with these real world devices and often rework them into my own creative contexts.

My figures are commonly chosen for the colors that their costume or patterning might present as reflecting a similarity to certain schematic, social, or political motifs. I then create compositions with them that are provocative or suggestive of undefined or improbable scenarios. In this way, I am able to create open ended narratives that engage current social issues.

In the triptych "Deporting the Red White and Blue," I illustrate masked figures grabbing and wrestling groups of birds whose natural plumage matches the patriotic colors mentioned in the title. This rounding up of color coded fauna is a reference to racial profiling. Through the work I ask questions: are we essentially deporting our souls away and failing to appreciate the larger connections within a finite world in this process of targeting those who come to America seeking a better life?

In "Vein Men," I depict representations of the human circulatory system as figures cum animated ruffians, rounding up hapless snowmen. It's not accidental that these figures have schematically colored red arteries and blue veins on a white background, in step with the colors of an American flag. Here the snowmen could be seen as lifeless, dehumanized punching bags or as "ICE men" getting their turn to be pushed around. The circulatory system figures, in turn, could imply the



"Deporting the Red White and Blue (triptych)," Detail: right panel, 24" x 18" gouache on paper, 2025

need for warmth or life, deep inside what might be an otherwise inhumane group of robots following orders.

Kenny Cole's art can be seen as a part of a group exhibition American Grotesque at Zero Station Gallery, 222 Anderson St., Portland, through January 2026. For more information, see www.zerostation.com.

Mayo Street Arts showcases artisans at holiday markets

By Amy Harris | Photos Mark Mattos

On Dec. 14, Mayo Street Arts, a Portland based community arts organization, will hold the second of a two part series of holiday artisan markets at their location on Mayo Street. The first market took place Nov. 7.

Ian Bannon, Mayo Street Arts Executive Director, noted that the purpose of the markets includes preserving and sharing traditions and cultures that immigrants bring with them to Maine, as well as some great holiday shopping opportunities.

The Nov. 7 market included Ukrainian Petrykivka folk paintings and Pysanka eggs, Afghan henna tattoos, and textiles and fashion designed by women originally from Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Amjambo Africa spoke with four of the female artisans who were showcased Nov. 7: Josieane Mutangana, Maryam Ghulam Hassan, Apphia Kamanda Mpay, and Nanu Batumike. All of the women talked about the personal value they find in creating their work and in sharing it with others.

Originally from Rwanda, Josiane Mutangana is a fashion designer, fabric artist, tailor, and owner of Josiane Fashion House (JFH). She creates women's and children's clothing, accessories, and custom pieces using African print fabrics, such as Ankara and Kitenge, to sell both locally and online.

Mutangana said, "As an immigrant, a mother, a Black woman, and a small business owner, sharing my art is not just a business; it's a way to honor my roots, inspire my daughter, and bring a piece of African culture to Maine. Events like this help build connection, understanding,

and pride within a diverse community. I believe Maine becomes richer and more beautiful when we share our cultures openly."

Maryam Ghulam Hassan, a painter and henna artist from Afghanistan, said, "I love my art and the culture of my country. I decided to take part in this artisan market because it helps me shine more, introduce my culture to others, and also learn about other cultures. It is very important for people to have opportunities to showcase their work, so that others can benefit from this golden chance – and, if they are interested, they can also learn these traditional arts."

Apphia Kamanda Mpay, originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is a fashion and costume designer. She is also the Co executive Director of Common Threads of Maine, a nonprofit offering community sewing classes through the Westbrook Adult education program.

"I come from a family of artists," Mpay said. "As a child I was sewing with my hands, making stuff for my dolls and my friends. It was like my art was in my blood."

Costume design and dressing up, known as sapology, are part of her culture. "Sewing is therapy," she continued. "I could keep doing what I started in my country. I missed my country and felt a gap. Because this is not the life I was called for, but sewing was a way for me to heal. Today, as a teacher with Common Threads, I can see how sewing keeps my students from being sad."

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— Maryam Ghulam Hassan

Street Arts] space feels welcoming, and it gives us a chance to share our work with the community."



Nana Batumike



Yuliana Derkach



Sisters Maryam Ghulam Hassan and weaver Dunya Ghulam Hassan



Apphia Kamanda Mpay



Josiane Mutangana