

"When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to say something; you have to do something."

Congressman John Lewis

2019

Good trouble. It is the willingness to shake things up, upset the apple cart and to speak against evil whenever it is encountered. Visual artists have long been in the forefront in addressing societal ills and human rights issues through their artwork. One of the first known overtly political protest images by an American artist of color is Sarah Mapps Douglass's 1836 delicate floral watercolor painted for a friend's friendship album. Using clever puns based upon the names of the flowers depicted—forget-me-nots and heart's ease—Douglass, a member of a prominent free African American abolitionist family in Philadelphia, transformed her painted gift into a political message, inscribing the work, "Lady, while you are young and beautiful forget not the slave so shall hearts ease ever attend you." Since then artists have been taking on the challenge of getting into to good trouble, necessary trouble, in order to call out inequality, injustice and racism. Significant movements for social change usually result in outpourings of artistic expression that help open our eyes to injustice and convey powerful new visions and possibilities.

*Good Trouble: Artists and Activism, Then and Now* addresses the ongoing emotionally charged climate of political unrest generated by the murder of George Floyd. The event spurred artists to lend their voices to call for an end to systemic racism. The call to acknowledge that black lives matter sounded on a global scale. This exhibit opens with an art historical overview of protest art by iconic African American artists from Elizabeth Catlett, whose commitment to socially conscious art spans seven decades, to younger artists like Kara Walker and Titus Kaphar who carry on the legacy. The show continues with works from around the world created in response to systemic racism and the killing of black people by police officers that resulted in the senseless murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, and others too numerous to mention. This exhibition demonstrates that the tradition of protest art as a catalyst for social change is alive and well. It is all good trouble.