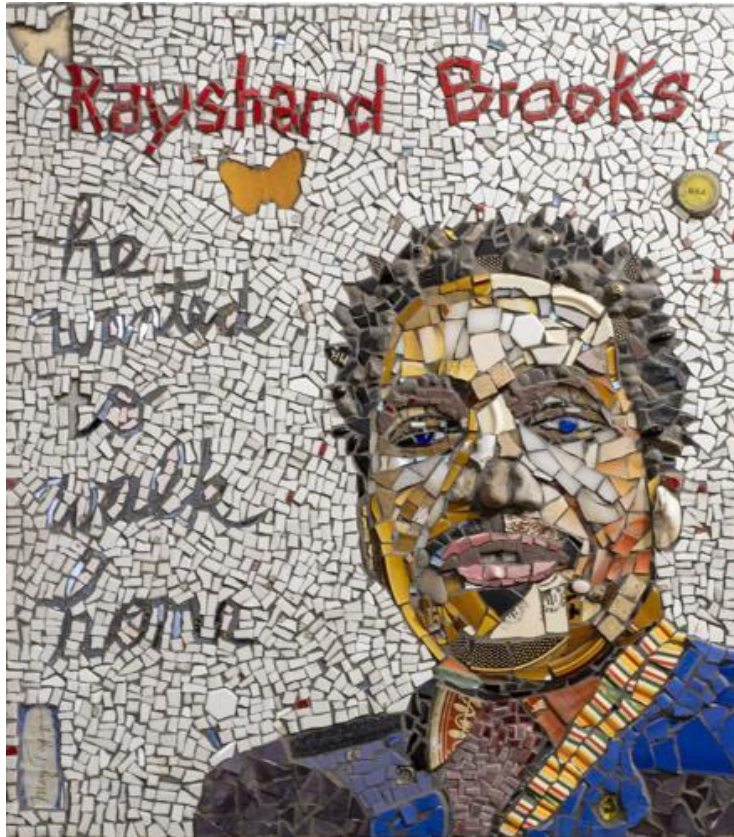


Visual Art Review

Mary Tapogna: The faces of Black Lives Matter

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“Rayshard Brooks” by Mary Tapogna
Photo by Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, staff

Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Trayvon Martin — their names are familiar — Black women and men killed at the hands of police or vigilantes in the United States.

But past the headlines, few of us know that Taylor, an honor roll student, enjoyed math; Martin saved his father from a burning apartment fire; Floyd had two grandchildren. We do not often have opportunities to think about the lives they lived.

Portraits of Taylor, Floyd and Martin are among the 10 mosaic artworks in “Black Lives Matter: A Portrait Series” by Mary Tapogna, who lives in Lyndonville, in Studio Place Art’s Third Floor Gallery through March 1. The exhibition’s timing aptly aligns with Black History Month, observed through February

Tapogna’s sensitive and powerful mosaics bring viewers up close to these 10 individuals, to see them smiling, alive with joy and interests — people who were engaged in their families and communities before their lives were cut short.

“What influences me is that I want to pay proper tribute to these individuals, due to the inspiration I receive from them. This may sound simple, but it is honest and hopefully carries through to the viewer,” says Tapogna in her artist’s statement.

One of the great joys in portrait exhibitions is to have time to pause and really look the subjects in the face — to stare longer than you would in person, and see the smile, the twinkle in an eye, the far sighted gaze — captured by the artist.

Tapogna works with glass, pottery, pebbles, shells, trinkets and more. The trinkets — a ceramic dragonfly, a peace sign button, beads — relate to each of her subjects.

There is unity in the compositions. All of the portraits have a background of mostly white tesserae. Each has slivers of mirror around the edges. The mirrors reflect light on the walls behind them, giving each portrait a bright corona.

Tapogna works closely with a photograph of each individual, selecting her materials with them in mind.

Besides the images and names, Tapogna often includes a few words about what she considers went so horribly wrong for them — Atatiana Jefferson “left front door open,” Rayshard Brooks “wanted to walk home.” In a few succinct words on the labels, she shares a bit about each one’s background or interests.

This eloquent exhibition gives viewers opportunity to reflect on these tragedies and injustice underlying them. In these smiling faces are searing reminders of the critical talks Black parents must have with their children to prepare them for encounters that can suddenly turn to life or death.