



# An American Vision

A review of the new exhibition titled "American Vignettes: Symbols, Society, and Satire" at Rubell DC Museum through Fall 2025.

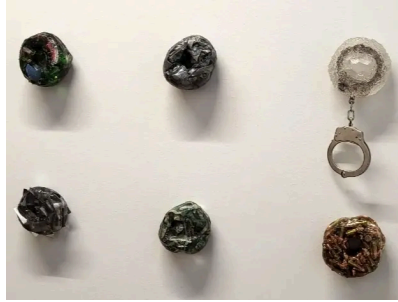
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Sterling Ruby, Flag, 2014, bleached and dyed fabric and elastic, 174.5" x 343" inches. (Vian Borchert)



Vaughn Spann, *Dark Days bring new hope (never forget)*, 2020, polymer paint, pulp, mixed media, terry cloth, canvas on aluminum stretcher bars, 160" x 220" inches (Vian Borchert)



Josh Kline, *Broken Windows*, 2015, 9 cast sculptures in crystal clear resin, handcuffs, duct tape, razor blades, auto glass, pennies, dollars, plastic shopping bag, bullets and trash bag, ed. 3/3 plus 2ap, 4" x 4.25 x 2" inches (Vian Bocher)



Christian Holstad, *Untitled*, 2004, graphite on newsprint, 6.5" x 4.5" inches. (Vian Borchert)

What does it mean to be an American? Can an artist convey their Americanism through their artwork? Is it nationalism or patriotism, or is it simply a form of expression to be an American? Do you have to wear red, white and blue on the fourth of July and fly a flag in front of your house? Does the flag become a symbol of Americanism, is a flag a statement - it tends to be. When symbols take over the art and specific colors give a message, does art become political very fast. In times of voting with a major shift about to happen in a country strong on its ideals and traditions, will Americanism change and will art be the predictor of that?

Newly opened exhibition titled "*American Vignettes: Symbols, Society, and Satire*" at Rubell DC Museum touches upon such themes. Although some art in my humble opinion didn't cry out "America", it was nevertheless engaging and thought-provoking. The artwork though that was most effective for this specific exhibit did strongly provide enough of the American package - We see that in the works of Sterling Ruby and Vaughn Spann in the main auditorium welcoming us upon entering the museum. Albeit both works of the distinguished artists are not the typical wholesome all American boy take world approach; but a reveal of a deep artistic vision that can affirm a new American way of seeing this is different but nonetheless American. In a sense one can say, the exhibition did hit the mark and achieved what it

set forth to do within these two works. We look, we see American symbolism and colors especially in Ruby's and Spann's versions of the American flag where enough power, enough prowess, enough artistry and enough depth rise to fill the hole within one that questions what American art is.

Donuts make a point! A nation consumed by food, on the go, fast food. Josh Kline hits the sweet spot in his donuts installation titled "*Broken Windows*" where one sees a number of donut size donuts sculptures in crystal clear resin filled with razor blades, broken glass and even handcuffs amongst other materials. There is no sugar coating this - this artwork is hard on the teeth... literally, figuratively and metaphorically. Talking about a great use of imagery where the donuts personify the dangers disguised in sweetness. A glazed sugary sweet treat is the diabetes that is eating you alive awaiting to kill you. These donuts become nothing but weapons waiting to get you at every bite. Pretty glazed donuts with blades at every bite to cut off your tongues from ever speaking, and hand-cuffs to arrest your dreams from ever becoming a reality. The donuts installation is another work of art that deserves much applause. There is no sugar coating this, this artwork is hard to digest. A loaded gun... A satire of the American dream and way of life pushed to the max through the artist's eyes - I can imagine the artist asking: What will it be? glazed or sprinkled with broken dreams?

Onward within the museum, as you walk past the big colorful canvases, a little corridor with small drawings on newspaper become the hidden gems in a sea of color. Small and tucked away - you have to walk up to them and stare in their midst to admire the skill. I am referring here to the graphite on newsprint work by Christian Holstad where a simple pencil line not a huge colorful canvas exudes strength in its demure subtle existence. Is this a new form of American we ask? To be tucked away, polite, even shy and simply be as powerful as you can be with your existence like these

tiny gems that speak volumes through their figurative stance.

Americans like the museum itself and the artwork within it, are a work in progress - Yet, it is through the fabric of its people much like the varying works and artists within Rubell DC that a compact unity can arise with a vision that can scream, speak and even whisper America!

To be a successful artist in a world where art is not celebrated is very hard. Yet, to be a successful artist in a world where your vision is nurtured and supported is a blessing. And, a blessing indeed has been bestowed to the handpicked artists on view at Rubell DC. They are indeed very very lucky - the artists whose art gets to be hung on the museum's walls and whose work is appreciated by the keen eyes of the Rubell family who have been for decades soldiering the arts by up-and-coming along with accomplished artists of our times.

*"American Vignettes: Symbols, Society, and Satire"* is currently at Rubell DC Museum through Fall 2025.