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Answers to Page 15 Puzzles

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Street Roots vendors Aileen McPherson, Dennis Chavez and Pauline Bade, along with Consuela Delgado (not pictured) will be taking part in the Portland Art Museum's Object Stories exhibit in July.

People, places, poetry and things

Four Street Roots vendors chosen for Portland Art Museum's upcoming "One Step Away" Object Stories exhibit

BY HELEN HILL
STAFF WRITER

Big city art museums have traditionally been vault-like repositories of masterpieces hanging quietly on a wall, seen only by the well-heeled. Uniformed guards on the prowl for patrons standing too close to the art add to what can be an isolating, disconnected experience.

The Portland Art Museum is joining the worldwide trend away from this passive exhibit model towards an interactive community space. And in an effort to make that space truly relevant and inclusive, PAM has focused on the most marginalized members of society for their Object Stories series.

Launched in 2010, Object Stories features revolving quarterly exhibits with interactive interviews, written records, film and story objects created by different marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, immigrants, people of color, combat veterans and LGBTQ+.

Four Street Roots vendors will be part of PAM's newest exhibit entitled "One Step Away" which focuses on issues central to people experiencing housing insecurity. The exhibit title references how perilously close many Oregonians are to homelessness; All it takes is one accident, unexpected bill, emergency or job loss.

Vendors Dennis Chavez, Paulette Bade, Aileen McPherson and Consuela Delgado have been working closely with a team headed by Kristin Bayans, PAM's Manager of Interpretive Media. Over the past two months with the help of professional film

crews, storytellers, editors and exhibition designers, they each crafted a multimedia story about their personal relationship to homelessness. They will be joining four other presenters from the Portland area.

"I think this will expand awareness of homeless issues," Chavez said. "People who go to exhibits are people of wealth. They don't know why people are homeless and what they are doing to remove themselves from that situation."

Chavez was specifically invited by museum staff to participate in the project. He sells Street Roots near the museum, and is a popular figure in the neighborhood.

"It was a good experience," he said. "I feel like they captured me. They came to my apartment to film. My apartment is small and it was crowded, I didn't have enough seating, but it worked out. I told them my story, how I became homeless and what I did."

Chavez is an Army veteran who slept on the streets for about six months. The object he chose to contribute was a stuffed toy polar bear holding an American flag to draw attention to the politics of climate change.

Paulette Bade was on the streets for almost seven months. "I had to put my walker under my mattress so no one would steal it when I was sleeping," she said. "I tried to talk about how it's hard for anyone, especially a woman. It took my dignity down to a whole new level."

Bade also enjoyed the process of documenting her story for the exhibit. "It was fantastic, I could speak my opinion. My home is in there, they filmed my apartment. Seven people were in the film

crew. It was crowded. PK, my cat, was good as gold, but she hissed when they put the microphone on me."

Bade submitted one of her original poems from a Street Roots zine as her object.

Aileen McPherson hosted the film crew inside the tiny camper she shares with her husband and two small pets.

"They said I was a good storyteller," McPherson said. "I told my story literally, how you get there, how it's changed me. They asked how would you fix being one step away from homelessness."

McPherson chose a self-portrait she painted as her story object. Other objects submitted by presenters included a walking stick, a ceramic owl, the book "The Color Purple," and an illustration of an eagle.

All eight participants received a \$250 stipend, and each had complete artistic and editorial control of the content. "We get to see it before it goes live, to agree or disagree with the edits," McPherson said.

The final meetings are drawing to an end and the exhibit is in the final stages of development. It opens to the public on Saturday, June 30. A community opening and reception will be held 6:30-8 p.m., Thursday July 5, at the Portland Art Museum.

Aileen is excited but nervous about the upcoming opening. "I've always been afraid of success, in any form. I feel like I'm not worthy," she said. "But being in a gallery is a dream come true."

The Object Stories gallery is located in the lower level of the main building, 1219 SW Park Avenue in downtown Portland.