FAU’s Jupiter Campus Library Presents ‘Exploring Gender’ Photo Exhibition and “Introducing Birds are Nice,” a Mixed Media Illustration Exhibition on Cardboard

JUPITER, FL (September 15, 2010) – Florida Atlantic University’s John D. MacArthur Campus Library Gallery is kicking off its sixth season with a photo exhibition titled “Exploring Gender” and an exhibition on cardboard featuring mixed media illustrations with found objects titled “Introducing Birds are Nice,” through Friday, October 15 at 5353 Parkside Drive, Jupiter.

“Exploring Gender” by South Florida artist Jonathan Stein features 12 large-scale portraits that painfully chronicle the yearlong recovery of a gay bashing victim. The artwork is in direct response to the 2009 murders of Craig Cohen, a 47-year-old Fort Lauderdale man, and George Steven Lopez Mercado, a 19-year-old Puerto Rican man.

Stein puts a visual face to the concept of social intolerance with his images, which replicate the brutal moments after an assault and painstakingly follow a victim’s physical ability to heal and regenerate over time. “Exploring Gender” suggests that while the human body has a wonderful resilience, beyond the surface of one’s skin is a greater more poignant hurt, fear and agony that remain with a victim for life.

Nine of Stein’s photographs are in a series titled “The Healing Process,” and three are in a series titled “It’s Just Make-up.” Stein worked closely with a Miami CSI detective to study the detrimental effects of violence on the body for the images in “It’s Just Make-Up.” Fascinated by cosmetics and its inherent power to incite desire or rage in men, Stein’s images portray the real-life abuse that many transgendered individuals experience when they challenge the boundaries of masculinity. In a triptych, the artist shows the before and after transformation of his subject from a male to a female. The third and most jarring image in this series shows his subject beaten senseless with the weighted title “FAG” carved on his forehead.

“I can offer no answers to these questions of injustice, just a platform for social discourse and, hopefully, a face to remember,” said Stein, whose exhibition endured countless rejections throughout South Florida venues prior to finding refuge at FAU. The artist hopes his work will serve as a symbol of justice and demand for greater hate crime legislation and protection.
“This exhibition is the most socio-politically oriented that we have ever had here,” said Diane Arrieta, the gallery’s exhibition coordinator. “This work is so high caliber that I hope everyone stops by to see it. No matter what your views are on the subject, the work deserves a broad audience.”

Stein graduated cum laude from Boston University with a bachelor of fine arts degree and transitioned to a full-time artist after working as a digital lab technician and staff photographer for The Palm Beach Post. He won the Miami Herald’s Silver Knight award for art in 1996, and since then, has combined art and social activism to aid and serve diverse populations. Stein also works as a part-time advocate for developmentally disabled adults.

“As an artist and social advocate, I want to create works that challenge an audience to think, feel and respond,” said Stein. “I strive not to inject my feelings on a body of work, but let the viewers form their beliefs about the work. So much art that surrounds us is aesthetically appealing but void of meaning. My themes may not always be palatable, but if you leave having been touched, I have done my part.”

The exhibition, “Introducing Birds are Nice,” is by a Miami visual artist working under the name Birds are Nice, also known as BAN. The artist earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from a state university but is self-taught and uses mostly art techniques that were not learned in school.

BAN’s characters and illustrations are intended to spark dialogue about urban life and spread a smile. The work encompasses traditional pencil and digital drawings, as well as sculpture and an occasional video/animation.

“BAN makes unique work that will put a smile on your face,” said Jackie Kern, a member of Jupiter library’s gallery selection committee. “It is very playful.”

BAN has been making art for many years but decided recently to continue anonymously with the Birds are Nice brand. “Somehow it allowed me to get everyone out of my head and do what I feel instead of worrying about what everyone else thought,” said BAN.

The library’s hours are Sundays from 12:30 to 11 p.m.; Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturdays from noon to 6 p.m. Call 561-799-8530 or visit www.library.fau.edu/npb/npb.htm.

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**Photo #1:** “It’s Just Makeup” (Triptych) photograph by Jonathan Stein 2010
Photo #2: “It’s Just Makeup” (Triptych) photograph by Jonathan Stein, 2010
Photo #3: “Birds are Nice logo,” 2010 digital by Birds are Nice
Photo #4: “Archie,” 2010 mixed media on cardboard by Birds are Nice

About Florida Atlantic University:

FAU’s MacArthur Campus in Jupiter offers a broad range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The campus is home to the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, the Lifelong Learning Society, the Scripps Florida research facilities and the future site of the Max Planck Florida Institute.

About Florida Atlantic University:

Florida Atlantic University opened its doors in 1964 as the fifth public university in Florida. Today, the University serves more than 28,000 undergraduate and graduate students on seven campuses and sites. Building on its rich tradition as a teaching university, with a world-class faculty, FAU hosts 10 colleges: the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts & Letters, the College of Business, the College for Design and Social Inquiry, the College of Education, the College of Engineering & Computer Science, the Graduate College, the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing and the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. For more information, visit www.fau.edu.