

From the curators of *NEXT: Reimagining the Future Through Art*

DIANE CICCONE

This is the third exhibition that **Jane Malloy** and I have co-curated at the Trenton City Museum. The first, *Stand Up Men*, featured three local African-American male artists sharing their stories as Black men in America through the mediums of painting, sculpture, and photography. The second, *If These Quilts Could Talk*, examined the complexities and history of quilting and featured local professional African-American female quilters to exhibit their work and tell their stories.

My vision with our third exhibition, *NEXT*, involves reimagining the future through art, specifically within the walls of Ellarslie Mansion. What barriers do we need to shatter? What stories do we need to hear? What artists have never shown here? It was natural to unite local and global artists for this exhibition as we begin to unravel what is *NEXT*.

In this exhibition, I was interested in how others saw the future and how that was manifested through their art. In the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the world and ignited new ways of co-existing. We have navigated a pandemic, two wars, gun violence, and racial violence – all while the wealthy get wealthier, the political become more political, and the divide between the haves and the have-nots deepens. So, I was really fascinated to see how the artists interpreted reimagining the future. Artists such as **ryo kajitani** use their art as an opportunity to express and to communicate how they have changed and how their change has affected those around them or how **Robin Brownfield** and her art really looked at the political climate.

We also wanted to challenge the way the museum has done things in the past. So, *NEXT* was opened to anyone anywhere in the world. Therefore, we are proud to welcome international entries for the first time to the Trenton City Museum – the furthest hailing from Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and Germany. We also have domestic entries from places such as Tennessee, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

We are also pleased that, for the first time at the Trenton City Museum, *NEXT* welcomes video located in the **Thomas A. Malloy Gallery**. It is most fitting that the videos be hosted in the Malloy gallery because Tom Malloy, a giant in the art world, specifically in his Trenton community, believed that artistic concepts must be challenged in order to grow.

JANE MALLOY

I am forever grateful to **Diane Ciccone** for inviting me to join her in our third collaboration together as curators. I would say “ditto” to everything she has conveyed in her statement.

Diane always has such amazing visions for exhibitions and despite the recognition my last name generates in the local art community and serving on the Trenton Museum Society’s board for nearly ten years, I had shied away from visual art until Diane (not so gently) nudged me into these collaborations. *NEXT*, like the other exhibitions I’ve curated with Diane, has given me an opportunity to share more than a family connection with my Uncle Tom.

I am especially proud of how **NEXT** pushed beyond the traditional mediums of art and included out-of-the-box artistry that has never been exhibited in Ellarslie Mansion. This includes welcoming spoken word and performance art as part of the exhibition. Having coordinated the Trenton Museum Society's **Freedom Friday Open Mic** the last Friday of every month for four years, I am hyped that we will move art from the wall to the mic in February as an extension of this exhibition. You will find the words of our Freedom Friday host, **Todd "Son of Black" Evans** on the walls of the Malloy Gallery echoing that the "mission" is "possible." The impact of performance art on how we move in the world is huge. Additionally, this is the 50th anniversary year of Hip Hop which has become the premier voice for spoken word.

Last, I will note the artists who are exhibiting here for the first time. There is **Preston Sampson**, an internationally renowned artist whose use of mediums such as pulp painting, encaustics, and printmaking are critically acclaimed. There's also **Marion Johnson**, a local wife, mother, grandmother, and former teacher who, like my Uncle Thomas, considered her artwork a "hobby" until someone told her that it was so much more. Using stained glass, **SteamPunk Shaniqua** is an example of Marion's work and a new medium of artwork exhibited at the museum. These artists and the diverse mediums they use represent what is NEXT.