HAZELWOOD, from page 8

everything they need, and for some people – they won't read that essay. Art can speak to them more directly. I think the ability of art to speak to people is partially selective, but it also encapsulates things very quickly, and it gives people a context for all the information they might need to take in. The details can be filled in later through other means.

E.G.: *Your essay in the book, "We Won't Be Made Invisible: Art of Homeless Activism," describes the growing influences of art in the homeless community. What role do you think art will play in the future of political activism in the homeless community?*

A.H.: I think it needs to constantly be replenished with new energies and new directions. A lot of organizations end up working with the same artist over and over again. I teach at San Quentin, and I met an artist there, who is out now – he's homeless, and he's making art for Street Sheet and for the WRAP, and he did the cover art for the book. He has energy and connection to the issues. The first print he did for WRAP was about the prison-to-homeless pipeline, which is something he's experienced personally. If we don't constantly renew the artists involved, we end up with a kind of stale artwork that doesn't really speak to how the issues are changing and to people's perceptions and needs. I think the important thing is to keep people involved and keep the art rolling and relating to the movement.

"My work is attacking the powerful. So my target is the system as it exists and trying to undermine that system. I think it's just a difference in perspective, I have tried more to be uplifting in my imagery rather than negative, but I feel like if you show the dark side of things, people acknowledge it, and people understand that that's what struggling brings."

E.G.: *Do you think the art's becoming stale or are there a lot of new energies entering into the scene?*

A.H.: Well it comes and goes. There are times when the artwork is really powerful and really connected. I think that any homeless-rights group needs to be on the lookout for connecting to artists. Artists are sometimes very willing to be a part of things, and sometimes they need to be drawn in. Once those connections are made, they can be very powerful connections. At the moment I think it's really positive. The previous book I did, "Hobos to Street People," which is a survey of artwork about homelessness from 1930s to the present – the art in history you see is up and down.

E.G.: *I found an older essay you wrote titled "Art, Artists and Activism: 1930s to Today." In it you say that the political artist should not ask whether political art is effective, but how it can have a bigger effect in the world. Have you asked yourself this question, and if so, what was the answer?*

A.H.: There's a lot of time spent in the art world wondering about what is art and what is not art, and whether political art is art and whether political art does anything. I think it's not an important question to ask. To anybody who's committed to a political cause, the important question is, "How does it work?" and "How does it function?" There are different kinds of political art: street posters that are basically telling people to "come to this rally." That has a different function than a piece trying to explain something. To me what's interesting in political art is that it can explain stances to people, without them agreeing with it necessarily from the beginning, but they can look at it, and they can learn something from it, and they can say, "Hey – this is something I now understand." When the artist asks the question of themselves, "What is the value of this? Or the teaching? Or is it expressing the points of view of this organization?" I think that's the valuable question to ask.

E.G.: *Is there a particular issue where you think that art was particularly useful in sharing more information with people at a glance?*

A.H.: WRAP, when it first started, published a report called "Without Housing." Four artists and myself made posters based on data. The information was very dense. It was about federal spending on housing, and it's an issue that will make people's eyes glaze over. But if you take those numbers and turn them into something visually interesting to people, that kind of encapsulates a story of what has happened and why the federal government's lack of spending on affordable housing has led directly to a rise in homelessness, and if you put that into a visual, then all of a sudden, the question becomes, not "What's wrong with this person?" but, "What's wrong with this society?" and I think that's really effective.

E.G.: *Your political art spans many issues, from democracy and student debt to homelessness and the U.S.-Mexico border, but one topic stands out as a sort of anomaly: Why feature the current plight of U.S. postal workers in your art?*

A.H.: I work on a lot of local issues, and the Berkeley post office is being sold off. So I'm working with this group that's trying to organize to save the Berkeley post office, and to me it connects with the same issue of the destruction of the public commons that the government is cutting spending on things that are useful for people: The commons, education – and I even include post office in that – public housing, all these attacks on the commons are all part of the neoliberal agenda, and I feel any way I can fight back is a valuable thing to do.

(To read about Portland postal workers' fight against closures and privatization, see page 3.)

E.G.: *There is a very threatening nature to many of your posters – an almost apocalyptic feel to the images. They are quite powerful. How do you decide what images to use when attempting to illustrate a particular point, and do you feel that these types of images are more effective than say, less dark images might be?*

A.H.: That's a constant question that I have to deal with. I have a friend who's a political artist and his work is almost always positive and shows iconic images of people trying to uplift. His work is uplifting and powerless, and my work is attacking the powerful. So my target is the system as it exists and trying to undermine that system. I think it's just a difference in perspective, I have tried more to be uplifting in my imagery rather than negative, but I feel like if you show the dark side of things, people acknowledge it, and people understand that that's what struggling brings. Sometimes I'll work with WRAP or the editor of Street Sheet and we'll talk about an issue and they'll explain what they want and we'll run it by some other people in the organization. For example, right now I'm working on a poster for 25 years of the Street Sheet. It's back and forth about what is important to show, in the end the images is the Street Sheet shining a light on all the negative things in the last 25 years that have happened to poor people in San Francisco.

"Beast of Hatred" by Art Hazelwood depicts ways in which people experiencing poverty are dehumanized. Within the belly of the beast is the media, the head represents governments and corporations, and one arm is the criminal system while the other is vigilantes – all are aspects of this beast that spews out negative comments about the poor, says Hazelwood.

"House Keys Not Handcuffs: Homeless Organizing, Art and Politics in San Francisco and Beyond" is available for a $30 donation at wraphome.org.