

STATE OF THE ARTS

A LETTER FROM THE ARTS EDITOR

By Alex V. Cipolle

Hope flooded me when I heard that the University of Oregon selected Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2015 book, or rather letter to his black teenage son, for its 2016-17 "Common Reading" for incoming freshman. *Between the World and Me* is a crushing, beautiful piece of work, prompting me to examine some uncomfortable truths about the hidden-in-plain-sight privileges I have enjoyed because I'm a white woman — even that sentence is problematic because, as Coates writes, "Race is the child of racism, not the father."

The UO is a predominantly white school, in a predominantly white city, in a predominantly white state whose history with sundown laws and the Ku Klux Klan is well documented. Even today, bigotry is alive in Eugene.

If thousands of students are reading a book challenging the new status quo, in which militarized police shoot down black men on what seems like a weekly basis, perhaps that's a sign we can claw ourselves towards some sort of new enlightenment, to a new age of kindness, loosening the grip of paranoid nativism.

As citizens of a country roiling with hate and violence, and in an atmosphere where facts and decorum are laughed at, it's time to face some uncomfortable truths. I have found no better way to face uncomfortable truths than through the arts, because art couldn't care less if you're comfortable. And leaving our comfort zones is when we grow.

The Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art is hosting a "Common Seeing" exhibit, *Between the World and Me: African American Artists Respond to Ta-Nehisi Coates*, open now through March 5, 2017. It's a small show, but it packs a powerhouse punch including the works of Robert Colescott, Glenn Ligon, Mildred Howard, Kara Walker and Kehinde Wiley, whose painting "La Source" (pictured on the cover) is the crown jewel. Read more on that piece in the coming pages.

In EW's 4th annual visual arts issue, *ArtsHound*, also read about Anya Kivarkis, who challenges accepted notions of capitalism through her jewelry sculpture; Aunia Kahn and the struggles of running an art gallery when no one is buying art; and DeeDee Cheri-el, a former Eugenean whose dreamy, colorful paintings explore the discomfort of being human. And in the news section you can take a look at local efforts on graffiti removal.

Thank you to all the artists who kick open doors to new ways of seeing, new ways of listening, new ways of being. Thank you for always challenging the world to be better.

Where there is art, there is hope.

