



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FULLERTON CALIFORNIA, JUNE 18TH, 2012

ART WITH AN AGENDA, THE LIFE AND MURDER OF KELLY THOMAS, AN ART EXHIBIT

We are very pleased to announce that *Art With An Agenda*, an art exhibit which is inspired by events surrounding the life and death of Kelly Thomas will have its opening reception at **PÄS Gallery, located at 223 W. Santa Fe Avenue in downtown Fullerton**. The opening reception will be held from **6pm to 11pm on Friday July 6th, 2012**, which is in conjunction with July's Fullerton Art Walk and the 1 year (+ 1 day) anniversary from when Kelly Thomas, a local homeless man who was suffering from mental illness, was assaulted by six Fullerton police officers. PÄS along with The Hibleton and The Violet Hour galleries, make up the large Magoski Art Colony and attendees should be prepared for a powerful and emotional artistic experience.

We, the participants and organizers of this exhibit, have an agenda, but we do not have any official affiliation to any other organizations or political parties. We are brought together by our love of art, our love of Fullerton, and our desire for justice.



The Agenda:

1. **TO PEACEFULLY DEMONSTRATE THAT BY GIVING VOICE TO A CAUSE, THROUGH ART AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION, OUR COMMUNITY WILL PREVAIL OVER VIOLENCE, BIGOTRY AND THOSE WHO ABUSE THEIR POWER.**
2. **TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE JUSTICE FOR KELLY THOMAS MOVEMENT AND POLICE BRUTALITY**
3. **TO RAISE MONEY IN SUPPORT OF THE ORANGE COUNTY HOMELESS**
4. **TO CELEBRATE THE FULLERTON ART WALK AND THE TALENTS OF THE PARTICIPATING ARTISTS**

Art With An Agenda will feature the original work of over 40 artists from L.A. and Orange Counties. Among the list of artists with a long resume of prior gallery showings, are Valerie Lewis, William Zdan, Stuart Perlman, Hagop Najarian, Mike Myers, Andrea Bersaglieri, muralist Rene Cardona, and the wonderfully prolific still life painter, John M. Sollom. In addition to other paintings John has submitted to the show, there are fourteen 8 x 10 oil paintings depicting the unnecessary escalation of the encounter between the Police and Kelly Thomas at the Fullerton Transportation Center. This encounter ended 45 minutes later, the last 10 minutes of which, was the brutal beating that put Kelly into the coma, and five days later took his life. John's painted panels increase with their intensity until we see all six officers standing around the body and a pool of Kelly's blood. John Sollom has loosely painted the images off of the city surveillance video in the familiar gray scale of surveillance footage. With this, Sollom has created a latter day *Stations of the Cross*. John's work was created immediately after he watched the tape for the first time, and this series of paintings be one of the more emotionally charged pieces included in this exhibit. There will be paintings which depict the truth, and the truth in this instance is uncomfortable. These works will, however, be juxtaposed with beautiful and sentimental paintings, like a teenage



portrait of Kelly before he got sick, which captured the spirit of Kelly perfectly. One portrait in particular which is being submitted by Valerie Lewis, a working artist at the Magoski art colony, is exceptional in its poetic reflection of Kelly. When I recently let Kelly's mother, Cathy Williams Thomas, look at a picture of the painting on my phone, it brought tears to her eyes.



Also submitting work to the exhibit, and confirmed to be in attendance on this night, are two friends who are both united in their commitment to helping those who are most marginalized in our society, as well as seeking justice for Kelly. They are radio host and animal welfare advocate Susan Olsen, who was first introduced to the public through her role as Cindy on the Brady Bunch, and is now a much sought after pop artist. Susan's friend, Cherie Currie, an actress who was also the charismatic lead singer in the 70's all girl rock group, the Runaways, has now added chainsaw sculptor to her resume. Cherie is a master at taking a chainsaw to tree trunks, and producing masterpieces. As documented through a series of photo's which Cherie posted to her Facebook page, Cherie spent the better part of two weeks carving a beautiful and ornate, life-sized bench in tribute to Kelly Thomas. I suspect that this bench will be the high dollar ticket item of the night. Susan and Cherie have been wonderful in their support of our cause, and they are making themselves available for interviews and other PR opportunities in order to get the word out regarding this important exhibit.



To varying degrees we are all desensitized by the violence on TV, but through this exhibit, I'm learning that if a similar image to a violent scene from the Fullerton city surveillance tape is depicted on a canvas, it hits us to a greater degree, in some cases like a punch to the stomach. Our minds have not yet been conditioned in other mediums to the point where they can tune those things out which make us most uncomfortable. Any *Art Walk* participants who somehow managed to avoid an emotional reaction to scenes of the tape on the nightly news will not be spared that luxury at the exhibit. If in the collection we can find the right balance of truth and compassion with regard to what happened on the night of July 5th, 2011, a compassion which will result from the paintings that humanize Kelly and make him more than a wild haired homeless man or battered face, and the art we are exhibiting has been done

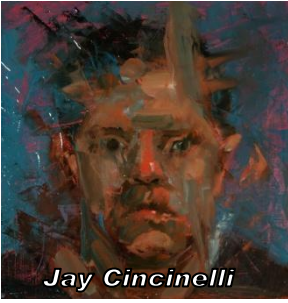


with artistic sincerity, guests of the exhibit will then be invested in such an emotional way, that even if they managed to avoid these feelings about Kelly's murder previously, they will now feel the appropriate amount of empathy and outrage that the acknowledgment of how Kelly died demands. These emotions can only result in a feeling of frustration, as one realizes that Kelly Thomas' death was senseless and cruel to such a degree that one is compelled to demand an explanation and to seek accountability.

It is at this point that we hope visitors to this exhibit will wander to the back of the gallery, where the walls will be covered with photographs and the homemade protest signs and banners from last summer which members of "Kelly's Army" have been tracking down for the last several months. My hope is that after seeing the human side of Kelly, and what these uniformed men did to him for no understandable reason, patrons/supporters, who before were able to dismiss what happened as just one of those unfortunate things in life, will finally

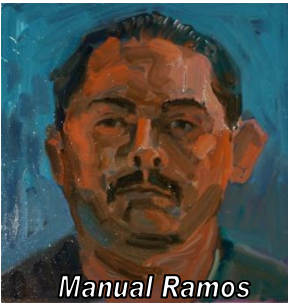
understand why their friends and neighbors made these protest signs, and stood in front of the Fullerton Police station demanding answers. Answers that, to date, have still not come.

I know that with this exhibit we will raise money for the homeless, and I know that we will raise awareness of the harsh realities to which life on the street translates, but if this exhibit is successful in liberating just one person from their denial that this was a senseless murder and attempted cover-up, we will have done serious work and furthered the cause for justice.



With Kelly's family in attendance, surrounded by art which was in one way or another was inspired by their son and brother, the participation of so many artists of great caliber, who invested their time and their emotion so they could donate meaningful work, I believe this opening night has the potential of being among the most emotionally powerful, collective artistic experiences most of us will ever participate in. We invite you to attend our opening and experience this for yourself.

All expenses associated with the exhibit and it's promotion have either been waived by the gallery owners, or covered by the organizers, which will allow for every dollar raised from the sale of art to go directly to the *Kelly Thomas Memorial Foundation charity for Orange Counties' homeless. Neither the Thomas family, nor the Gallery owners, are responsible for any of its content, or the views which I am expressing here.



Thank you for your interest. It is with your help through donations to KTMF.org and by bringing attention to these events in the media, that we further our cause for justice, and we bring a little love and empathy on the one year anniversary of what, in our minds, was the ugliest day in Fullerton's 108 year history.

To anyone that thought all but Kelly's family would have moved on to by now: *This is more than a cause, this is loyalty. We knew Kelly and we liked Kelly, and we are just getting started.*

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the concert or the art exhibit.

Justice For Kelly!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephan Baxter".

Stephan Baxter/Organizer/Co-Curator

www.artwithanagenda.org

- Art Shown in this document was created by Rene Cardona, John M. Sollom, Valery Lewis and Cherie Curry

*(*KTMF is a not-for-profit organization which was founded by Kelly's family in 2011; its mission to provide relief to homeless men, women and children of Orange County, by collaborating with other charities and agencies and by educating communities on the issues and needs surrounding the growing homeless population. (www.ktmf.org)*

