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POTUS: Piñata Test: A Photographic Essay

Helen Davis

Summary

After 40 years as a left-brained statistician Helen Davis retired and has repurposed her life to creating art and attending classes at Monterey Peninsula college. Her work is often provocative focusing on social issues. She hopes to take every art class Monterey Peninsula College teaches.



The Piece

Our assignment for Mixed Media Class was to create a piece from soft human-made materials that connected with the environment. Beyond that, there were no limits, and we were encouraged to think outside the box. Well, that was easy: a POTUS piñata, filled with all the environmental policies that the current administration has repealed. We could use it as a performance piece for anyone who wanted to take a swing at it.

I quickly set to work on a huge head, beginning with an 18" balloon for the cranium. I applied cardboard to build the structure of the facial features and then applied papier-mâché. To build up the fleshy parts of the face, I added tissue paper and another layer of papier-mâché. Expanding insulation from an aerosol can was used to create the hair with its' signature swoop in front. Acrylic paint and pastels were applied for color, but I still hadn't quite captured his character, so I added a fly. I filled the piñata with Hershey's Kisses, each with a repealed policy extending from the paper strip in the kiss.

On Critique Day, I hung the piece from an oak tree outside the class studio so that we could swing at the piñata. We were about 30 minutes into the critiques when the campus police

showed up. They told us there had been a complaint and we would have to take down the piece. The teacher informed them that it was only for a critique and would be removed when the critique ended. Then she announced to the class that my piece would go last.

Two hours later, we headed outside for my critique. The police had been waiting; they climbed out of their car immediately to join the class. They listened quietly while I explained my creation. In addition to the piñata, I had brought a handkerchief with the United States Constitution printed on it to use as a blindfold and a Yosemite Hiking Club walking stick to use as a bat. I had covered the stick with a pool noodle to make certain no one would get hurt.

When I picked up the stick, the officers stepped in to say that I could not use a weapon. Once again, the teacher stepped up for academic freedom, telling the officers that we had every right to continue with our performance piece. She asked to speak to the Director of Security. The Director told her that the MPC President had given the order to stop this. She reminded him of academic freedom and the consequences of shutting down free speech, but when she told him we would be hitting the piñata with a pool noodle, he backed down and we were allowed to proceed.

Just as Robynn, blindfolded with the Constitution, was about to swing the noodle, someone cried, "Save the fly!" I swept in just in time to rescue the poor fly before the first swing of the noodle.

Later we found out that it was not the MPC President who had ordered the performance be



stopped. In fact, he had stood up for academic freedom and sent an email saying the piñata should stay.

This turned out to be quite the performance piece

